

## Many Hollywood celebrities rally behind Obama

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By Alex Dobuzinskis

LOS ANGELES (Reuters) - Ahead of a big fundraising event next week, many Hollywood heavyweights are rallying behind Barack Obama in his bid for U.S. president, pledging money and star power after lending early support to his one-time rival Hillary Clinton.

Experts say that since Clinton conceded defeat earlier this month in her bid to be the Democratic nominee, celebrities have quickly united behind Obama.

The result, they said, could be a campaign cash windfall for the senator from Illinois, but star support doesn't necessarily transfer directly to votes.

A Tuesday fundraiser in downtown Los Angeles is expected to attract a host of Hollywood stars and feature a performance by the singer Seal at a cost of \$2,300 per ticket.

Director Steven Spielberg and his partner in the DreamWorks movie studio, David Geffen, and DreamWorks Animation Chief Executive Officer Jeffrey Katzenberg are organizing another Obama fundraiser for later this year, said Andy Spahn, a consultant to the Hollywood power-trio.

"If a Hollywood celebrity puts his or her mind to it, they're good money raisers," said analyst Sherry Bebitch Jeffe, a senior scholar at the University of Southern California.

"Barbra Streisand, you put her in concert and you raise fortunes for Democrats, or Bruce Springsteen," Jeffe said.

Mitchell Schwartz, who was Obama's California campaign manager through the primary election season, said Obama's appeal in Hollywood had been limited, until now.

"I don't think we were the Hollywood candidate -- ever," Schwartz said. "I think Hillary might have been more, she might have had more support."

### ALIGNING THE STARS

Other Obama celebrity endorsers include talk show host Oprah Winfrey and actors Robert De Niro, Tom Hanks, Scarlett Johansson and Halle Berry.

Billionaire Geffen upset many Hollywood power players and political supporters last year when the longtime Clinton supporter broke for Obama.

Oscar winner Hanks, the star of "The Da Vinci Code," gave money to Bill Clinton's legal defence fund when he was president, but endorsed Obama with an online video in early May, when Hillary Clinton was still campaigning.

In the video, Hanks joked that celebrity endorsements do little to sway voters, and Jeffe said that while stars can help raise cash, agreed that their appeal may also do harm if voters consider celebrities too liberal.

During the primaries, Obama had trouble attracting Hispanic voters in some states because, analysts said, some Hispanics were reluctant to vote for a black candidate.

But a pro-Obama video in Spanish with Hispanic actors Jessica Alba of "The Love Guru," John Leguizamo of "The Happening" and comedian George Lopez, has attracted more than 250,000 viewers on the video sharing site YouTube.com.

"It helps build a broader sense of a candidate's support," said professor Chon Noriega, director of the University of California, Los Angeles, Chicano Studies Research Center. "But I don't think that because George Lopez said support (a candidate) somebody's going to say, 'Well that's who I'm going to vote for.'"

Presumptive Republican candidate Sen. John McCain also has his celebrity endorsers, including actors Robert Duvall and Sylvester Stallone.

Reuters/Nielsen

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