

THE BRILLIANCE OF THE EDWARDS ENDORSEMENT

I joked to some folks yesterday that Will Rogers is probably rolling over in his grave about now. Between Obama's insistence on running one, unified message and party and Obama's masterful implementation of the Edwards endorsement yesterday, we Democrats may no longer be able to quip—at least for the next several months—that we "belong to no organized party."

That sentiment was widely shared among a bunch of local political types in MI with whom I just had beers. It wasn't just that Obama (and David Bonior, surely) had managed to headline Obama's first MI event with the guy in the race who spoke most about the crappy economy. It wasn't just that it was MI where he chose to get the endorsement—making up for a lot of the bad things some Michiganders have been told about Obama. It wasn't even just the nice touch of keeping the Edwards endorsement a secret from the thousands who showed up in Van Andel arena to see Obama until Obama got to announce it himself on stage—magnifying the specialness of the Edwards endorsement. It was, obviously, also the way Obama managed to pre-empt Hillary's biggest win since Arkansas with the news that both of them have been chasing since February.

But the more I think about it, Obama's management of the Edwards endorsement was even more brilliant than that.

Consider, for a moment, Robert Reich's explanation of why Hillary remains in the race (h/t Jane).

She wants the best possible deal she can strike with Obama. She wants Obama to agree to pay her campaign debts, to seat the Michigan and Florida delegations (so she can claim a moral victory), and — the quietest deal of all — a personal

commitment from him to appoint her to the Supreme Court when the next vacancy occurs.

Just as a picky point, the Edwards endorsement simplifies any resolution of MI. If the MI compromise proposal goes forward, it'll make it a lot easier to award Obama 59 delegates now that the other major candidate who took uncommitted votes has endorsed Obama—Edwards isn't going to complain that "his" votes from uncommitted are awarded to Obama. And even if Obama does feel generous and gives Hillary her MI "win" (which will piss me off, but I'm willing to be used once again for the sake of party unity)—having the Edwards endorsement will make it more likely that the roughly 5 elected delegates who support Edwards and the At Large delegates yet to be assigned to uncommitted will support Obama. (Obviously, that's true of FL as well.)

But that's a picky point. What I'm really interested in, with regards to the timing and implementation of the Edwards endorsement, is that it happened just as Hillary's team had intensified its lobbying to secure the VP nomination for Hillary. A few days ago, everyone was talking about the dream ticket Obama-Clinton. Now, after last night's endorsement, everyone is talking about the dream ticket of Obama-Edwards; talk of a Obama-Clinton ticket now seems dated, flat.

Consider the pressure that puts Hillary under. Whether she wants SCOTUS or VP or some other prize for a concession, everything she might be a good candidate for, Edwards would also be an excellent pick for. VP? AG? SCOTUS? Yup.

Yet Edwards, of course, jumped in when the concession prizes were all available—and jumped in in a way that made Hillary's concession less necessary (though still pretty important) even as it isolated Hillary further in her opposition to Obama. If Hillary holds out much longer, it'll be easy for Obama to give Edwards whatever

prize Hillary might have wanted as a reward for Edwards endorsing to bring the party together.

By bringing in Edwards when he did (and mind you, I don't imagine that Edwards is missing this significance either), Obama takes away much of Hillary's bargaining position. That's not very nice, mind you. But it is effective politics.

Will Rogers. I'm sorry, but you may have to take a pass this year.