

Last chance to derail Kerry comes today in Wisconsin

The Wisconsin primary is a likely last stand for struggling Howard Dean

By Mark Silva
The Orlando Sentinel (KRT)

GREEN BAY, Wis. — The last chance to stall Sen. John Kerry's swift drive for the Democratic presidential nomination comes Tuesday when voters in this reform-minded but economically troubled state head to the polls in what is expected to be record numbers.

This is also likely to be a final battleground for either Sen. John Edwards of North Carolina or Howard Dean of Vermont, who have struggled to emerge as alternatives to the Massachusetts senator before Super Tuesday — the March 2 slate of 10 primaries from New York to California.

Edwards vows a "one-on-one race" with Kerry in the early March contests. But in Wisconsin, where any registered voter is eligible to participate, Tuesday likely will mark the end of a tortuous road for Dean.

"It's probably headed for another big Kerry victory," said Tom Holbrook, professor of political science at the University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee.

After Tuesday, he said: "It will be a two-man race in the sense that Edwards is the viable alternative to Kerry." But "it could be that this is the nail in the Dean coffin."

Indeed, on the eve of what Dean has termed his most critical primary, his national campaign chairman, Steve Grossman, has thrown his support to Kerry.

Both Edwards and Dean are counting on the independence of an immigrant-built state with a legacy for far-reaching reform to spur their last-gasp campaigns.

Yet if polling is any indicator, Kerry is likely to overwhelm his last two serious rivals in this state — the last in a string of early primaries where candidates could concentrate on a single state.

Kerry, who campaigned in snowbound Green Bay on Monday

with fellow Massachusetts Sen. Ted Kennedy, is favored among 47 percent of likely Wisconsin voters, a Zogby International poll Monday showed, followed by Dean at 23 percent and Edwards at 20.

Yet Edwards is the one who drew attention in the closing days, winning endorsements of leading newspapers including the Milwaukee Journal Sentinel on Monday and spending more on TV ads here than either Kerry or Dean.

However, a strong showing by either Kerry rival won't carry anyone very far. The campaign to win the 10 Super Tuesday contests will be fought with television ads — and Kerry the only candidate with big money to air them.

"You fight against the calendar, no question," Edwards said. "My responsibility is to make Democratic primary voters understand there is a choice."

In this state long known for cheese and for big-time football played on snow — but lately known more for shipping valuable jobs overseas — voters have played pivotal roles in presidential politics. The success of peace activist Eugene McCarthy in courting Wisconsin's primary voters forced a Vietnam War-besieged President Lyndon Johnson to abandon his bid for reelection in 1968.

Larry Smith, a state worker in Madison weighing a choice between Kerry and Edwards, suggests that many of the 1.6 million voters expected Tuesday will go with a "winner."

"I'm wondering how many people will be voting their personal choices and how many people will be voting a strategic choice," he said. "I'm wondering how many people are voting for Kerry because he's the guy."

The impression that Kerry is the guy to beat is enhanced by a poll portraying the decorated Vietnam War veteran-turned-war protester as a potent rival for Bush.

The latest ABC News/Washington Post poll, showing declining public confidence in the president's

handling of the economy at home and war in Iraq, shows Kerry favored among 52 percent of Americans, Bush 43 percent.

All of this has intensified scrutiny of Kerry and Republican attacks as well, while Kerry welcomes full-bore examination: "The more chances for you to get inside my heart and look at my character, the better," Kerry tells a crowd in Madison.

But none of this has dissuaded Edwards from insisting he can contest Kerry in the March 2 votes that hold fully one half of the delegates needed for nomination.

Edwards, a mill-worker's son, carries his message of compassion for working people to the union hall of a Milwaukee factory that once employed more than 10,000 and offered black workers in particular entry to the middle class.

"I take very personally what is happening to you," Edwards quietly tells workers circled around him. "I feel that crowd in Washington doesn't have any idea what it means in people's lives. They think of it as a statistic."

In a more boisterous room, Dean campaigns among diners at Milwaukee's American Serb Memorial Hall, where 2,000 pounds of Wall-eye and Icelandic Cod are fried up on Friday nights — 5,000 pounds on Good Friday.

Dean, once the party's presumptive front-runner, hasn't won a primary or caucus in 16 contests. Still, he hasn't lost all his support. Don and Mary Thiede, retirees in suburban Greendale, turn out for fried fish and a nearly finished candidate.

"The Democratic Party can't afford to lose him. He's a breath of fresh air," said Mary Thiede, holding little hope for Dean in what could become his last stand.

"The Democrats, the old boys' club ... " she said, "They did him in."

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India, Pakistan continue talks to cease ongoing turbulence

Of high priority for the countries is deciding the status of Kashmir, divided between countries

By Liz Sly
Chicago Tribune (KRT)

ISLAMABAD, Pakistan — India and Pakistan formally resumed peace talks Monday amid hopes that this time their dialogue will result in a lasting solution to nearly six decades of hostility.

Spokesmen for both sides described the first day of talks in more than two years as "constructive" and "cordial," and said the meeting focused on a setting a timetable and agenda for future sessions that would touch on all aspects of the nuclear powers' hostility.

"There is a realization in India and Pakistan that war is not an option," said Pakistani Foreign Ministry spokesman Masood Khan.

High on the agenda will be the disputed status of the territory of Kashmir, claimed by both countries and divided between them. The talks also will broach a range of other issues, including trade, transportation links,

water disputes and the dangers of nuclear confrontation.

Khan said Pakistan will press for a nuclear "restraint regime" to curb the arms race between the two nations, an issue given new urgency in light of the recent revelations that Pakistan's chief nuclear scientist peddled bomb designs and parts to Iran, Libya and North Korea.

The resumption of formal dialogue follows the groundbreaking meeting in January between Pakistani President Pervez Musharraf and Indian Prime Minister Atal Behari Vajpayee, at which the two leaders shook hands and promised to talk peace.

Two years ago, the nations massed more than a million men along their border, threatening full-blown war, after gunmen launched a December 2001 attack on India's parliament that New Delhi blamed on Pakistan.

That crisis had a salutary effect on both countries, and many observers detect a readiness to try to find a negotiated solution to their longstanding differences.

"There's a new resonance, a new dimension, a new resolve, leading to raised hopes that both sides are prepared to move away from their entrenched positions to find a real

solution," said Tanvir Ahmad Khan, a former Pakistani foreign secretary who participated in past failed peace attempts.

Pakistan has realized that its policy of "bleeding" India by sponsoring militant groups challenging India's rule in a portion of Kashmir isn't working and can't coexist with its support for the war against terrorism, he said.

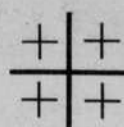
India also has realized that it can't hope to achieve the global recognition it craves, as the world's second most populous nation with a rapidly expanding economy, as long as it remains on the brink of conflict with its neighbor.

There is still much that could go wrong. Musharraf and Vajpayee are pushing ahead over the suspicions of hardliners within their own countries who don't want to make concessions.

Musharraf's life is in danger, as was illustrated by the two failed assassination attempts in December, reportedly by groups linked both to extremist Kashmiri organizations and al-Qaida. Vajpayee, at 79, is seeking re-election this spring.

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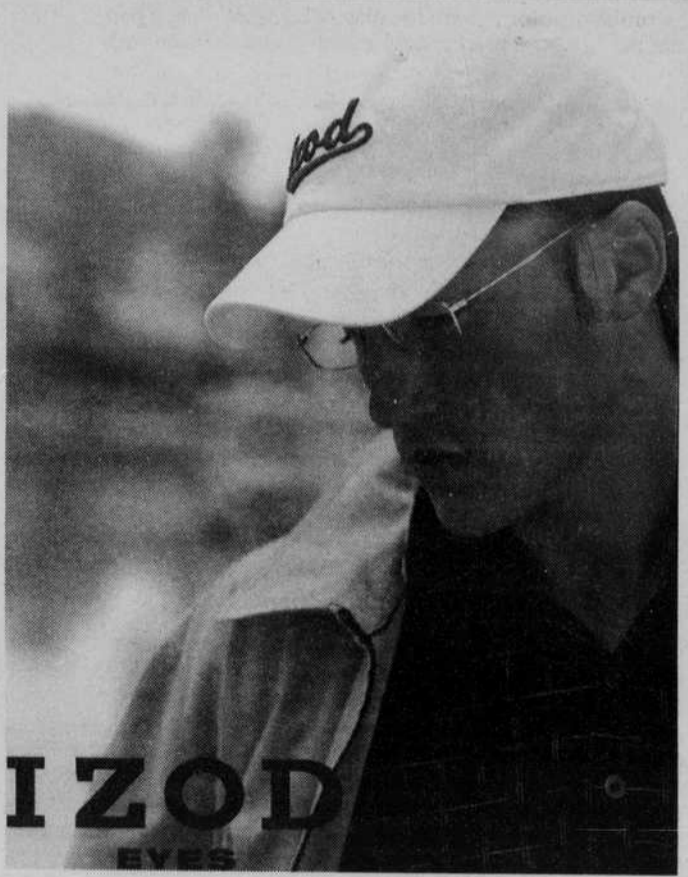
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