

Clinton 'graceless' in losing nomination

BY MARY VALLIS

Even after Hillary Clinton's fate seemed certain, even after her supporters admitted Barack Obama would be the Democratic presidential nominee, even after the final votes had been tallied and she had lost, Hillary Clinton kept on talking about herself.

In a speech that perplexed supporters and gave no hint of her political future on Tuesday night, Ms. Clinton made only a few perfunctory remarks about the man who will lead the Democrats' war against John McCain in the next election. She called Mr. Obama a "friend" and congratulated him on running an "extraordinary race" — without ever overtly acknowledging he had beaten her in the fight for the nomination, or recognizing the historic significance of his achievement.

Ms. Clinton briefly praised Mr. Obama's ability to inspire Americans about politics. Her speech then turned inward, to her own reflections from the campaign trail and personal hopes for the future of the United States. She even mused aloud, "What does Hillary want?" and then launched into a recap of why she had entered the race.

"She came across as graceless," said Anne Sowden of Here's Looking at You Image Consulting in Toronto. "She's going to alienate a lot of people because she hasn't got the grace or the courage to say, 'I lost.'"

Many expected her to concede. She did not.

Some observers say Ms. Clinton is demonstrating lack of dignity in the face of defeat. Others characterize her words as an outright denial that she has finally lost. Whichever is the case, Ms. Clinton's words are helping keep the spotlight squarely on herself, rather than the Democratic party's new presidential nominee.

"The expectation was that she was going to concede and unite. By talking about herself, that wasn't uniting," said Kathi Elster, a New York-based management consultant and co-author of *Working With You Is Killing Me*. "She didn't do the two things we all expected, and we're kind of perplexed."

Ms. Clinton's words feed an image of her and her husband as egotistical and self-obsessed — an ambitious couple who care only about their own political futures, rather than what is best for the Democratic party. Even before Tuesday night's results rolled in, observers warned that their response to the results could affect their political standing.

"Will they be seen as party unifiers and team players, or party wreckers and sore losers?" asked Charlie Cook, editor and publisher of the *Cook Political Report*.

"In the long haul, if the Clintons handle this right, she can strengthen her position in the party and he can begin the rehabilitation of his own place in the party. Handled badly, neither will ever be able to fully recover."

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