

Response to Gary Hart's New York Times Letter to the Editor

Former U.S. Senator and presidential candidate Gary Hart wrote to the editor of the New York Times on February 18th that he and I have significantly different recollections of what happened in the 1984 Democratic campaign. Indeed we do. Reading Senator Hart's letter reminded of what Sen. Daniel Patrick Moynihan once said, that "everyone is entitled to his own opinion, but not his own facts."

Senator Hart wrote "a large majority of superdelegates committed to Mr. Mondale even before the primaries began." But according to all the public delegate counts from the time, that simply is not the case. Vice President Mondale did win more than 70 delegates from the House Caucus in early February, which at that time picked superdelegates, but most of the 568 superdelegates did not make an endorsement until much later in the process, in late April and May, when most of the states had already voted.

Senator Hart points to the fact that he won "almost the same number of overall votes" as Vice President Mondale. Here the operative word is "almost." Walter Mondale won 6.9 million popular votes in the primary season and Gary Hart won 6.5 million. That certainly is a close popular vote race, but nonetheless the fact is that Mondale won by over 400,000 votes.

And what Senator Hart fails to mention in this context is the enormous scope of Mr. Mondale's victory with pledged delegates, the delegates allocated on the basis of the votes cast in primaries and caucuses. On the first ballot in San Francisco at the convention, Mondale received 2,191 votes. Of those, 1,740 were from pledged delegates. Senator Hart received 1,132 votes from pledged delegates on that first ballot. Indeed the scope of Mondale's victory with pledged delegates was enormous - his pledged delegate total was more than the totals of Senator Hart and Reverend Jesse Jackson combined.

Finally, Senator Hart asserts that the superdelegates in 1984 did not support the candidate who was the strongest. Well, we can all say "what if" about every past election, and it should be noted that Senator Hart's campaign was an impressive challenge. But we can't deny the facts that in 1984 the superdelegates supported the winner of the popular vote, who had won a huge and decisive pledged delegate victory, and did so after most of the voters had their say. I hope that, at least as far as these facts are concerned, Senator Hart and I could agree, even if we have different opinions about who deserved to be the Democratic nominee that year. And given the closeness of this year's Democratic primary contest, it's important that, when we recall what happened in the past we closely examine the facts, to help inform our judgments about how we can achieve the best outcome for our party this year and in the years to come.