

African American support no sure thing for Dean

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Employees International. He also got the endorsement of Congressional Black Caucus Chairman Elijah Cummings (D-Md.) last week.



But the party's 2000 presidential nominee's decision to bypass his vice presidential running mate, Senator Joseph Lieberman (D-Conn.), in favor of Dean has been the most surprising development.

"It is a line of demarcation," says University of Maryland Political Scientist Ron Walters, who has complained that Democrats have drifted to the Right. "For him, who was the highest former official in the Democratic Party leadership, to now apparently break with that and is supporting Dean, means that he supports a change in the party's direction."

And because of Gore's popularity among African-

Americans — he won a larger percentage of the black vote than Bill Clinton — political observers are eager to see if that popularity can be transferred to Dean.

"This gives Howard Dean some inroads into the black community because Al Gore, like Bill Clinton, was very well respected, but Howard Dean ultimately has to reach out to African Americans,"

says Brazile, the only African American to manage the campaign of a non-black presidential candidate.

Some observers feel that political endorsements are overrated.

"[Jesse] Jackson Sr. didn't have the endorsement of black leaders in '84 and he still got about 70 percent of the black primary vote," observes Katherine Tate,

chairwoman of the Department of Political Science at the University of California at Irvine.

Jesse Jackson Sr. has made no endorsement, but issued a statement saying the endorsements of Congressional Black Caucus members and Al Gore are "pivotal" milestones on the road to the White House for Howard Dean.

Cummings says his endorsement of Dean is individual; not as chair of the 39-member CBC, which appears to be stratified.

Veteran CBC member Charlie Rangel (D-N.Y.), endorsed former Gen. Wesley Clark last week. When Clark told an audience about his work for affirmative action in the armed services, Rangel responded,

"The biggest contribution that this general can make for civil rights equity and justice in this country is to get rid of George Bush."

Also, former CBC Chairman Rep. James E. Clyburn (D-S.C.) endorsed Rep. Dick Gephardt, former House Democratic leader. During a teleconference, Clyburn said: "I will work tirelessly for him."

CMS board

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made," she said.

The board also voted to modify the current Lansdowne Elementary boundary to allow a small area (Old Salem/Meredith) to have Sharon Elementary as a home school. This area

will feed to Alexander Graham Middle and Myers Park High instead of McClintock Middle and East Mecklenburg High.

According to a spokesman from the school system, the change will only affect about 37 students.

The vote sends a mixed signal on the board's direction, said the Rev. Dwayne Collins, a community activist who sued CMS to keep its race-based student assignment plan in place.

"If that vote is any indication of what will play out, it's not going to be good for people who suffer from high-poverty, low-performing schools," he said.

School choice has been an area of controversy for the school district, prompting lawsuits from black parents and bringing up memories of a time when school were separate but unequal. Cramer admits the choice plan has flaws because it is a compromise, but it also has strengths.

"Strong public schools are vital to this community," she said.

Collins agrees with the goal, but criticizes the method, which he said has resegregated inner city schools to low-income blacks and Hispanics. Ensuring their educational opportunities "is going to take a groundswell of activism," he said.

"The onus is really on the people who are getting the thorns instead of the fruits of what Charlotte-Mecklenburg has to offer."

Cramer said the board plans to look at ways to make many inner city schools more attractive to parents, that way alleviating overcrowding at some suburban schools in the system.

"There is a lot of tweaking that can be done to the choice plan," she said, adding no major changes are planned in the first three years of the plan. "There are no simple answers in any of this," she said. "If there were then they would have been implemented."



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