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SUPERDELEGATE

Democratic college chief, 25, reaches out

BY KATHLEEN GRAY • FREE PRESS STAFF WRITER • March 18, 2008

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It's not many 25-year-olds who get calls from former U.S. Sen. Tom Daschle or get a few minutes of one-on-one time with the leading Democratic candidates for president.

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Lauren Wolfe is no ordinary twentysomething law student. She's one of 28 superdelegates from Michigan hoping to be seated at the Democratic National Convention. Her status is the same as that of party power hitters like Gov. Jennifer Granholm and U.S. Sen. Carl Levin. Wolfe, who lives in Royal Oak, is president of College Democrats of America.

Superdelegates are a select group of Democrats including elected officials such as members of Congress and governors; former presidents and vice presidents; members of the Democratic National Committee, including many union leaders, and former chairs of the DNC. Wolfe, as president of her group, is a member of the DNC.

Ever since the names of superdelegates became public, Wolfe, a second-year law student at University of Detroit Mercy, said her e-mail in-box and cell phone voice mail have stayed perpetually full from people trying to sway her decision for either Sens. Barack Obama or Hillary Clinton.

"I keep getting calls from people who ask: 'Can I speak with Lauren Wolfe's assistant,' " she said last week during a break between classes. "But it's just me."

Wolfe also is hearing from former teachers, professors and classmates who have run across her name on social networking sites.

She takes her job as a superdelegate seriously. While young voters have been turning out in record numbers in state primaries and caucus this winter -- many supporting Obama -- Wolfe is diplomatic.

"I want to see what happens after all the primaries," she said. "But ultimately, it's my job to represent young people and stand up and vote for the person who young people feel is the best candidate."

She's been standing up for Democrats since she was in high school at Detroit Country Day, when she walked in parades and knocked on doors for Democratic candidates. Her parents both own small businesses and aren't politically active.

"But they were always encouraging discussions around the dinner table," Wolfe said.

Wolfe got involved with CDA as an undergraduate at Smith College in Massachusetts in 2001, rising to president of the college's chapter in her junior and senior year. After graduating, she lived in Germany for a year on a Fulbright scholarship, teaching English and American culture to elementary and high school students.

She said her foreign experience gave her insights into how Americans and U.S. policy were viewed abroad.

Back in Michigan in 2006, she ran for president of the national organization and won with 55% of the vote. Today, she splits time between classes and CDA business.

Morley Winograd, a political consultant, author and former Michigan Democratic Party chairman, said 2008 is a heady time for young people like Wolfe.

"I like to call this the civic generation. They're revolting against the culture of previous generations," he said.

They use cell phones and laptops, connecting them with other like-minded people.

"The Internet is like oxygen for them," Winograd said.

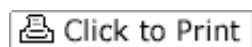
That's how Wolfe has been connecting with young voters. With text messages, YouTube videos and social networking sites, the CDA is signing up thousands of new members on college campuses.

"And the candidates are not only talking to young people about issues important to them," Wolfe said. "They're doing it in ways that are accessible to young people."

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