

Democrats

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the-nation primary.

In their time on stage, several of the candidates made an explicit pitch for the votes of union members, stressing their backing for legislation designed to make it easier to join unions, for example.

Edwards, Clinton and others drew cheers when they voiced support for universal health coverage, and Rep. Dennis Kucinich of Ohio vowed to pull the United States out of NAFTA soon after taking office in the White House.

But the Iraq war overshadowed all else at the two-hour event, Democrat after Democrat vying to show their eagerness to end U.S. participation in a conflict that has resulted in the deaths of more than 3,100 U.S. troops.

"Sign me up. No negatives," Sen. Joe Biden of Delaware said just after Richardson made his appeal. Moments later, though, he

spoke dismissively of congressional efforts merely to stop Bush's plan to deploy additional troops. "Don't talk about capping and all that. Do something," he said.

Clinton and Obama support separate bills to prevent an increase in troop levels above those in effect in January. Kucinich was more direct.

He said he had voted against authorizing the war in 2002, adding, "People are looking for a president who does the right thing when it matters the most."

Former Sen. Mike Gravel of Alaska, a quarter-century out of office, was the eighth candidate. "I don't think it's a big deal whether I get elected president or not," he said at one point.

The event occurred on a day in which aides to Obama and Clinton clashed over remarks made by DreamWorks founder David Geffen, a one-time supporter of President

Clinton who has lined up behind the Illinois senator in 2008.

The Hollywood mogul was quoted in the New York Times as saying Sen. Clinton is ambitious and polarizing and her husband, the former president, reckless. Aides to the New York senator promptly called on Obama to give back a campaign donation from Geffen.

Clinton sidestepped a question of whether Obama should denounce Geffen's remarks. "I sure don't want Democrats or supporters of Democrats to be engaging in the politics of personal destruction," she told moderator George Stephanopoulos.

Sen. Chris Dodd of Connecticut, the first to speak, brushed aside a suggestion from some administration allies that the withdrawal of troops from Iraq would create chaos.

"How much more chaos

could there be in Baghdad than exists today?" he asked to applause from the audience at a union-sponsored event near the Nevada state capitol.

"Time has run out on what President Bush has tried to do in Iraq," said Clinton when she took her turn on stage. She touted her legislation to begin a troop withdrawal within 90 days, and as she has done repeatedly, declined to apologize for her vote to authorize the war in 2002.

Former Iowa Gov. Tom Vilsack struck a similar note. "I want to challenge every single one of you and ask a simple question, what have you done today? What have you done today to end this war in Iraq?"

"It needs to be ended now. Not six days from now, not six months from now. Not six years from now. It needs to be ended now, and it is up to you," he said.

Edwards, the party's 2004 vice presidential nominee, said it was time to begin a troop withdrawal. "I voted for this war. I was wrong to vote for this war. I should never have voted for this war. I take responsibility for that. No one else is responsible for it.

He added, "But the truth is, if we want to live in a moral and just America, and we want America to be able to lead in a moral and just world. We need a leader who is honest, open and decent and trying to do the right thing."

Stephanopoulos asked Edwards moments later whether he had been referring to Clinton.

"Well, whether it's good enough, I think it's between her and her conscience. It's not for me to judge," said the former North Carolina senator.

The program called for

each contender to make brief opening comments, then field three questions from Stephanopoulos, an ABC News broadcaster and former aide in Bill Clinton's White House. That meant, for example, that Clinton was backstage when Edwards spoke.

The Republican National Committee used the forum to try to put its own spin on the candidates, releasing "research documents" containing unflattering critiques of each of the Democrats hours before the event.

In recent years, Democrats have sensed political opportunity in the mountain West, a fast-growing region long dominated by Republicans. Nevada, with its large Hispanic population and influential labor unions, was considered a battleground state in 2004, and President Bush won the state by just 3 percentage points.

March

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datory sentencing laws, allow state employees to participate in collective bargaining, and protect the rights of Latin Americans.

"Today's event marks the beginning, and only the beginning of our commitment to unite our effort and combine our struggle for the changes that we need to see for our Latino immigrants and African-American communities in North Carolina," said Marisol Jimenez McGee, the director of advocacy at El Pueblo. El Pueblo is an advocacy and public policy organization for the Latino community in North Carolina.

The HK on J march began in the Memorial Auditorium and included a dance performance, spoken word and music. After the audience was presented the People's Agenda, they voted for all parts of the 14-point agenda by being asked to stand up from their seats. Participants then marched to 16 West Jones Street in the nippy weather through downtown Raleigh to demand that the General Assembly adhere to their agenda.

HK on J organizers have also created a plan of action for each of the agenda items. Barber noted that HK on J campaigners will insert the People's Agenda in every political discussion and debate until each one of the points becomes a reality.

"We're going to go to the legislature. We're going to go to Congress. We're going to go to whoever has power to bring about change, because our communities are in crisis," said Dr. Jarvis Hall, the political action director of the N.C. NAACP and one of the architects of the People's Agenda.

There were numerous speakers at HK on J, representing over 70 organizations that partnered with the N.C. NAACP to coordinate Saturday's event and to continue the HK on J campaign. Several elected officials were also present to show their support, including Rep. Larry Womble (Forsyth County), a member of the NAACP who said that he traveled to Raleigh from Winston-Salem with a convoy of about four buses and two vans. Several other buses arrived from churches in the broader N.C. area.

Coordinators said that the demonstration was scheduled for Saturday because most of the working class people have to work on weekdays.

Greensboro resident, Sinda Lewis said it was important for her to attend HK on J because she remembers how demonstrators took a stand against segregation when she was a child.

"It was real spiritual for me, and I just feel blessed to have been just one in the thousand, because it's time to make a change," she said.

Melde Rutledge writes for the Carolina Peacemaker.

Your Horoscope Says... Feb. 23- Feb. 28

ARIES

Your careless ways with money are going to be apparent this week. Financial mistakes you've made in the past will be especially painful. Don't conceal the pain from yourself. It is a warning that you should take steps to prevent future financial crisis.

Soul Affirmation: I let my friendships guide my way.

Lucky Numbers: 1, 27, 31

TAURUS

Spend time outdoors enjoying and relaxing with Mother Nature. Learn a new sport, and spend time with family and friends. Don't take travel matters into your own hands. Seek a professional who will be able to plan a wonderful vacation for you without breaking your bank. Cook up some goodies for your loved ones.

Soul Affirmation: I change who I am by changing where I am going.

Lucky Numbers: 4, 53, 54

GEMINI

Stay positive. Don't let negative people get inside your head. You know that things will work out well. Ease rapidly away from anyone who is a naysayer. During the week, things may seem hard at times. Soon, though, life will be filled with fun. Enjoy!

Soul Affirmation: The slowness of my week gives me time to refresh my energy.

Lucky Numbers: 19, 30, 45

CANCER

The bond that you established with your spiritual side works well in your relationship with a special person. Speak of the reality of the intangible qualities of life. Your lover will understand. Keep attention on the financial matters you've been dealing with.

Soul Affirmation: I obey the rules this week and avoid hassles.

Lucky Numbers: 18, 29, 30

LEO

The link that you've established with your spiritual self will be strengthened by the people who come into your life this week. This week is a week for seriousness about a relationship. Discuss your deepest thoughts with others. They'll understand and thank you for sharing intimate parts of yourself.

Soul Affirmation: Faith keeps me calm in the storms of life.

Lucky Numbers: 14, 29, 43

VIRGO

You've done some of your own love homework. Hopefully, you've had an opportunity to learn a new way of seeing the world and, in that way, you've found a way of loving that is more natural for you. The combination of sexiness and joyful focus can create you a wonderful love experience.

Soul Affirmation: I get joy from giving good things.

Lucky Numbers: 14, 23, 45

LIBRA

Share in the glory of your friend who has been recognized for outstanding work. Plan a small get-together to celebrate the occasion. Your time will come, and you will be placed on the pedestal. Your intimacy radar is sensitive. Watch out for a new romance that might come along. Expect the unexpected. You will be pleasantly surprised.

Soul Affirmation: Love is easier than breathing.

Lucky Numbers: 16, 30, 50

SCORPIO

You've done a lot of things in life that no one has agreed with at the beginning. Finding agreement this week will be difficult, but it should not deter you from moving forward. Feeling sorry for your loneliness will discolor what you are doing. Be happy that you are alone.

Soul Affirmation: I get joy from giv-

ing good things.

Lucky Numbers: 2, 10, 31

SAGITTARIUS

Eternal optimist, eternity is now. Get in touch with your hopefulness and be a beacon to others. Try not to be taken in by promises made by others or promises you've made to yourself. Concerning your own affairs, avoid contemplating lofty subjects and seeking long-range solutions.

Soul Affirmation: Time is the greatest peacemaker of them all.

Lucky Numbers: 14, 28, 39

CAPRICORN

Some say optimism is fantasy. Suppose the good thing you're optimistic about never comes. This week you'll know that the joy of anticipating it is joy enough. Just the certainty of coming goodness is present goodness. The joy of tomorrow is available this week.

Soul Affirmation: This week is the week the Lord has made. I rejoice in it.

Lucky Numbers: 22, 36, 38

AQUARIUS

Your self-discipline helps you to do more this week. People will be watching as you zip around with style and grace! Broaden your cultural horizons by trying new foods and meeting new people. You'll be pleasantly surprised!

Soul Affirmation: I am patient with all that comes my way this week.

Lucky Numbers: 3, 4, 14

PISCES

The urge to chase off on a tangent may be strong this week. Take a few minutes to study the big picture and make sure any whims serve the bigger purpose. It's a good week to do what needs to be done.

Soul Affirmation: Luck is my best friend this week.

Lucky Numbers: 5, 10, 15