

Interview with:

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Mithat Bereket (MB): Let's start with you Amy Holmes, thank you for coming to my program and to Sardi's.

Amy Holmes (AH): My pleasure.

MB: What is the importance of the voting blocs in Super Tuesday; the Latinos, the women, the white men, the others. How important were they and what is the result of the Super Tuesday aftermath according to those voting blocs?

AH: Certainly those voting blocs were very important to the candidates and you saw them trying to target those voting blocs where they feel their strongest. If you look on the Republican side for example, the Evangelical vote was very critical to Mike Huckabee's win, he did exceptionally well, better than anyone thought, better than he thought, in the South where Evangelical voters have a real high concentration. If you look on the Democratic side for example, you had Hillary Clinton and Barack Obama really vying for the African American vote. Would African American voters go with the Clinton brand name that's so familiar and so well liked in the African American community, or would they go with Barack Obama who is more symbolic of African American progress? Now an area that I don't think has gotten enough attention is that Hillary does very poorly among white males in her own party, and that does not bode well for Hillary in a general election, should she win the nomination.

MB: So when you look at the results from Super Tuesday, who got the most from each bloc? For McCain, for Huckabee, for Romney, and for Obama and Hillary?

AH: Sure, generally speaking, and I think Jeff would agree with me, generally speaking Romney and Huckabee, they split that conservative vote, they also split the Evangelical vote. John McCain got more moderates, independents, republicans who weren't so far to the right. On the democratic side we saw that Hillary Clinton did very well among Latino voters, particularly in California, where Barack Obama did well with African Americans in the South. But an area that I think is interesting and should get some attention is that Obama did well in Iowa and states that were overwhelmingly Caucasian, places like Minnesota, Idaho – Idaho he got 80 percent of the vote and there are not a lot of black people in Idaho.

MB: Was this a surprise in Idaho?

AH: It shouldn't have been because Barack did very well in Iowa, again where he won the majority of the white male vote,

Jeffrey Plaught (JP): He did well with Caucasians and again he did well in caucus states which require a level of organizing. But it's been interesting, especially on the democratic side, younger voters, very much towards Barack. Older voters caring more about social security and Medicare which the Clintons have been a bulwark protecting, much more towards Hillary Clinton. These cleavages by race and ethnicity which Amy described. Also, when you look at economic status, family household income, families which make less than 50,000 dollars a year for Hillary Clinton, families which make more than 50,000 dollars a year, and the highest income groups especially, for Barack Obama. And then a little bit of a regional break where Hillary Clinton is strong in the Northeast part of the United States; New York, New Jersey, Massachusetts, New Hampshire, which she had won earlier. Barack winning obviously in his native Illinois and in the Midwest, and then a kind of string across the mountain states. So it's kind of a fascinating split in terms of the groups within the Democratic party who support each candidate, and at the end of what was called Super Duper Tuesday, we end up and everyone wakes up and says it's a tie. So I think husbands and wives turned to each other this morning saying what happened, I can't believe this, and many democrats think that this thing is not going to be ended for a long time and it very well may go to the convention

AH: Oh this thing ain't over.

MB: Were there any sort of surprises for you guys about the results, or were you expecting all this to be happening?

JP: It is a surprise because for a year and a half there was an inevitability about Hillary Clinton's campaign for presidency, and the Clintons have had sort of a hold on the American, especially democratic, political psyche since the fact that after Super Tuesday, which was a front-loaded kind of closest to a national primary that we've had, the expectation was that the race would be decided. So the fact that we're kind of a tie, or a jump ball with a basketball analogy, I think surprises a lot of people with the long view.

MB: What do you think Amy?

AH: Well the big surprise for republicans is that John McCain may become the Republican nominee. Last summer people thought his campaign was dead. He was firing top staffers, he had no money, I mean really nobody saw this coming. And the fact that he could put together a coalition of moderates and independents, this is a new way to win a republican nomination, to do it without that hard core Evangelical conservative vote. So that was a huge surprise for Republicans. Also a big surprise really was how well Mike Huckabee did. Nobody saw that coming, including his own campaign.

MB: The democratic side, Jeff, which you've been very involved with as a pollster for the Democratic Party, now it seems that the next step will be the coming elections again in about 12 states until the 22 of April, like Louisiana, Nebraska, Washington, Maryland,

Virginia, Washington DC, Hawaii, Ohio, Rhode Island, and then we'll go to Pennsylvania.

JP: Right, generally the view is that the early part of the democratic calendar, the caucus states like Louisiana like you mentioned, and then what's been called the Potomac Primary, Maryland, Virginia and Washington DC, favor Barack Obama. Those are good environments. But that the later part of the calendar, the big states like Ohio, Texas, Pennsylvania, which is the last primary state, are better areas for Hillary Clinton.

MB: So that means that until, let's say the 4th of March, Obama will be winning over, then when it comes to Ohio, Rhode Island, Texas...

JP: A lot of this is you have to be a math expert on both sides. On the democratic side we're counting delegates and it's very hard to see how anyone gets over the top. On the republican side

MB: Can you, in your experience, who will win which state in these coming states?

JP: Barack Obama has won, seems to win all the caucus states last night so all the caucuses coming up in the next group he's going to win. Barack Obama's seems very likely to win Maryland, the District of Columbia, Virginia which is an incredibly important state, historically has elected republicans, recently they've elected democratic governors – Democratic Governor Tim Kaine is supporting Barack who will do well. The state of Ohio which has been our bell weather state in general elections, Hillary Clinton is up anywhere between 15 and 20 points in the polls and is viewed as something of a late bulwark in the campaign. And then you go to the state of Pennsylvania which is also a swing state, and a big state

MB: Also a state with a lot of black people, do you think they're going to vote for Obama?

JP: It's African American in the cities, in Philadelphia and Pittsburgh, but then you have suburban women who have anxieties within the greater region

AH: But I'd like to jump in, I think a really important point is that the Hillary camp, they need to get out this story about the expectation line. That Barack Obama might be winning those early states, because she's going to have to basically absorb a lot of losses and a lot of hits, but she's going to have to tell her supporters stick with me, stick with me to these later states where I think I can win. So she's trying to lower expectations for those early states so that people don't count her out while Barack Obama is tallying up these wins.

JP: And something to look at which hasn't been focused on as much is Barack Obama raised nearly 33 million dollars in the month of January, he's raising a million dollars a day. It's historic. Hillary Clinton raised 13 million dollars – in American political history the Clintons have been by far the most prolific fundraisers. There is a little bit of

a money issue, now Barack has the ability to compete and play in paid advertising more broadly than Hillary Clinton, so she's going to have to spend a lot of time raising money and catching up.

MB: This is what I was going to ask, for the democratic candidates now which you know well, do you think they'll be able to collect more money after this whole hustle, and after which they are now tired, all their teams are tired, is it sort of a new beginning?

JP: Well, yes because the amount of money in our politics relative to the amount of money in our economy is very low, so while its big amounts of money in politics, millions of dollars is a lot of money and no one could wake up today and say who's going to be the democratic nominee. So close competitive elections mean, people give for love, fear, business, lots of reasons and there's lots of people who are going to want to be in on the action because they're not sure who the nominee is going to be. So I think they'll both be able to raise money, but Barack has shown himself to be sort of a superstar as a candidate as well as a superstar as a fundraiser.

AH: And there's another consideration for Hillary that some prognosicators say that the more people know Obama, the more they love him. So the longer this thing plays out, the more competitive and the better Obama can do, possibly upsetting the Clinton juggernaut that all the democrats thought a year ago was going to be just waltzing to this nomination.

MB: Also they were talking about the feeling of the black voters, African Americans for Obama, they were thinking that oh will vote, but will not count. But now they see that it's working. They are winning. So they say that sometimes maybe this will increase the votes for Obama for the other states. Do you think this will happen?

AH: Well early on there was some concern that African Americans were not rallying behind Obama because they were afraid he might be assassinated, that he might not win, that their vote wouldn't count. And then when they saw that Obama, when he won in Iowa that was a huge deal, when he won in South Carolina and black voters started to coalesce around him. But it's interesting, I've interviewed some African American women leading into Super Tuesday, and when they said the things that they admired about Barack Obama, they liked that he was mixed race. They liked that he had a white mother. It made them feel that he could reach out to white mothers and really heal this racial wound that we have in this country. They liked his view, he reminded them of JFK. So I think it's a little, the media likes to simplify why African American voters are voting for Barak Obama. It's not just racial solidarity, there are a lot of different considerations. You have to remember that African Americans did not start out with this great support for him. We know that this vote goes well beyond race.

MB: So Jeff, what do you think the basic talk or the ideas that will bring victory for the candidates – I mean the mood of the American public, the sort of tendencies, the preferences of the moment...

JP: Well it's interesting, on the democratic side there's not big issue differential between Barrack Obama and Hillary Clinton, on the big issues of our time there's not big difference. There's some difference on the early war vote that Hillary Clinton cast or the vote for authorization, which Obama says he was immediately against the war. But subsequently their records on the war and their rhetoric is basically the same. So there's not a lot of issue differential, but there's very much a difference in terms of approach, and in terms of – Hillary's argument is we need to get in rid of George Bush, she said after Super Tuesday I'm not going to be swift-boated, which is to remind everyone about the attacks on John Kerry and the Democrats' campaign, hey these are rough businesses these campaigns, and we're not guaranteed winning and I'm the one who'd kind of withstood fire, and in a tough campaign who do you really want? Barack's message is aspirational, he and his key advisors talk about it as a movement, about asking Americans to be part of a bigger something, about change going on. On the republican side actually, very interesting, there's much more of a differential.

AH: On the republican side it's still very much a contest of substance, democrats it's a contest of style.

MB: The main word with the American people right now is change. But what sort of change are we talking about? Change with experience? Change with a dynamic new guy? Change with an old, sort of 70 year old former general? So what do you think about this? I mean change is important, but the tones of change

AH: Sure, well I have to tell you, November is still a long time away, it is a lifetime in politics. A lot can happen between now and then. If, God forbid there is some sort of national security crisis, it could be that the public rallies around say a John McCain who is a proven leader, this is a man who was captured and tortured in a tiger cage for five and a half years. He is a war hero, he's well loved and well respected, the American public could rally around him. The public can say, well we want Barack Obama because we want an end to the Clinton / Bush dynasties, we want an end to the partisanship, we really want to turn the page and try to work together. It's anyone's guess at this point what the public's mood is. Some say this is really a democratic terrain after eight years of George Bush and an unpopular war, a democrat should be able to win that. But you know what, it was the same in 2004, John Kerry had all those things going in his direction, and he still lost to George Bush.

MB: And again, four days before the election in 2004, Osama Bin Laden issued a video, so the vote goes back to the Bush camp.

AH: Exactly. There are so many variables, so many things can happen. Look back at 2000. George Bush was actually surging in that weekend, but then we think the Gore campaign dropped this story about the DUI and all of his numbers went down, and then of course you saw that contest with the popular vote.

MB: Tell me about the issues, like foreign policy for example, or America's image in the world, which is a big concern in Turkey since we are very close to Iraq which is our

neighbor. How do you think these candidates, if they'll be elected as president, will make a difference?

JP: Well on the Republican side first of all, John McCain, the frontrunner, said we may be in Iraq for 100 years and...

MB: That's another question – why do you think none of the democratic candidates can say next day, if I'm elected as president, I'm going to withdraw the army from Iraq. Cause it seems like most of the Americans want this war to end and the army back at home. So why can't they just say openly that they want to withdraw the army as soon as possible?

JP: Well I think they're trying to take a position of some calibrated kind of end, but I think there's still a significant portion of the United States that believe we have security interests in the area and that withdrawing immediately might not be in our best interest. I think there's a desire to be kind of out of Iraq, and I think the democratic argument is Barack Obama is trying to use that very point that Clinton messed up a big vote early on which says something about her character and her values. And while Hillary Clinton wants to say I'm ready on day one, Barack Obama wants to say it's what you do on day one, you've got to get it right. So he's trying to make a foreign policy argument. But the United States' reputation around the world has suffered tremendous damage. The democrats want to run against George Bush and the erosion that's happened here at home and the erosion around the world, but the only people that get to vote in this election are United States citizens. So what it finally comes down to is going to be an argument about voters' lives, and most Americans wake up every day, we have a mortgage crisis...

MB: As soon as I see, Amy, the Hillary camp or Hillary herself aimed against Bush himself, and vice versa Obama aimed against the system of the Bush administration. Which do you think will be more affective for the American voters?

AH: Well right now they're in a democratic primary and George Bush is a very attractive target for democratic voters. So Hillary is trying to rally her base, rally her supporters, against George Bush, and as Jeff is saying, they want to run against George Bush. But George Bush is not on the ballot. He's not in that election in November.

MB: And how do you think McCain played the anti-Bush feelings?

AH: I think he played them very well. I think he walked that tight rope where he said that he supported the President, but that the President did not prosecute this war properly. John McCain very early on was railing against Don Rumsfeld, the secretary of defense. He said we needed to put more troops on the ground if we were going to succeed, so there were major policy differences between John McCain and George Bush. And as much as Hillary Clinton or Barack Obama might like to have George Bush as their boogeyman, he's not in this. It'll be John McCain and a whole new slate, a whole new set of issues.

MB: On one side of the scale there will be McCain on the republican side, which do you think the American public thinks is the best competition from the other side - Obama or Hillary?

AH: You know, that's an interesting question, Jeff was getting at this. Hillary is trying to make the claim of experience, Obama is saying judgment. Both of them are getting traction on both of those arguments. Who the American people are going to think is the most competent president we'll see in November.

MB: What do you think Jeff?

JP: I think Hillary tries to change the argument for president as an issue of management, and as an executive kind of running something which she talks about interesting...

AH: Well she actually, she had a very strange quote, most Americans probably didn't like it when she said "you need a strong bureaucrat." Americans don't have a great deal of affection and regard for bureaucrats.

MB: They've had enough of the strong bureaucrats I suppose.

JP: Right, and she's tried to connect, she's talked about that, Barack talks about a greater sense of feel or vision, and the American presidency is not to be the leader of the government, but the leader of the country. And they have a little bit of a different role. Hillary's much more likely to talk programmatically, very convincingly and thoroughly about the kinds of programs she supports and what she's going to do. That gives concrete specificity, texture, believability to her program. Barack's tone is much more aspirational, it doesn't fill in some of the specifics as much, but it gives sort of senses of hope and optimism and the potential for difference. So they're kind of arguing a little bit of a different role for the president of the United States and how they would like maybe to approach their government.

MB: Another important question for both of you, let's start with Amy, do you think that McCain, Obama, Clinton will make some shifts in their policies for the coming next primary elections in the 12 states. Do they have to do some adjustments, some minor fine tunings?

AH: That's an interesting question. John McCain, you know, he has a winning formula so far. It's interesting that voters, in both parties, think that the economy is the most important issue. And those voters on the republican side, they actually credit John McCain. On the democratic side, I think that Jeff could probably speak to this better than I can, Barack Obama has stayed positive, he's stayed forward looking, and I think that's been helping him. I mean, he's doing very well against a very well oiled Clinton machine.

JP: In part, Mithat, what will happen is also as the republican nomination, if as we expect it continues to move to John McCain, then John McCain as well as George Bush will begin to frame the democratic nomination because it's a race against a known challenger.

MB: But who do you think will be the one against McCain?

JP: I think that's somewhat of an advantage for Obama. Well it's an advantage in different ways. For Obama it's an advantage in the sense that he's done better at attracting independents into the Democratic primary in a different kind of politics.

AH: It's been an amazing turnout.

JP: Right, so that helps him. And also he kind of highlights generational notions – John McCain is 70 which is old, it's not too old, Ronald Reagan was an old president, but he's on the older side

AH: 70 is the new 60, come on

JP: But I think McCain also raises very strong foreign policy credentials, probably primarily because he was a prisoner of war for five years, I think he highlights national security credentials, which I think benefits Hillary some because if you are most worried about American security and you're a democrat, you're probably leaning towards Hillary. If you care most about change and a new kind of politics, and a country which can do better, you're probably leaning towards Obama.

MB: And Amy, that's one of the interesting things when you look at it from Europe, from Turkey, on politics and the elections. Now, for primary elections for party politics, candidates should play for the party hardliners. But after he or she has been elected the candidate, then he or she has to play for the general public. That means a shift in the arguments and the general policies. Do you think McCain will be able to handle that?

AH: I think actually McCain is very well positioned for the general election, that he is actually not going to have to change his campaign message very significantly. He's winning this republican primary with moderates and independents. So when he gets to the general election, I don't think you're going to see this major shift from him. I mean this is a man who is talking about climate change which is not a popular topic among conservatives. When conservatives hear him talk about it, why are you saying that? We don't agree with you on this issue. This is a man who wanted comprehensive immigration reform with a Z visa which would have given 12 to 20 million immigrants a straight path to citizenship. And yet he's still able to win the republican nomination, we think. On the democratic side, I look at Barack Obama and there are some issues there that I think are going to be, if he wins the nomination, real losers with the American public. One of them, drivers licenses for illegal immigrants. This is an issue that is deeply, deeply opposed by a wide swath of the American public. That's an issue that I think republicans can I think beat him up with, and I think beat him up very effectively. I

think he's going to have to move to the center. He was rated the most liberal senator in the entire senate. That is quite an accomplishment when you have Ted Kennedy, Pat Leahy, and a number of them. So I think Barack Obama, he's been very good at sort of masking his liberal leanings, and talking about hope and aspiration and the future, and non-partisanship and reaching out to republicans. I think he's going to have to shift quite a bit more.

MB: What do you think about this, about Obama especially, will he be more opening up if he will be elected as a candidate of the Democratic Party?

JP: What happens in American politics is that in the primaries, people tend to run towards the activists in their party, which is the liberals on the democratic side and the conservatives on the republican side. John McCain is the candidate that democrats least want to run against. He's their strongest general election candidate. There's still some chance they'll have a civil war on their side, but he is a very strong candidate for them. On the democratic side, republicans believe they want to run against Hillary Clinton, that's what they kind of say, that's what the consultants say, because it's deep in their DNA, a hate of the Clintons. But they've lost two national elections to Hillary Clinton and it's hard for me to imagine new information that they would surface about Hillary Clinton which the American public didn't already think that it had seen. So I think we're likely going, whether the nominee is Obama or Hillary, as the last two elections have been, to see very very close elections in a largely divided country.

MB: And very lastly, to wrap it up, there are three people that we're talking about, McCain, Obama, and Hillary. Now, what sort of presidents do you think each of them will make? What sort of characteristics will they have, differences in their presidencies if they will be elected at the end of November? What will be their style?

AH: That's an interesting question, one that republicans are discussing particularly when it comes to Hillary Clinton. She claims that she wants to reach out to republicans, will she? We haven't seen a lot of that necessarily when she was first lady and trying to pass healthcare in a very secretive environment, not using the expertise of the legislators that the people elect. So there are big questions, Hillary talks about non-partisanship, will she follow up on that. But a really interesting point, and I think Jeff was getting to this, is if November is a close election like the past elections have been, if it's John McCain or Hillary, and they don't get a clear mandate from the voter, then you can expect four more years of partisanship and gridlock.

MB: What do you think about that Jeff?

JP: I can tell you the American presidents who they would probably like to be. John McCain will probably model himself after presidents like Teddy Roosevelt, who was a maverick, swashbuckling president, and Ronald Reagan who used a good disposition to lead. I think Barack Obama probably aspirationally sees himself as a John Kennedy, a young president, kind of exciting coming into office. And Hillary Clinton is probably

going to be a merge between Bill Clinton in those policies, with a historic of having a woman ...

MB: Can Obama be another JFK for the US, another Kennedy?

JP: I think Barack Obama's candidacy, if we can judge a presidency by its candidacy, his candidacy has been inspirational, beaten expectations, kind of touched a nerve in the American political electorate. Democrats, republicans, so I think he definitely could. And remember, before John Kennedy was assassinated, what the Kennedy legacy has been is different from what the Kennedy legacy has been.

AH: But I would go back to that idea of him being inspirational and drawing people together. We saw this in '92 with Bill Clinton, you know that he was this young, electrifying candidate, and when he got into office, his first two years were a disaster, he lost the Congress to republicans, he went too far left on his agenda, and then he had to tack back to the middle, back to the center in order to have a successful presidency.

MB: Ok. Well, Amy Holmes and Jeffrey Plough, thank you very much for being with us.