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## Al Gore endorses Howard Dean

**Gore: 'One candidate clearly now stands out'**

**NEW YORK (CNN) -- Al Gore endorsed Howard Dean's bid for the Democratic Party's presidential nomination on Tuesday, substantially deepening Dean's fast-developing drive for dominance in the nine-candidate field of would-be challengers to President Bush.**

"I'm very proud and honored to endorse Howard Dean to be the next president of the United States of America," Gore said.

The announcement in Manhattan's Harlem, coming on the morning of another debate between the "'04 Dems," as they're called, could cement Dean's status as the leading Democratic candidate heading into the kickoff contests now just weeks away in Iowa and New Hampshire.

"We need to remake the Democratic Party, we need to remake America," Gore said.

"This nation cannot afford to have four more years of a Bush-Cheney administration," he said.

Prior to Tuesday's endorsement, a source told CNN that Gore -- the Democratic Party's presidential candidate in 2000 -- thinks a protracted primary campaign would serve only to help President Bush.

"In a field of great candidates, one candidate clearly now stands out and so I'm asking all of you to join in this grassroots movement to elect Howard Dean president of the United States," Gore said.

Dean thanked Gore for his leadership: "We have needed a strong, steady hand in this party and I appreciate Al's willing[ness] to stand up and be one," Dean said.

Gore said part of the reason he chose to endorse Dean was his ability to appeal to the nation's "grassroots" elements, a reference to Dean's success in organizing and raising funds on the Internet and in small voter gatherings.

Gore also praised Dean's opposition to the U.S.-led war in Iraq. The former vice president called the Iraq war a "catastrophic mistake" by the Bush administration, a move that leaves the United States less effective in the nation's battle against terrorism. He said the United States is now in a "quagmire" in Iraq.

"He was the only major candidate who made the correct judgment about the Iraq war," Gore said. "And he had the insight and the courage to say and do the right thing. And that's important because those judgments -- that basic common sense -- is what you want in a president."

"Whether it is inspiring enthusiasm at the grassroots, and promising to remake the Democratic Party as a force for justice and progress and good in America, whether it is a domestic agenda that gets our nation back on track, or whether it is protecting us against terrorists and strengthening our nation in the world, I have come to the conclusion that one candidate clearly now stands out," Gore said.

Gore and Dean traveled together to Iowa following the announcement where Gore gave a speech later in the day in Cedar Rapids. The Iowa Caucus is set for January 19.

Dean was back in New Hampshire for Tuesday evening's Democratic debate sponsored by ABC News and WMUR-TV. The New Hampshire primary is scheduled for January 27. ([Endorsement stirs debate](#))

The announcement came nearly three years to the date from Gore's concession in the 2000 election, when he won the popular vote but lost the electoral vote.

"When we set this event up," Dean said to loud laughter at the Harlem rally's start, "I had absolutely no idea that we were going to have the elected president of the United States here with us today."

Sen. Joe Lieberman, Gore's vice-presidential running mate in 2000 and a current presidential hopeful, said he would continue "to fight for what's right, win this nomination, and defeat George W. Bush next year."

"I have a lot of respect for Al Gore -- that is why I kept my promise not to run if he did," Lieberman said.

"Ultimately, the voters will make the determination and I will continue to make my case about taking our party and nation forward," Lieberman said in a written statement.

A source close to Lieberman said Gore, who was Clinton's vice president, did not call Lieberman to inform him of the decision.

## **Dean pulling ahead**

With the Dean campaign gaining momentum, a new CNN/USA Today/Gallup poll shows Dean widening his front-runner status among the eight other Democratic candidates.

The poll showed that 25 percent of registered Democrats surveyed support Dean as their nominee, with retired Gen. Wesley Clark coming in second with 17 percent. ([Poll: Dean's New Hampshire lead increases](#))

In an interview before the news broke on CNN's "Judy Woodruff's Inside Politics," Dean played down his front-runner status.

"The pundits in Washington have been talking about me as the front-runner for a long time," Dean said.

"Well, guess what, the people of Iowa, New Hampshire, South Carolina and Arizona and so forth get to decide who the front-runner is. So, it's nice talk, but I'm not buying it."

## Caught off-guard

Erik Smith, a campaign press secretary for Rep. Dick Gephardt of Missouri, sounded as if the Gephardt team was caught off-guard by the news, as were Dean's other rivals.

Dean and Gephardt are the top two candidates in Iowa. ([Gephardt calls for increased homeland security funding](#))

"Dick Gephardt fought side-by-side with Al Gore to pass the Clinton economic plan, pass the assault weapons ban and defend against Republican attacks on Medicare and affirmative action. On each of these issues, Howard Dean was on the wrong side," Smith said.

Saying he respected Gore and fought for his campaign four years ago, Sen. John Kerry of Massachusetts said, "This election is about the future, not about the past." ([Kerry: Bush administration arrogant, reckless](#))

"This election will be decided by voters, across the country, beginning with voters in Iowa," he said.

Paul Begala, a political adviser to President Clinton and now a host of CNN's "Crossfire," called the endorsement an "enormous boost" that would clearly give Dean momentum going into Iowa and New Hampshire.


"It's very good for him," Begala said. "I wouldn't go so far as to say it locks anything up, though, because people want to make up their own minds."

*CNN's John King and Kelly Wallace contributed to this report.*

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