



## Democrats Swig Beer in Vienna While Voting for Clinton, Obama

By Jonathan Tirone



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Feb. 12 (Bloomberg) -- Polls close today in the only Democratic primary taking place in hotels, restaurants, all-night diners, pubs and beer halls over the course of a week.

American expatriates are turning their haunts into impromptu polling stations as they cast ballots for their presidential nominee for the first time since 1992. Democrats abroad will send 22 delegates, with 11 votes, to the convention in Denver.

"People just love coming out to the pub and voting," Democrats Abroad Austrian Co-Chairwoman Katie Solon said as she sipped tea in Vienna's polling place: Pickwick's, a bar and English-language bookstore that served beer as ballots were filed on Feb. 5. "It's

amazing to have the community feeling."

Democrats Abroad, the Washington-based organization representing party members living in over 100 countries, switched from a 16-year-old caucus system this year to try to increase turnout. Voters cast ballots on the Internet or show up for same-day registration at polls, in addition to retaining the ability to mail absentee ballots to their home states.

The group has been working for more than a year on tapping political support from the estimated 6 million Americans living overseas, said Washington-based Democrats Abroad Director Lindsey Reynolds, 31, the organization's only paid staffer. While she declined to disclose precise figures, she said the number of new Democrats casting ballots is in the thousands.

### Absentee Republicans

Republicans living overseas can stay home: The Republican National Committee requires mail-in absentee ballots, said Miki Bowman, chairwoman of Republicans Abroad in the U.K. and a former staffer at the Department of Homeland Security.

In Hong Kong, about 40 Democrats voted between 5:00 p.m. and 6:00 p.m. local time on Feb. 10. They talked politics between bites of Belgian waffles, amid the sound of background rhythm and blues from a juke box at the Flying Pan, a 24-hour diner in the center of Hong Kong's Wan Chai district.

"The last few times it was such a complicated process to vote in the primary from overseas but this time it's much easier," said Erik Floyd, 55, a New Yorker who has lived in Hong Kong 14 years and who voted for Senator Barack Obama.

"This arrangement definitely makes it easier for people to vote compared to a caucus," said Andrew Green, 30, a San Francisco native, who organized the vote at the Flying Pan.

### Half-Vote Delegates

The 22 expatriate delegates attending the Democratic convention have a half-vote each, said Solon, 50. Splitting votes allows the group to represent a wider geographic area, he said. Seven votes will be pledged to candidates prior to the event.

Americans from overseas will hardly overwhelm the Aug. 25-28 convention, which will seat at least 4,049 delegates, with 2,025 required to seal the nomination. The District of Columbia, with a population of around 590,000, is sending 38 delegates alone. The District, along with neighboring Virginia and Maryland, holds its primary today.

U.S. citizens living abroad had until Jan. 31 to register for Internet voting and can submit their electronic ballots until midnight tonight. They must give their name, birth date and the place they last voted in the U.S. Democrats Abroad said it verifies with U.S. authorities that no one votes twice. Internet ballots are

tabulated by San Diego-based Everyone Counts.

Obama, of Illinois, holds an edge in pledged delegates of 925 to 896 for Senator Hillary Clinton of New York, based on an unofficial tally by thegreenpapers.com, a nonpartisan Web site that compiles election statistics. Not all the delegates in recent primaries have been apportioned.

#### Hotel Voting

In Greece, students from the American Community School in Athens led voters from the lobby of the luxury Hotel Grande Bretagne on Constitution Square upstairs to the voting place.

"In the past I had to send huge amounts of paperwork, whereas this feels like they're plugging for me," said Laura McDowell, 42, a copy editor who has lived in Greece for 15 years and voted absentee before. "This seems very organized."

Americans voting in Moscow went to The Place, a restaurant near the Vodootvodny canal. Families with young children chatted over French fries and orange juice after casting votes. The restaurant offered free club sandwiches and coffee to anyone who cast a ballot. A global winner will be declared on Feb. 21 after all votes have been tabulated and double-checked in Geneva.

Some expatriates say they feel a kinship with Obama. "I think he has a better understanding of the wider world," said Peter Reinhardt, 36, a Yale University alumnus who has lived in Russia for 13 years. Obama, whose father was Kenyan and who lived in Indonesia as a child, "had similar experiences to what many of us U.S. expatriates experience every day."

In Vienna, the Democrats were good for business, said Pickwick's owner Nat Rosenberg, a naturalized U.S. citizen from Romania who had always voted Republican before this year.

Business was "huge" the night of the primary, he said, with around 200 Democrats drinking beer, buying books and talking politics after casting their ballots.

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*Last Updated: February 11, 2008 18:19 EST*

