

Behind the Howard 'Who?' Dean Phenomenon

by Nancy Spannaus

Is the Dean Presidential campaign like the IT bubble? In the midst of all the hype about the Howard (Who?) Dean Presidential campaign's report on his second quarter fundraising—he says he raised \$7.5 million from 59,000 contributors—it's worth looking behind the statistics. What is the Dean campaign, really?



Up until the present wave of publicity, former Vermont Gov. Howard Dean has been best known for his advocacy of health care for children, and his opposition to the war against Iraq. "I'm from the Democratic wing of the Democratic Party," he is fond of saying, in imitation of his much more liberal friend, the now-deceased Sen. Paul Wellstone.

Now, all of a sudden, Dean is being touted as a "revolutionary" for his "stunning" results in raising campaign funds over the Internet. This fundraising capability is being touted as an indication of Dean's "grassroots" appeal, making him a potential threat to the likes of Sen. John Kerry (Mass.) and Sen. John Edwards (N.C.).

Let's take a deeper look at both these stories.

Where Was Dean's Opposition to Cheney?

It is true that Dean campaigned against the war against Iraq. It is *not* true that he took any effective action to try to *change* the policy of pre-emptive war, either by the Bush Administration, or the Democratic Leadership Council (DLC) crowd that runs the Democratic National Committee. To this day, Dean has said *nothing* on his website about the role of Vice President Dick Cheney, who is known to be the author of the pre-emptive war doctrine and the intelligence frauds sold to President Bush. That's a very serious indication of Dean's being either a coward, or a faker.

Was Dean perhaps simply posturing, in his anti-war stance?

It has been pointed out that the good doctor toned down his opposition to the Iraq War considerably, once it began. Rather than presenting a foreign policy opposed to military force, Dean chose to criticize the President for attacking Iraq, as opposed to going after North Korea and Iran. While paying

lip-service to multilateralism, Dean's rhetoric against those nations got pretty hot.

A Dean supporter might reply that Dean's candidacy was more heavily based on his domestic program, such as health care for needy children, than foreign policy. But, even here, there's more sizzle than steak. As Governor of Vermont, Dean did provide health insurance for nearly all children, but he does not promote universal health care, and he puts first and foremost, his commitment to fiscal conservatism and balanced budgets. In this deepening depression, such commitments require the violation of the general welfare of the population—as Dean did when he carried out deep budget cuts during his governorship.

Campaign by Internet?

As for Dean's alleged "revolution" in building a mass fundraising base, that also smells mighty fishy.

A Sunday July 6 *Washington Post* profile by J.P. Gownder gave a rather revealing profile. It seems that Dean's "Meet-ups" (meetings organized by the Internet site Meetup.com) are frequented by well-heeled, but often unemployed dot-com employees! No non-whites here—the campaign's explanation is that non-whites don't use the Internet so much. Gownder concludes that the Dean campaign is likely to go the way of the "new economy," unless he "gets real" in political organizing.

Gownder's view coheres with the fact that Dean's campaign is essentially a perception game, an attempt to make a populist "phenom" out of a wealthy fiscal conservative, with heavy environmentalist and counterculture tastes. Dean's website admits that he has little support from, or appeal to, the over-65 crowd, or the poor. His model among Democrats? There's no mention of Franklin Roosevelt, despite much other name-dropping. Judging from his June 25 speech to the Washington, D.C. Council on Foreign Relations, it's none other than Cold Warrior Harry S Truman!

Dean's narrow appeal to the yuppie IT crowd is not surprising. Although he neglects to mention it on his website biography, Dean comes from a wealthy New York family, and was educated at prep schools and Yale. He moved to Vermont in 1978, and soon got into politics. After two terms in the state legislature, he became lieutenant governor under a Democrat, and then under Republican Richard Snelling. When Snelling died in office, Dean became Governor—a post he gave up in January 2003.

According to a *New York Post* profile of June 29, among Dean's major supporters are some not-so-little guys, such as actor Paul Newman, writer Nora Ephron, mega-speculator George Soros, David Rockefeller, Jr., and Jonathan Tisch, of the Mega Group Tisch family, owners of Loews Corp. Not exactly your "outsider" for the little guy.

It looks like Howard (Who?) Dean is not the "upstart" who's going to save the Democratic Party, or the republic, from Dick Cheney and the DLC.