



WFU Photo

Maya Angelou chats with Hillary Clinton.

Clinton

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Democratic Party and to the country that we have such a wonderful, exciting, passionate contest going on."

Clinton was in town last week for a campaign stop at Wake Forest University with poet Maya Angelou, a professor at the school. After the two had a hourlong "conversation" before a crowd of 2,000 people in Wait Chapel, Clinton told The Chronicle that the long-winded and often contentious contest between herself and Obama has helped to resurrect American politics.

"Politics had gotten sort of ho-hum. People had given up," she said. "Both Sen. Obama and I have brought millions of people into this process."

After Clinton's victory Tuesday in Pennsylvania, North Carolina's May 6 primary has become increasingly important for both sides. The Clinton campaign is making it clear that it will fight for every single vote, even those of African-Americans. In addition to her appearance with Angelou, the Clinton campaign has dispatched a bevy of black leaders across the state to lobby voters. Among them are U.S. Reps. Corrine Brown (D-Fla.) and Sheila Jackson-Lee (D-Texas), the Rev. Marcia Dyson and "Living Single" actress Erika Alexander.

Dyson, who was on hand for Friday's event, is a native of Chicago who has known Obama for more than a decade. Yet, she is supporting Clinton, whom she has known for only a year. Why?

Dyson says she is voting her interests. She believes Clinton will work harder to address the issues that affect African-Americans and especially black women. Dyson was impressed when Clinton stated during a debate last year that the nation's response to HIV/AIDS would be stronger if the disease were affecting white women at the same rate as black women.

And she says the senator showed her dedication to the black community when she left the campaign trail to appear in Memphis earlier this month to mark the 40th anniversary of Dr. King's assassination and at Tavis Smiley's State of the Black Union event in New Orleans last February. Obama missed both events and has been criticized by Smiley, Dr. Cornel West and others for his absence.

"It was not easy for her to go back (to Louisiana for the State of the Black Union) after she was slaughtered there (in the state's primary). But she did it," Dyson said.

Angelou told the hundreds gathered in Wait Chapel that she was also drawn to Clinton because of her strength.

"I watched her be a woman in times of stress and difficulty. I watched her stand," said Angelou. "I said, 'if this woman ever runs for anything, I'll put my hand behind her back.'"

Both Dyson and Angelou have prominent people in their lives that do not share their political preference. Dyson's husband, author and commentator Michael Eric Dyson, is a diehard Obama supporter, as is Angelou's close friend, Oprah Winfrey, whom Angelou referred to as her "daughter" during Friday's conversation with Clinton.

Asked after the event about how she and Winfrey handle their political differences, Angelou said the topic rarely comes up.

"She is a serious woman, and she thinks profoundly and she has come to that conclusion, and I am a serious woman and I have come to my conclusion, and we respect each other," she said.

Clinton said she is looking

forward to campaigning across North Carolina in the weeks ahead.

She is disappointed, she said, that a planned debate between her and Sen. Obama may not occur. After the candidates' April 16 debate in Philadelphia, Obama indicated that he may not take part in anymore debates. Obama and his supporters have criticized the nature of the questions that were asked during the last debate.

When asked about that debate, which took place two days before her Winston-Salem appearance, Clinton said grilling from debate moderators is par for the course.

"I think that we all get asked tough questions. That is part of the process of running for president," she said. "I know that the people here in North Carolina are anxious to have a debate ... I have agreed to a debate here in North Carolina, and we will see if that can be arranged."

Pundits have argued that the longer the nomination process goes on for the Democrats, the weaker the party's candidate will be when he or she faces Republican John McCain this fall.

Clinton disagrees. She says the competition will make the eventual nominee and the party stronger.

"I think it is good for our democracy. It will be good for the eventual nominee of the Democratic Party," she said. "I know whatever differences there may be between Sen. Obama and myself, the differences between us and Sen. McCain and the Republicans are huge. So we will go into this election as a unified party, and I will do whatever I can in whatever capacity to make sure we elect a Democrat."

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