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Cayel Asselbaye, 2, held a Barack Obama poster yesterday during the Obama Ohana Potluck and Beach Canvass rally held at Kapiolani Park.

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[Back Issues](#)  
(1996-Present)  
[M](#) | [T](#) | [W](#) | [T](#) | [F](#) |  
[S](#) | [S](#)

Sections

[Local News](#)

[Features](#)

[Sports](#)

[Business](#)

[Editorial](#)

[Travel](#) (Sunday)

[Corrections](#)

[Blogs](#)

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## Obama backers stress importance of caucuses

By Laurie Au  
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Supporters of U.S. Sen. Barack Obama's campaign for president urged hundreds who gathered yesterday to vote in tomorrow's Democratic caucuses, saying Hawaii could make a difference in a year when the race for the party's nomination is so tight.

During a picnic at Kapiolani Park, family members, local celebrities and political allies of Hawaii-born Obama reiterated his messages of change and hope in an effort to secure more votes. In the latest national estimate, Obama leads U.S. Sen. Hillary Clinton by 62 delegates.

At stake in Hawaii's caucuses are 20 delegates whose commitment will be determined by tomorrow's vote.

"This is the first year that Hawaii is going to really count," said Kelly Hu, an actress from Hawaii who has been campaigning for Obama this weekend. "I'm glad people are getting excited about politics here in Hawaii. Sometimes we feel so isolated out in the middle of the Pacific that we don't even feel like a part of the process."

An additional nine Hawaii delegates are so-called superdelegates who can vote for whom they choose.

Obama supporters emphasized the importance in voting and told picnic-goers not to take the caucuses for granted or assume that Hawaii's votes will go automatically to Obama.

U.S. Rep. Neil Abercrombie invoked many of Obama's

messages, calling this race a "movement" instead of a campaign and chanting, "Yes, we can."

"This year, Obama and Hawaii are going to define the presidential campaign in the United States," Abercrombie said.

"At the end of the night, let's have the most overwhelming vote for Barack Obama that any state has ever seen."

Obama's half sister, Maya Soetoro-Ng, who has been campaigning aggressively in Hawaii and on the mainland, shared stories of her older brother's childhood as a way to connect to local voters.

"This is a place that's been relatively unchanged for him, and so much of who he is was born here," Soetoro-Ng told a crowd of about 200 people eating "OBAMAsadas."

"He was born in Kapiolani Medical Center for Women & Children, two blocks up from where our grandmother still resides ... the place where he used to stick orange peels under his bed, where it got all dried out and ... nasty."

Many voters, some of them first-time caucus-goers, said there were inspired by the rally and optimistic because of Obama's success in recent state caucuses.

"I think it's very exciting that this is probably the first time in my life my vote will count," said Jeanne Johnston, 68, of Kailua.

Others were not as confident given that many prominent state leaders, including U.S. Sen. Daniel Inouye, had endorsed Clinton.

"I'm nervous," said Kristin Chiboucas, of Aina Haina. "It's so close. The state government here is so pro-Clinton, and they may have some sway over the state. Every vote matters."

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