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Trio in College May Hold Key Votes for Democrats

By SARA MURRAY
April 16, 2008; Page A5

WASHINGTON -- While most of the Democratic Party's superdelegates are members of Congress, governors or senior party officials, Awais Khaleel, Lauren Wolfe and Jason Rae are still in college. Yet the votes of the three student superdelegates might help decide the Democratic nominee.

As members of the Democratic National Committee, they are included among the 800 or so superdelegates to the party's national convention in Denver Aug. 25-28, and they have made it their mission to represent young voters.

The trio are unlikely members of this group of accidental powerbrokers who increasingly appear to hold the balance of power in the race for the nomination. DNC officials think they probably are the only college-student superdelegates.

Young people "aren't aware of the fact that we have superdelegates like myself who grew up with them in middle-class families and go to public universities and are financing their own education," says Mr. Khaleel, a 23-year-old political-science student at the University of Wisconsin-Madison.



Awais Khaleel

- **Who?** Among 800 or so superdelegates to the Democratic presidential nominating convention are three college students.
- **How?** Two represent College Democrats of America; the other was elected locally.
- **Special Challenge:** Finding the money to get to Denver in August.

He and Ms. Wolfe, 25, a University of Detroit Mercy law student, are vice president and president, respectively, of the College Democrats of America, an organization that works with campaigns to reach out to young

voters and since 1993 has held DNC seats.

With chances growing that the superdelegates might choose the nominee, Ms. Wolfe says she tries not to focus on the responsibility, putting her efforts instead into organizing young voters and hoping some compromise can be reached. Both she and Mr. Khaleel say they won't endorse a nominee until the primaries and caucuses have ended in June.

Only a few DNC slots are allocated to groups like the College Democrats of America. The majority of the 410 DNC superdelegates were elected by their state parties. Such was the case with Mr. Rae, a 21-year-old Marquette University student who has endorsed Sen. Barack Obama.

Mr. Rae is a Wisconsin delegate to the DNC who will be voting in his first presidential election. He earned his DNC slot at 17 years old after years of



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avid interest in local politics. His campaign for DNC membership involved homemade stickers, fliers and a lot of handshaking, he says. "I actually had to sneak out right after voting to get to summer camp," he says.



The three student superdelegates talk with young voters about issues like health care and the economy, they review the campaigns' outreach efforts -- and then they study for their exams. Ms. Wolfe says her inbox is crammed with email from young people expressing their candidate preference.

Mr. Khaleel says some students tell him they are worried about finding a job when they graduate; others worry about whether they will be able to afford college. Many young voters either know someone serving in Iraq or have served there themselves.

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But none of the three was prepared for the increased attention superdelegates have received recently as their potentially critical role has emerged. "When I got involved with it, I thought I would be attending a couple meetings in D.C. every couple months," Mr. Rae says. Instead, they have had to juggle exams and classes with, for example, phone calls from Sens. Obama and Hillary Clinton or coffee with Chelsea Clinton.

Mr. Khaleel recalls the hubbub when he had coffee with Chelsea Clinton. "People are definitely looking around the coffee shop, like, 'Is it her? No it can't be,'" he says. "And somewhere in the middle I'm, like, I'm having coffee with Chelsea Clinton."

Remaining undecided hasn't been easy, Mr. Khaleel says. "There were moments where there were certain surrogates who would just ask me cold, you know, 'Would you support our candidate?'" he says, adding that it's "hard to say 'No' in the face of someone you respect."

Ms. Wolfe can't even be sure she will be seated at the convention. Michigan delegates won't be seated unless the party comes up with a compromise for the state, which has been barred from the convention for having held its primary too early. While this means she has received no phone calls from the nominees, she did hear from former Sen. Tom Daschle of South Dakota, who supports Sen. Obama. "I just go to school and go home and study -- and then you listen to your messages and the former majority leader is calling," she says.

The three also face constraints that many superdelegates don't. Mr. Rae, who works as a resident assistant in a campus dorm, says he has been saving for his plane ticket to Denver for four years. Mr. Khaleel says that when he enters the work force next month, he expects to have to let his employer know he will need a week off in August to cast his vote.

Money was also a concern for Ms. Wolfe, who plans to travel to the convention with two friends, even if she won't be seated. "I might be the only superdelegate road-tripping it over three days," she says. "But we're going to have a lot of fun."

Write to Sara Murray at sara.murray@wsj.com

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