

# The Path to the Presidency

## Presidential hopefuls campaign for nomination



Courtesy of the Women's League of Voters.

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The race for the presidency is definitely heating up. Having started out with twelve democratic hopefuls, the candidates have now slimmed to four. However, even after the candidates have exited the race, they still maintain influence and are able to persuade their following to support other candidates who share similar platforms. For this reason, we will explore the platforms of the top six candidates who are: Gen. Wesley Clark, Howard Dean, Sen. John Edwards, Sen. John Kerry, Rep. Dennis Kucinich, and the Rev. Al Sharpton.

Before any one of the democratic candidates can say they are running for president a hurdle must be jumped. There are 4,322 total delegates. In order to secure the presidential nomination, a candidate must acquire 2,162 delegates. Thus far, only 608 delegates have chosen a candidate. Kerry is in the lead with 260 delegates. In a distant second is Dean with 121 delegates. Close on his heels Edwards holds 107 delegates. After Edwards we have Clark with 81 delegates, Sharpton holds 6, and Kucinich holds on to 2 delegates.

As students, it is vital that we know the positions of the candidates and understand how each will benefit us if appointed president. To fully understand, we must dig beyond the quick superficial one-liners, and sleek business attire, and concentrate on the issues.

Affirmative Action, feminist issues, and gay rights are often consid-

ered hot topics, but have yet to be fully explored during the campaigns. "Often times at the beginning of the campaign, candidates are so busy trying to gain attention that they only have enough time to get out those one-liners or quick campaign slogans," Dr. Coulson-Clark, a professor of Public Administration said. "As the race progresses and we start to see candidates take a strong position in the forefront, we will hopefully begin to hear more of the real issues such as Affirmative Action, feminist issues, and such."

The issues that have been frequently touched include the economy and taxes, education, environment and energy, health care, war in Iraq, abortion, death penalty, and gay rights.

### Education

True to the democratic creed, each candidate emphasizes the importance of education. Each candidate's position is as diverse as the candidates themselves.

Clark insists that more money be given to states in order to help pay for the 2002 overhaul. Clark, along with Edwards and Sharpton, all oppose education vouchers.

Dean, last reported as second in the polls, believes that in order to ensure affordable education for all, that no one should pay more than 10 percent of their income toward loans after postsecondary graduation.

Edwards believes that there should be one year of free tuition at public universities and community colleges for students who agree to 10 hours of community service per week.

Kerry suggested that America instill a \$3.2 billion community service plan for high school students that would qualify them for the equivalent of their state's four-year public college tuition.

Kucinich holds strong to the belief that college education should be free; repealing tax cuts to the wealthiest people would pay for education. In order to ensure equality throughout the educational process, Sharpton has declared that what we need is a constitutional amendment to guarantee a high-quality education for all.

### Environment

The environment is an issue that affects us all. With toxic chemicals spilling into oceans, and air being polluted daily by various toxins, we desperately need a candidate who will not short-change the issue of the environment.

Clark, Edwards, Kerry, and Kucinich all strongly oppose drilling in Arctic National Wildlife Refuge.

Clark proposes that America instill "tough new limits" on power-plant emissions. He trusts that by reinstating the special tax on companies that generate the most toxic waste, we can again reduce the damage most of these major companies create.

Dean has focused more on the future of our power sources. Dean wishes to require 20 percent of electrical generation to come from renewable sources by 2020 and to also strengthen Clean Air Act to cut power plant emissions.

Edwards supports tougher clean air and clean water rules for farms and unspecified increase in fuel-efficiency standards for cars.

Kucinich and Sharpton agree that America should toughen pollution penalties.

While others have glossed over the issue of environment, Kerry has provided a goals list, which includes his goal to have 20 percent of electricity come from renewable or alternative sources by 2020. He is also striving to make America independent from Middle East oil in 10 years.

### Health Care

Health care is an issue that is constantly at the forefront of America's concerns. Since Bush has taken office, the number of American's without health insurance has risen considerably.

While Clark, Dean, Edwards and Kerry all agree that tax credits and cuts for middle and lower class people is the answer to this problem, Kucinich and Sharpton have slightly different solutions.

Kucinich believes that by creating a nation health insurance and providing single-payer universal health care, we will alleviate the problem, while Sharpton proposes that an amendment, which will enshrine the right to health care of equal quality for everyone.

### War in Iraq

A hot topic throughout the nation is the War in Iraq. "It is time to bring our troops home," Kucinich, who has opposed the war since the beginning, said.

Rev. Sharpton and Dean have also opposed the war since its beginning while Clark, like others, was for the war in the beginning. Clark has now changed his position and strongly opposes the war.

Kerry also supported the decision to go to war but he now says that he did so based on faulty U.S. intelligence. He is also opposed to the \$87 billion package for Iraq and Afghanistan.

### Abortion

A controversial bill recently signed by Bush, and now blocked in courts, bans controversial late-term abortion procedures. Many women are looking for a candidate who will empathize with them and keep them in consideration when examining such bills. All of the democratic candidates support abortion rights.

Kerry and Kucinich have both said that they would only vote in Supreme Court justices who support abortion rights.

### Death Penalty

The death penalty is always a source of controversy. This issue has left the democratic candidates evenly divided. While Kerry, Sharpton and Kucinich all strongly oppose the death penalty; Dean, Edwards and Clark are supporters. Dean explained that he supports the death penalty in instances of terrorism, police killings, and the killings of young children.

### Gay Rights

Gay rights have been a strong issue throughout this campaign. Since

Bush stated that he believes the Boy Scouts of America should not allow homosexuals into its organization, there has been cause for the gay community to rally for political support. There has been a considerable amount of focus on the right for same-sex couples to marry.

Clark, Dean, Edwards and Kerry are all opposed to gay marriages. However, they do support civil unions between same-sex couples.

Dean signed the first state law on same-sex civil unions. This enabled gay couples the rights to inherit property from each other, obtain child custody, and to control a partner's affairs until death.

Sharpton and Kucinich, however, are supporters of gay marriages. He insists that if elected he would seek a federal law to protect civil unions from any abridgment by states if courts do not recognize those rights.

### Affirmative Action

Although the candidates have not gone into depth about the issue, there were some general statements made about civil rights and affirmative action. "Affirmative action is necessary, affirmative action is right, and affirmative action must be preserved. America's diversity is strength," Kucinich said.

"I'm in favor of the principle of affirmative action," Clark said. "What you can't have is a society in which we're not acknowledging that there is a problem in this society with racial discrimination."

While others simply discussed the general ideals of affirmative action and civil rights, Edwards and Dean had heated discussions about a statement Dean made early on in the campaign.

"I want to be the candidate for guys with Confederate flags in their pickup trucks," said Dean, in an attempt to attract the southern vote. Edwards, a native of North Carolina, quickly took offense to the comment.

"The last thing we need in the South is somebody like you [Dean] coming down and telling us what we need to do," Edwards said. "I grew up in the South. I grew up with the very people that you're talking about. The vast majority don't drive around with Confederate flags on pickup trucks."

Dean's refusal to apologize about the statement agitated all the candidates.

## Gaining the nomination

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As many of you know, we are right in the middle of a presidential election year; however what most people do not know is the process by which a president is elected.

Every state in the country including the District of Columbia holds what is called a primary or a caucus, (Democratic or Republican). This is when voters from the two major parties in our nation gather at local poll sites during their state's primary and cast votes for the individual they believe should represent their party in the general election in November.

When the candidates vying for their party's nomination arrive at the convention, they do so with the number of delegates that they have collected from each state. The individual with the most delegates will become the party's nominee for president. That nominee will then announce their candidate for vice president.

While candidates may run for president as indepen-

dents (i.e., without the endorsement of any political party), such as Ralph Nader, a former Green Party Presidential candidate who is now running as an Independent, nearly every president in U.S. history was the nominee of a major party. During a presidential election year, the primary/caucus season generally runs from February through June. The conventions are held in July and August, and the general election is in early November.

This year the Democratic Party will have its convention starting July 26 and lasting through July 29. The Republican Party will begin its convention on August 30 and last through September. After each party has chosen its nominee, the general election season begins.

The candidates from the two parties begin the national campaign as the nominee of the party and try to build up votes. On the first Tuesday after the first Monday in November, we have our presidential election.

The winner is usually announced that night on the late night news; however this is not how they become president.

The vote that you and I cast is called the popular vote; however; the Electoral College (composed of the number of senators from each state (2) and the number of representatives from each state) is a body of individuals who will meet on the Monday following the second Wednesday of December. Each state's Electors meet in their respective state capitals and cast their electoral votes one for president and one for vice president. The votes are then sealed and sent from each State to the President of the Senate who, on the following January 6, opens and reads them before both houses of the Congress. The candidate for president with the most electoral votes, provided that it is an absolute majority (one vote more than half of the total), is declared president. Similarly, the vice presidential candidate with the absolute majority of electoral votes is declared vice president.

At noon on January 20, the duly elected president and vice president are sworn into office.

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