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Democrats Turn to Dean–Will It Work?

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By the time Dean was elected last Saturday, there was little question about the outcome of the DNC chairman race. Bloggers from the left wing of the party had hammered Dean’s opponents, putting the former presidential candidate in the front-runner position and eliminating any challenge from the center.

You wouldn’t know all that from reading many of the nation’s opinion leaders. Paul Krugman, a predictably liberal columnist for The New York Times, claimed Dean’s election as a sign that “the fighting moderates” of the Democratic Party are now in control.

Dean’s election does not mean that the party is turning to the left, Krugman insists. “Mr. Dean is squarely in the center of his party on issues like health care and national defense,” Krugman asserts. Dean’s election “reflects the new ascendancy within the party of the fighting moderates, the Democrats who believe that they must defend their principles aggressively against the right-wing radicals who have taken over Congress and the White House.”

Amazingly, Krugman goes so far as to claim: “It was always absurd to call Mr. Dean a left-winger.” Really? Are we to believe that Howard Dean now represents the center of the Democratic Party? If so, the Democrats are truly in big trouble. Perhaps we should just rewind our memory to the 2004 race for the Democratic presidential nomination. Howard Dean veered to the far left in that race, opposing the war in Iraq [and much of the War on Terror] as evidence of the Bush administration’s recklessness and radicalism. He repeatedly stated that he would have voted against the resolution authorizing the president to take military action, and he would have cut off funding for the military effort, leaving troops without support and the people of Iraq still under the oppression of Saddam Hussein.

The campaign to label Howard Dean a “centrist” is now in full swing. Not only is Paul Krugman making this rather laughable argument on the pages of The New York Times, but other papers have fallen in line. An unsigned editorial published in the February 11, 2005 edition of USA Today claimed, “Ironically, Dean’s political record is largely that of the kind of centrist Democrat who doesn’t scare off independents and Republicans.” The editorial went on to congratulate Dean as a “five-term governor of Vermont” who won support from the National Rifle Association “and fought with the more politically flamboyant members of his own party.”

That’s not the way Bill Clinton sees it. During the 2004 nomination contest, Clinton told a Democratic loyalist that Dean “forfeited his right to run for president when he signed the civil unions bill” in Vermont. Dean now wears that comment as a badge of honor.

Clinton, by the way, had argued that Dean could not win the Democratic presidential nomination. He was right, of course, and Dean's rehabilitation as the new chairman of the Democratic National Committee raises a host of questions about the character and convictions of the party.

After all, Howard Dean did sign Vermont's now famous civil-unions law, creating the nation's first legalized same-sex unions. He has not retreated from his advocacy for same-sex marriage, and, if the Democratic Party follows Dean's lead, it will not be moderating its position on the issue.

In a new book, *You Have the Power*, Dean argues that same-sex couples should be accorded full rights under the law. Looking back to the days of controversy in Vermont, Dean remembered: "I was invited to many, many gay groups and got to know a lot of gay, lesbian, bisexual, and transgendered Americans well. I realized that there wasn't anything different about gay people, except that they fell in love with people of the same sex."

As Dean tells the story, he waged and led a courageous fight on behalf of same-sex unions while others dithered and attempted to delay action. "What we came up with was a compromise," Dean explains, "a civil union bill that gave equal rights to every couple." As he went on to explain, "We created a parallel institution to marriage, with a different name, because marriage was entwined with many people's religious beliefs. Our compromise gave gay and lesbian couples in our state all the same rights that heterosexual couples had except those rights accorded by the federal government, which were outside of our purview." As for the federal law, Dean added, "That needs to be fixed as well."

According to Dean, opposition to same-sex unions is evidence of simple prejudice. "It is impossible to love America and hate Americans of any kind," Dean sermonizes. "Prejudice, bigotry, racism—these aren't the kinds of problems that will fix themselves or fade away under the weight of good intentions. But they can be fixed if people can be made to see their common humanity. If each American can be led to figure out his or her personal biases and watch out for them. Because we all have them, every single one of us. And overcoming them is something we have to work on every day, every single moment, when you interact with other people." Dean seems blissfully unaware that that simply is not a serious moral argument. Taken at face value, this would mean the complete elimination of moral conviction from public life. When extended from issues of race and ethnicity to matters of behavior, Dean's argument can only lead to moral anarchy.

More recently, Dean has joined with Senator Hilary Clinton and other Democrats in attempting to repackage the Democrats' position on abortion. "There's nobody who's pro-abortion in America," Dean stated after his election on Saturday. "Democrats aren't pro-abortion. Our belief is not that we're pro-abortion, but that we do believe that a woman has a right to make up her own mind."

This comment is consistent with Dean's call for his party to reclaim the language of "values" and "religion" in an effort to identify with more Americans. What Dean doesn't acknowledge is his own radicalism on the issue of abortion.

George Neumayr set the record straight in a recent article published in *The American Spectator*. Neumayr makes clear that Dean—a physician turned politician—did an OB/GYN rotation for Planned Parenthood in the 1970s. Later, Dean served as an executive board member of Planned Parenthood New England, "meaning that he directly oversaw the largest abortion provider in the region." As Neumayr concludes, "Were the Democrats sincerely moving to the middle on abortion, selecting a former overseer of abortion would have been the last thing to do."

There's more. Dean is also a recipient of Planned Parenthood's "Margaret Sanger Award," honoring the organization's founder, a proponent of abortion and eugenics who argued that the "unfit" should not be allowed to have children. As Neumayr sees it, this just means that the Democrats have decided "to latch themselves to abortion even tighter."

Dean will continually insist that the Democrats are not "pro-abortion," but are instead merely the reluctant defenders of a woman's "right to choose." Neumayr presents evidence that proves such a claim would be either dishonest or disingenuous, or both. "Who came up with the idea of '\$5 copay' abortions? Dr. Dean. Vermont had the highest rate of abortion in the country under him, averaging 359 abortions for every 1,000 live births. Vermont pro-lifers laugh aloud at the media's lazy description of Dean as a moderate willing to make overtures to pro-lifers. That's not the Howard Dean they remember. On a radio talk show, Dean once referred to pro-lifers in the state as common criminals. He was so pro-abortion he concocted a macabre scheme to let low-income 'mothers' claim their unborn children for eligibility in his 'Dr.

Dynasaur' program, then once they were eligible he gave them state monies with which to abort that state child."

That's not the Howard Dean Paul Krugman and other opinion shapers are trying to foist on the American public. As Neumayr concludes, "Short of elevating an outright abortionist to head up the Democratic Party, Howard Dean is about as bad a choice as Democrats could make to serve their purported goal of appealing to Middle America."

In his most recent book, Dean claims that Democrats "have been afraid to talk about faith or values" for too long. "We've avoided taking a moral tone or speaking too strongly about patriotic pride." He then accused the Republicans of using the language of values to obscure "an anti-democratic, anti-pluralistic, openly theocratic agenda."

Howard Dean's leadership of the Democratic Party is certain to make an impact in America's political culture. His national prominence and name recognition will be translated into media attention and political impact.

As chairman, Dean will face the challenge of rebuilding the Democratic Party after a series of devastating losses. The political reality may force him to trim his sails and modify his ideological commitments. Nevertheless, Dean's past should not be forgotten, and his legacy as an ardent and radical proponent of abortion must not go unnoticed.

If Democrats really want to reclaim lost ground and show respect for life, they should seriously consider a statement made by another former Democratic presidential candidate. "Wanted or unwanted, I believe that human life, even at its earliest stages, has certain rights which must be recognized—the right to be born, the right to love, the right to grow old . . . When history looks back to this era it should recognize this generation as one which cared about human beings enough to halt the practice of war, to provide a decent living for every family, and to fulfill its responsibility to its children from the very moment of conception."

That remarkable statement, made in 1971, was uttered by Senator Edward Kennedy of Massachusetts. Of course, that was many years and an entire moral universe ago. Sen. Kennedy is now a staunch defender of abortion at every stage and in virtually every context.

Nevertheless, Kennedy's statement, uttered two years before *Roe v. Wade*, indicates the only means of rescue for the Democratic Party. The Democrats may try to talk "values," but until they reclaim the value of human life from conception until natural death, they do not deserve to be taken seriously.

