

Obama supporters rally in national effort

By CATHERINE BAUM Staff Writer

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NORTHAMPTON – Although Massachusetts' presidential primary election is long over and the general election is more than six months away, about 150 to 200 people took part in a rally Saturday to support Democratic candidate Barack Obama in Northampton's busiest intersection.

Thousands of individuals from all 50 states gathered in towns and cities across the nation for the rally, just before Pennsylvania's presidential primary on Tuesday and the Indiana and North Carolina primaries after that.

The event, known as both 'Nation for Change' and 'Yes We Stand,' was organized here by members and friends of Progressive Democrats of America.

It was held at the corners of Main, King and Pleasant streets from noon to 1 p.m. after the weekly vigil of the Northampton Committee to Stop the War in Iraq.

'It felt like a street festival - I've never seen so many people so happy to shout about the way they feel,' said Wendy Newton, of Northampton, who helped to organize the rally.

Newton said one of the reasons she and her husband, David Newton, moved to Northampton in 2004 from Connecticut's Fairfield County is because the community is 'accepting' of such events.

'People welcome and take delight in being able to express opinions here and enjoying others expressing their opinions,' Newton said.

'We didn't come very far but it feels like a world away.'

The grassroots event was not officially advertised, but spread locally via word-of-mouth, fliers and emails, said Lisa Baskin, of Leeds, another organizer.

'The Obama Web site has been key for everybody everywhere to somehow connect to the campaign and become involved,' Baskin said.

Participants Saturday ranged in age from infant 'babies for Obama,' as signs read, to 'mommies for Obama' to voters in their 90s, Baskin said. One person baked a cake that read 'Hope,' she added.

'I don't remember a time like this ... my grandkids are interested in this - that's hope,' said Baskin, 64, who has been involved in politics since she was a teenager and was a delegate in the 1988 Democratic National Convention for Jesse Jackson.

'It really was exciting to see the kind of passion and commitment to this campaign all across the board.'

The rally was also held in Worcester and Boston Saturday.

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