

Howard Brush Dean III – A Democratic Hero

Howard Brush Dean III was born November 17, 1948 in East Hampton, NY. He graduated from Yale University with a Bachelor of Arts in Political Science in 1971. He received his medical degree from the Albert Einstein College of Medicine in 1978 and began a medical residency at the University of Vermont.

In 1980, Dean spearheaded a (successful) grassroots campaign to stop a condominium development on Lake Champlain, instead favoring the construction of a bicycle trail. The effort helped launch his political career. In 1982, he was elected to the Vermont House of Representatives, where he remained until being elected lieutenant governor in 1986. Both were part-time positions which enabled him to continue practicing medicine. Dean became Governor of Vermont when Richard A. Snelling died in office, and was subsequently elected to five two-year terms, serving as governor from 1991 to 2003. This accomplishment ranks him as the second longest-serving Governor in Vermont history. Dean also served as chairman of the National Governors Association from 1994 to 1995. As Governor of Vermont, Dean bucked many in his own party by immediately pushing for a balanced budget. He took the state from a \$60 million budget deficit to a \$25 million dollar surplus, an act which marked the beginning of a record of fiscal restraint. He balanced Vermont's budget eleven times, raised its bond rating, and lowered income taxes twice. Dean also focused on health care issues, expanded the "Dr. Dynasaur" program, and ensured near-universal health coverage for children and pregnant women in the state. The uninsured rate in Vermont dropped from 12.7% to 9.6% under his watch and child abuse and teen pregnancy rates were cut roughly in half.

Dean began his bid for President as a "long shot" candidate, but by autumn of 2003, he had become the apparent frontrunner for the Democratic nomination, performing strongly in most polls and outpacing his rivals in fundraising. This latter feat was attributed mainly to his innovative embrace of the Internet for campaigning, with the majority of his donations coming from individual Dean supporters. Conservative critics labeled Dean's political views as those of an extreme liberal; however, in liberal Vermont, Dean, long known as a staunch advocate of fiscal restraint, was regarded as a moderate. Dean began his campaign by emphasizing health care and fiscal responsibility, and championing grassroots fundraising as a way to fight special interests. His opposition to the U.S. plan to invade Iraq (and his forceful criticism of Democrats in Congress who voted to authorize the use of force) quickly eclipsed other issues. By challenging the war in Iraq at a time when mainstream Democratic leaders were either neutral or cautiously supportive, Dean positioned himself to appeal to his party's activist base. Dean often quoted the late Minnesota Senator Paul Wellstone as saying that he represented "the Democratic wing of the Democratic Party". His message resonated among frustrated Democratic primary voters who felt that their party hadn't done enough to oppose the policies of the Republicans. Thus, Dean also succeeded in differentiating himself from his primary opponents.

Dean's campaign approach was novel, pioneering the use of the Internet not just for fundraising but also as an organizational tool. In terms of money, publicity and activism, he quickly staked out a leadership position in the field of candidates. In this way, he was able to bypass existing party and activist infrastructure and built his own online network of supporters. In terms of traditional "ground troops", however, Dean remained at a disadvantage. Dean adopted a coffee

shop strategy to visit grassroots activists in all 99 Iowa counties, but he lacked the campaign infrastructure to get voters to the polls that his opponents had.

Those committed to the policies of the Democratic Leadership Council, which supported the use of force in Iraq, found the otherwise moderate Dean a threat not only to their position on the war but to their influence in the post-Clintonian Democratic Party. The conventional wisdom in Washington did not expect a campaign based on the president's lack of credibility to gain the support that Dean had garnered. When it did, thinly-veiled DLC "527" organizations funded relentless PR coverage of Dean's "scream" in order to beat back his surprising candidacy. Quite simply, Washington did not intend for Dean to become a threat to the campaigns of longtime party loyalists Gephardt and Kerry; instead his campaign was supposed to draw a percentage of the party's left-wing away from Nader and Kucinich. Nobody in Washington expected to see the widespread anger that Dean's campaign corralled. The DLC onslaught, coupled with biased media coverage of the infamous Dean scream after losing the Iowa primary, effectively crippled his campaign and eventually led him to withdraw from the race. His supporters however felt it was not a lost cause, serving to frame the White House race by tapping in to voters' concerns about the war in Iraq, in the process energizing Democrats and sharpening criticism of incumbent George W. Bush. At present, many political pundits affirm that Dean's contribution was "cathartic" for the party. Dean's lone Pennsylvania delegate, State Rep. Mark B. Cohen of Philadelphia, said Dean's decision, ultimately emulated by Kerry, to forgo primary federal matching funds and exceed the matching fund spending limits "marked the day the Democratic Party became a serious contender for national power in 2004."

Dean went on to become Chairman of the DNC, pledging to bring reform to the Party. Rather than focusing just on "swing states," Dean proposed what has come to be known as the 50-State Strategy. Committing the Party winning elections at every level in every region of the country, with Democrats organized in every single voting precinct in the country. State party chairs have lauded Dean with praise for raising money directly for the individual state parties.

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