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ANALYSIS: WHAT DOES HILLARY WANT? RESPECT AND MORE

BYLINE: By RON FOURNIER, AP Political Writer

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"What does Hillary want?" the vanquished Democrat asked.

The vice presidency.

"What does she want?" Sen. Hillary Rodham Clinton repeated.

A prime-time speaking role at the Democratic National Convention.

"I want to hear from you," she told cheering supporters on the night her campaign ended. "Go to hillaryclinton.com"

What does Hillary want? The former first lady wants campaign donations to forgive her debt. And she will press her case for relevancy at the risk of widening the divide between Barack Obama's supporters and her older, whiter, working-class coalition.

"This has been a long campaign, and I will be making no decisions tonight," Clinton said, begging patience of a party desperate to unite. "In the coming days, I'll be consulting with supporters and party leaders to determine how to move forward with the best interests of our party and our country guiding my way."

What Clinton told supporters she wanted was an end to the war in Iraq, universal health care and a stronger economy. That certainly is true, but she's also looking out for her own interests. Clinton did not bow out Tuesday because she wants to retain her political leverage, advisers said privately, eyeing a spot on the ticket, a convention role and perhaps other benefits.

The New York senator told congressional colleagues Tuesday afternoon that she would be open to a vice presidential bid, a significant comedown for the former first lady who entered the race 17 months ago as the clear front-runner.

"I'm in it," she said Jan. 20, 2007, "to win it."

But she lost it.

Running as the establishment candidate against the headwinds of change, a hawk in a party of doves, a Clinton for better and worse, the New York senator couldn't match Obama's timing. His celebrity was too big, his political savvy too much and Internet-driven ground game too powerful for the candidacy of the '90s.

"I am committed to uniting our party," she said Tuesday night, "so we move forward stronger and more ready than ever to take back the White House this November."

Nice words, but Clinton didn't say how or when. She did pledge to fight for universal health care with "no exceptions and no excuses," a not-so-subtle dig at Obama's less ambitious health care plan.

In a way, you can't blame her for being reluctant to let go. Clinton lost, but not by much, and she built a fervent following particularly older woman who saw themselves in every sexist slight and insult cast her way.

Obama, less than four years out of the Illinois legislature, skated through the primary season with nowhere near the scrutiny she faced as first lady and somewhat less than she did as a presidential candidate.

Nearly 20 million voters sided with her, many in the nation's biggest states, and nobody can question her grasp of the issues or her doggedness.

Accepting his historic victory, Obama the nation's first black presidential nominee with a serious shot at the White House praised Clinton for "her strength, her courage and her commitment to the causes that brought us here tonight."

What does Hillary want? She wants to be president still and she wants the respect she's due.

Obama denied her the former this time, but now is his time to grant her the latter.

EDITOR'S NOTE: Ron Fournier has covered politics for The Associated Press for nearly 20 years, including several years in Arkansas when Clinton was the state's first lady.

(This version CORRECTS corrects date of Clinton' "I'm in it to win it" quote to Jan. 20, 2007.)

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