



THE VIEW

Issue #51

May 19, 2008

THE VINDICATION OF HOWARD DEAN

BY

MARTY WISEMAN, Ph.D.

Last week's victory by Democrat Travis Childers in Mississippi's 1st Congressional District race gave the state another few moments of attention by the national media. The reason for such importance being attached to a race like this in a fairly rural district had to do with the unexpected nature of the Democrats winning a district that was listed by many national observers as a Republican safe seat. The 1st District had been nurtured to its solidly Republican status over 14 years by former incumbent and now Mississippi's newest Senator, Roger Wicker. The Democratic win in the Mississippi 1st was simply an exclamation point on a trend that had begun with the Democrats winning the Illinois seat held for many years by retired long time Republican United States House Speaker Dennis Hastert and a similar Democratic victory in a Louisiana House seat that had been in Republican hands for over 30 years.

Of all of the explanations offered for this turn of events, one that has been little talked about is the role played by Democratic National Committee Chairman Howard Dean. The question during this campaign season has to be asked: Are we witnessing the vindication of Howard Dean?

Dean emerged on the national scene during his meteoric rise to the top of the Democratic Party candidate list during the 2004 Presidential campaign. Howard Dean was a physician who got into politics in Vermont and quickly climbed the ladder to the Governorship of that state where he served for over five terms after having been initially elected to fill an unexpired term. Once in the Presidential race, Dean became a favorite of those who watch politics for

the entertainment value, and Dean's quick wit and candidness ensured that they would rarely be disappointed. In the process, Howard Dean perfected the use of the Internet for the purposes of gaining campaign contributions, and within a short time this relatively unknown New England Governor was racking up impressive campaign dollars and the most amazing thing was that they were being generated from all strata of income. Thousands of contributors gave an average of \$80.00 per contribution, but they were available to be solicited many times up to their campaign contribution limit. Things were rolling for Dean for a while until that fateful performance on January 19, 2004 when he concluded his concession speech in Iowa with the famous "Dean Scream". Following that event Howard Dean's campaign sank like a rock and on February 18, 2004 following a disappointing showing in the Wisconsin primary Dean ended his presidential bid. The major memory left by his time in the presidential campaign spotlight could be summed up by the question, "Who was that clown?"

The Republicans went on to enjoy a comfortable re-election campaign for their standard bearer, incumbent George Bush, and Dean became a memory, or so most observers thought. There was talk of a 40-year reign for Republicans reminiscent of the Franklin Roosevelt era for the Democrats. What could the Democrats possibly do in the short term to stave off such a possibility? Even the most cynical Republicans could not have predicted what would happen next. The Democrats defied the predictions that they were headed for the dustbin of history, and on February 12, 2005 elected Howard Dean as Chairman of the Democratic national Committee. The glee from the already victorious Republicans could hardly be contained and most of the rest of the country reacted to the news with a significant degree of amazement.

After the 2004 election the mood among Democrats in the red states like Mississippi was decidedly one of dejection. It seemed a certainty that the Democrats would retreat to their base on both coasts and a few swing states and abandon the "red flyover states" to the Republicans. To the contrary, Democratic Chairman Howard Dean announced his "50 State" strategy and maintained that the Democrats would indeed take the fight to all 50 states and into every Congressional district. Even in Mississippi, long thought of as one of the most solidly Republican states in the country based on the significant margins given to Republican Presidential candidates since Jimmy Carter, got the attention from Dean along with national Democratic Party dollars to expand staff and effort. The skeptics still abounded.



Fast forward to 2008. There are those three Democratic victories in special elections for the House. But that is only the beginning. The Howard Dean fundraising approach has been adopted by Barack Obama and Hillary Clinton. A recent campaign finance report showed that Obama and Clinton combined had generated nearly \$535 million combined compared to almost \$83 million gathered in by Republican presumptive nominee John McCain. Long time Republican heavyweight and conservative philosopher Richard Viguerie recently pointed out the significant increase in Democratic Party registrations compared to a flat figure for Republican membership. Viguerie added his dire predictions for fall Republican prospects to those of others like House Minority Leader John Boehner.

The fact is that the jury is still out and the ultimate outcome will rest with the voters in November. But beginning with the Democratic election successes in 2006 and progressing to the current state of affairs the fortunes of the Democrats have changed dramatically since the disarray of 2004 and much of the credit must go to Howard Dean. You can rest assured folks aren't laughing anymore.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR:

WILLIAM MARTIN WISEMAN, Ph.D

William Martin Wiseman is Director of the John C. Stennis Institute of Government and Professor of Political Science at Mississippi State University. He received his Ph.D in 1986, his MPPA in 1980, his MS in 1974, and his BA in 1973, all awarded from Mississippi State University. In addition to his duties at Mississippi State, Dr. Wiseman is a guest professor at Jackson State University. Dr. Wiseman's areas of academic interest include American government, intergovernmental relations and federalism, county and municipal management, public personnel administration, and innovations in state and local government management.

Wiseman is a sought-after speaker on state and local government, state and local politics, political theory and rural development. Often a guest editorial writer in Mississippi daily and weekly newspapers, he can also be relied upon to evaluate federal, state and local election results for all media.

He is married to the former Bonnie Parker, and they have two children. He is active in the United Methodist Church.

Dr. Wiseman's e-mail is marty@sig.msstate.edu

ABOUT THE INSTITUTE:

Elected to the United States Senate in 1947 with the promise to "plow a straight furrow to the end of the row," John C. Stennis recognized the need for an organization to assist governments with a wide range of issues and to better equip citizens to participate in the political process. In 1976, Senator Stennis set the mission parameters and ushered in the development of a policy research and assistance institute which was to bear his name as an acknowledgment of his service to the people of Mississippi.

Mississippi State
UNIVERSITY

Mississippi State University does not discriminate on the basis of race, color, religion, national origin, sex, age, disability, sexual orientation, group affiliation, or veteran status.

