

## What's in a name? Everything in US president race

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By Jeff Mason

WASHINGTON, Feb 14 (Reuters Life!) - Just call her Hillary. Say hello to Barack.

This year's crop of U.S. presidential candidates are using distinctive first and last names to connect with voters and create a brand that they hope will resonate on Election Day.



So what's in a name? Quite a bit when you're running for the most powerful position in the world. The trick, analysts and observers say, is how to use those names to woo voters.

Hillary Clinton, the New York senator and former first lady, has emphasized her first name, putting it on posters and signing it on fund-raising appeals in an effort to stamp her own identity on her campaign and counter perceptions that she is aloof.

"Names are brands," said Christopher Hull, an adjunct professor at Georgetown University who specializes in presidential primaries.

"'Hillary' is not that common a name and therefore it is an easy one to brand."

Using her first name also differentiates her from famous husband Bill Clinton, the former president.

"I think if she just went by Clinton or Hillary Clinton, (then) people are reminded of Bill again," said Anna Beardsley, 29, attending a rally for Obama in Alexandria, Virginia.

"Hillary's kind of a nice, fun name. I think that ... she has to use that to her advantage. I think she needs it."

Obama, on the other hand, has coupled his unusual-sounding names with a revival-like campaign. Packed stadiums often greet him by calling out "Obama, Obama" over and over again.

"The name has become part of how he sells himself -- a kind of star quality," said Julian Zelizer, professor of history and public affairs at Princeton University.

"It sounds like a rock star ... like Prince or something."

Obama's staff and some supporters call him by his first name, spokeswoman Jen Psaki said.

"If it would mean bringing a successful end to the war in Iraq and returning the priorities in this country ... he would probably be fine if people called him Frank."

Candidates sometimes adjust their names for political reasons. Clinton has made less frequent use of her maiden name, Rodham, since running for president and Obama rarely mentions his middle name, Hussein.

## NAME GAMES

The Democrats are not the only party playing name games. Former Republican presidential candidates Mitt Romney and Rudy Giuliani also put first names on their signs and used that familiarity to warm up to voters.

Front-runner John McCain, meanwhile, has a more traditional name and, by running on his record in the Senate and history as a war hero, is more likely to be addressed by a title than an informal first name.

"All of a sudden to start calling himself 'John,' I think would just be a harder sell than with the other candidates," Zelizer said. "He doesn't need to, and I'm not sure he can."

The names on the Democratic side have drawn more attention, thanks to a neck-and-neck battle between the first viable female and black candidates in history.

In the past, calling a black or woman by a first name only was seen as a sign of disrespect. Some voters saw a hint of sexism in the frequent use of Clinton's first name.

"There's been a lot of speculation that people have been sexist against her in calling her Hillary rather than Senator Clinton or even calling her, even worse, Mrs. Clinton," said Sarah Talley, 27, of Richmond, Virginia.

Clinton spokesman Doug Hattaway said she doesn't mind.

"She's very personable and informal, and using her first name reflects that," Hattaway said.

"People call her both Hillary and Senator Clinton, and she's fine with it either way. I don't think she sees it as disrespectful when someone calls her by her first name."

No matter who prevails, once the White House is won, the informality of first name usage is dropped.

"The minute someone is president, it is not appropriate in any context other than family," said Zelizer. "The transition is immediate." (Editing by David Wiessler)

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