

BY JOHN TOSCANO

The Iraq War is on the front burner for Democrats in Washington and is also dominating the party's candidates on the campaign trail, where huge audiences are fixed on the topic.

United States Senator Hillary Rodham Clinton keeps getting asked to explain her 2002 vote authorizing the war and her colleague and rival, Senator Barack Obama (Illinois), who never voted for the war, is raising doubts about whether he has a plan to get us out of Iraq.

Obama, who officially announced his candidacy over the weekend in his home state, was thrown a little off-stride afterward in Iowa where he went to campaign later Sunday and said that \$400 billion has been spent on the war and 3,000 lives of the bravest young Americans wasted."

He apologized if he offended anyone by the remark, saying he did not mean to disparage the troops' sacrifice.

Meanwhile, on the other side of the aisle, former Mayor Rudy Giuliani still has not formally announced he is running, but remarked in California on Monday that he is "100 percent committed" to running for president, according to a *New York Post* report.

Giuliani, dealing lightly with his Hamlet-like indecision, said he's now in the process of deciding where, when and how to make a formal announcement.

"My idea is I'm going to announce in 100 different places," he said as his audience laughed.

He also took a shot at Clinton, his closest rival in most polls, saying he wasn't sure she'll be the candidate of the Democrats.

Clinton was in New Hampshire campaigning earlier this week, where she was joined by

Clinton, Obama On Firing Line In N.H.; Rudy Still Hesitating



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Obama on Monday. Despite being asked some hard questions, both appeared to be kindly received by huge audiences in this early primary state.

Typical of the treatment that Clinton received in Nashua, one guest at a party where the candidate appeared said her explanation about her 2002 vote wasn't satisfactory.

But Clinton turned this around by pointing out that she is the one Democratic candidate that many top Republicans most fear.

Obama, meanwhile, also ran into some flack on the war issue; although he's generally on safe ground because he had a clear anti-war position before it started when he was a state senator in Illinois.

Now he is saying in his campaigning that he has a plan to get the troops out by 2008, but this wasn't good enough for one spectator, who demanded that he must stop the funding immediately. As of the moment, Democrats in Congress don't appear ready to cut off funding sought by President Bush, it was said.

Obama didn't hesitate to add his voice to those questioning Clinton's war position. Citing Clinton's recent statement before the Democratic National Committee that if she's president in 2009, she'll immediately get us out of the war, Obama acknowledged that this was her position, but he said he wasn't quite sure how she would accomplish that goal.

One thing seems quite sure, however, and that is that Obama is not being treated as a novice this early in the campaign. He has received some very laudatory comments from among the select group of voters who attended the parties where both Obama and Clinton appeared.

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