

Thursday, February 19, 2004

## EDITORIAL

### Dean's exit from primary may facilitate voters' picks

In the top political news of the week, former Vermont Gov. Howard Dean's withdrawal from the race highlights what has been one of the most interesting and surprising presidential primary races since the members of the Editorial Board were born.

He was once the out-of-the-blue front-runner sporting the biggest campaign wallet and a legion of Internet supporters; the rogue candidate who touted himself as a mighty knight, the best hope to defeat who Dean paints as a snarling dragon reallocating countless gilders to the wealthy in times of duress, shamefully burninating the Iraqi countryside and trashing relations with other important principalities. Dean plummeted quickly, though, following a distant third finish in the opener Iowa caucus and his much-lampooned "I Have a Scream" speech, managing to fall from the front of the pack to winning none of the 18 primary contests to date.

By throwing in his towel, Dean disappointed a grab bag of American political activists: the difficult-to-energize young voters, Democrats of all stripes, hippies, voters contemptuous of Beltway insiders and, more cynically, Bushites who wanted to see a fall contest against a Northern progressive Democrat with an anger streak. (The last non-Southern Democrat to hold the nation's highest office was a softer-spoken but assertive New Englander named John Kennedy.)

Still, despite the disappointment of his diverse fan base, Dean's withdrawal is a welcome move, as it should expedite democracy, in a roundabout way. His retreat reduces the race effectively to a two-man competition: Sen. John Kerry, D-Mass., versus Sen. John Edwards, D-N.C. (Of the 2,161 delegates needed to secure the party nomination, the Rev. Al Sharpton has picked up 16 delegates, whereas Rep. Dennis Kucinich, D-Ohio, has snagged only two).

There's something psychologically and mathematically palatable about a two-candidate race. Wider races force voters who like less popular candidates to mull over some game theory. Should they decide to support someone whose ideals most closely align with their own, or is it better to drop their vote to a candidate with a better chance of winning the nomination?

With only two contenders, the criteria are much simpler: Depending on your taste and objectives, vote either for the candidate whose views agree most with yours or for the candidate you think has the greatest chance of defeating President Bush in November's election. (The latter title is up in the air for the moment. In hypothetical match-ups against Bush, reported a CNN/USA Today/Gallup poll released Wednesday, Kerry topped the president 55-43, and Edwards led him 54-44 — both much wider margins than the 4-percent error margin.) Voters can spend more time learning about each candidate, too, with fewer candidates in the field. In an age where sound bytes are too often substitutes for substance, any chance for more voter awareness ought to be a good thing.

In consolation to his fans, Dean can still play a critical role in the primary process. Dean might instruct the 201 delegates currently pledged to him to Kerry or Edwards, a moderate but substantial prize. And with Super Tuesday just weeks away, a Dean endorsement could be a deciding factor in which candidates captures most of that day's 1,151 delegates — an electoral smorgasbord.

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Eric Layton Illustration

## U.S. alcohol laws aim to protect

The article ("Idiotic U.S. laws turn casual drinks into forbidden fruit," ODE, Feb. 5) presents some very interesting arguments

### GUEST COMMENTARY

The first is the statement referring to the American military, "You can go off to war and kill at age 18, but you can't have a drink." This statement is, in fact, untrue. The drinking age on American military bases is 18, and if you hold a military ID, many bars will serve you despite your age.

Second is the statement that "many

minors aren't looking to get drunk." I don't know about the rest of the you, but from what I've seen, there aren't very many people under the age of 21 who just want a sip of wine. It seems that the "fun" thing to do on a weekend is get totally sloshed and then compare how big your hangover is. While this stereotype is just that, a stereotype, I have seen that it credibly fits a great deal of college students.

Finally is the discussion about minors in other countries learning to drink with their parents. Well, for those of you who don't know this, it is a legal practice to do that here as well. If your parents are the ones who supply the beverage and you are under their supervision, then you (as a minor) are legally

permitted to drink. Unfortunately this does not hold for restaurants and such, but if you're at home and you want wine with dinner, it's legal if the parents provide it.

When you look at it, our alcohol laws are not all that restrictive. These laws were actually made for people's protection. If you want to experiment with alcohol, you have your parents (presumably responsible) teach you how to drink with moderation... rather than go to a beer bong party the Saturday after finals.

And rituals? Please. I don't drink, and while quite a few of my friends do, there's no one pressuring me to risk alcohol poisoning just to fulfill some idiotic tradition.

Eric Mann is a junior majoring in physics.

## Lane name change would be PC

I propose the Lane County Board of Commissioners refer a county namesake change to a referendum. We should change it from U.S. Sen.

### GUEST COMMENTARY

Joseph Lane to U.S. Sen. Harry Lane, his grandson. This idea is not frivolous, though maybe annoying.

I contend Joseph Lane is an unworthy namesake because he ran for vice president of the United States on a ticket endorsing slavery, and favoring secession by states which refused to extend the American passion for freedom to people in bondage.

Harry Lane is a worthy namesake for our county because as mayor of Portland and U.S. senator from Oregon, he represented independence and progressive government. I've found research suggesting Harry Lane was a maverick like Wayne Morse and Tom McCall. As a physician, "Doc" Lane charged low or no fees to patients who were up against it. He represented "the plain people" and was conspicuous in a U.S. Senate called even then the Millionaires' Club.

Harry's racial views were mixed: He defended Native Americans and home rule for Filipinos, but was unsympathetic to blacks and Chinese coolie labor.

Neither Joseph nor Harry lived in Lane County.

Family values: During 2003, a diary written by President Harry Truman made news because of unflattering judgments about Israel. I realized that if Joseph Lane had left a diary expressing a passion for pedophilia, Satan worship, anarchism, polygamy or the Communist Party, I wouldn't be writing. The County Commission would have made a namesake change before sunset.

The obscenity of slavery: Americans have been soft on slavery in a way we were never soft on communism. I often hear, "We can't judge people of the past by current standards." Sure we can. The treatment of slaves included working them to death; punishment by whipping, ear-cropping and branding; and a sexual double-standard we just got a whiff of when Sen. Strom Thurmond's illegitimate daughter came forward.

Political correctness: American history is a mixture of rebelling and conforming. Sometimes we flock like sheep; sometimes we say "No." It was once PC to slap around first-grade kids who wrote with their left hands. Now it's PC to let them perform naturally. Fairly recently it was PC to treat women, blacks and illegitimate children as inferior at their core. And to rank ethnic groups in order of desirability. And to keep

handicapped folks out of sight, shut the stores on Sunday and deny or ignore wife-beating and incest. Political correctness is reversed now. The question is not whether a Lane change is PC. It's whether it's right.

Money: If we change the namesake from Joseph to Harry, no budget will be needed for revising signs, maps or letterheads.

My inspiration: I got this idea from the Martin Luther King Jr. Boulevard struggle and from James Loewen's book "Lies Across America." Loewen said many disgusting citizens have been honored by historical markers. In 1986, he reported, the King County Commission in Seattle changed its name from a slavemonger named William Rufus King to the civil rights leader Martin Luther King Jr.

In the past few weeks, a West Eugene street name has been changed from Sam R. to Sam Reynolds, to redress a racial insult. The Corvallis School Board is reconsidering the name of Avery School, on grounds Joseph and Martha Avery were passionate racists. Respectable Congressional conservatives plan to replace Franklin D. Roosevelt with Ronald Reagan on the dime.

It's time for a Lane Change.

Peter Robers lives in Eugene.