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## A party divided tests Clinton's will to unite

By LAWRENCE C. LEVY

Eight years ago in Los Angeles, as she did last night in Denver, the wife of a president stood before thousands of Democratic delegates set to nominate someone who wasn't named Clinton. It was a bittersweet moment, the end of a tumultuous chapter in a remarkable life, and the start of a new one seemingly pulsing with promise. Even then, speaking as the first first lady to seek elective office, a few supporters from New York wore buttons and waved placards that said "Hillary for President."

It was not to be. Last night, in a poignant speech that very well may be her last before before a national audience, Sen. Hillary Rodham Clinton, D-N.Y., began yet another phase in her life. And with a rhetorical passion that seemed anything but forced, she formally took on a new task that is familiar to her ... standing by her man and attacking his enemies.

"Barack Obama is my candidate," she declared in a deliberate cadence aimed to douse any doubt. "He must be our president - no more, no how, no McCain." Just as Hillary's steadfastness helped save the candidacy, and then the presidency, of her husband, when threatened by sex scandals years apart, so must she now serve Obama in doing her part to bring her supporters onboard for him.

It's essential for more than Obama. If it wasn't the speech of a lifetime ... how could anybody leap the emotional bar set by the appearance Monday of Ted Kennedy? ... Clinton's address may be the speech of her future. Whatever regrets she may have felt in officially surrendering her dream of becoming the first woman president, close advisers say she understands her political future rests on how hard she is seen to have worked to realize the history-making dreams of another. And so she delivered to the delight of Clinton and Obama supporters.

"Whether you voted for me or for Barack," one of 12 times she mentioned his name, "the time is now to unite as a single party for a single purpose. And you haven't worked so hard over the last 18 months or endured the last eight years to suffer through more failed leadership."

The key question now isn't "What does Hillary want?" as headlines have taunted. It isn't "What has Hillary done?" as in having run a tough campaign that exposed Obama's weaknesses with middle-class white voters. What matters for Obama and the Democratic Party is, "What will Hillary do..." from now until Election Day. "I will do everything they ask of me, travel anywhere they ask, talk to anyone they ask," Clinton said Monday after she flew to Denver from an Obama labor rally in Fresno.

You can argue that Clinton could help Obama more if instead of just releasing her delegates, she would tell them to actually vote for Obama on the floor, as she will. Or you can accept Clinton's premise, offered to the New York media after she appeared before the state's delegation, that her backers need to reconcile their own emotions and satisfy their obligations to voters who sent them to Denver. As angry as they are, any effort to bully her backers... even by Clinton herself ... would backfire.

Who can say for sure? But polls show a lot of Clinton voters unwilling to back Obama, and there was no denying the anger of some who protested outside the convention center. Even those who now support Obama feel a twinge of wistfulness. "I'd be lying to you if I said I didn't sit here wondering what it would be like for me and my city if we were here to nominate Hillary," Schenectady Mayor Brian Stratton said prior to Clinton's speech. "It's bittersweet."

Obama, while annoying Clinton backers by not even vetting her for the second spot on the ticket, has started to do his part. The selection of Sen. Joe Biden appealed to many in her camp. "Biden really helped me with my guys," said John Durso, a state labor leader. Michelle Obama's mini-tribute during her keynote helped, too.

On Monday, Clinton commented on GOP ads that excerpted her criticisms of Obama during the primary. "I'm Hillary Clinton," she said impishly, "and I do not approve of that message."

Tuesday night she was very much Hillary Clinton and they ... the delegates who rose for her in a roar ... approved her message.

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