



Will Iowa showing wither Dean's NW support?

By **ELIZABETH M. GILLESPIE**
Associated Press Writer

SEATTLE — Before Howard Dean's third-place finish in Iowa, pundits in the Pacific Northwest had him pegged as an unstoppable front-runner with more momentum and grass-roots appeal than any other candidate.

Now they're not so sure.

As Deaniacs regroup and focus on winning Washington's upcoming caucuses, political analysts say they face a much tougher challenge than they did a week ago.

"He took a major hit," Portland, Ore.-based pollster Tim Hibbits said, referring to the Iowa loss and Dean's fist-pumping concession rant, which has critics questioning whether he has the temperament to be president.

"Do I think he's finished? No," Hibbits said. "But it certainly places a premium on him winning in New Hampshire. And that's certainly a dicey proposition."

At the former Vermont governor's Washington state headquarters north of downtown Seattle, campaign director Betty Means downplayed the Iowa disappointment and said volunteers running the Dean machine remain as energized as ever.

"We've got a great organization here in the state of Washington, and we feel good about our ground game," Means said.

Lincoln Grismer, an 18-year-old from Kirkland, showed up for his first day of volunteering on Wednesday.

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Watching Dean take only 18 percent of the vote in Iowa “was something of a wake-up call,” said Grismer, a 2003 high school graduate who’s taking a year off before college. “I felt like I needed to come in and help,” he said. “I like the energy here. I think we can do it.”

Dean has visited the state four times in recent months, more than any of his challengers. He drew more than 1,000 people to a town hall-style meeting in May, then more than 10,000 people for a downtown rally a few months later, making it the biggest crowd in a nine-city “Sleepless Summer Tour.”

His biting criticism of the war in Iraq drew in many of his supporters in Seattle and Portland, where anti-war protesters have taken to the streets in large numbers over the past year. And whether it’s health care coverage for the uninsured or preserving pristine forests, his message seems custom-built for the liberal Northwest.

“He really awakens the passions of the party activist core — with respect to the war in Iraq, with respect to the lingering frustration over the 2000 election, and with respect to the direction the country is going under the Bush economic policy,” said Christian Sinderman, a Seattle-based Democratic campaign strategist.

Dean has also harnessed major mobilizing power from the Internet — with tech-savvy supporters setting up meetings all over the country, pulling in millions of dollars in online donations and urging anyone with the time or interest to get involved.

Laura Williams, 26, quit her job at Amazon.com last May and returned to her home state of Vermont to volunteer for Dean’s budding presidential bid. Now she’s field director for Washington state.

“It has been really exciting to see students with spiky hair and tongue rings sitting in a coffee shop with county chairs and Democratic Party officials strategizing and organizing for Dean,” she said.

Washington’s 95 delegates make up the second-largest bloc in the West. A recent Associated Press survey showed that Dean

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has wooed seven of the state’s 17 superdelegates — elected officials and other party insiders who will help select a nominee at this summer’s convention.

Massachusetts Sen. John Kerry, who won the Iowa caucuses with 38 percent of the vote, is the only other candidate who’s won early support from a superdelegate: U.S. Rep. Adam Smith.

Paul Berendt, the state Democratic Party chairman and a pro-Dean superdelegate, said Iowa doesn’t have him worried one bit.

“Iowa demonstrated that the Dean campaign’s not going to have a cake walk in the nominating process, but Bill Clinton came in third in Iowa in ’92, so there’s nothing to say that (Dean) can’t beat this back and go on and win the nomination.”

Because Washington caucuses are happening earlier than ever — Feb. 7 — the state is viewed as a crucial battleground. Political insiders have backed off predictions that a Dean landslide is inevitable, but many say he still stands a good chance of winning.

“As long as Howard Dean is competitive, I’ve got to figure that he’s got to win Washington state,” Republican Party Chairman Chris Vance said. “It’s a caucus state, which means you’ve got a small turnout of party activists. Most of them will be from Seattle, where he’s campaigned, and where they love his radical anti-war message. And he has the support of the party infrastructure.”

Oregon, which has 58 delegates, will have little say in choosing the Democratic nominee with its mid-May primary, well after crucial contests in other states. A nominee is expected to emerge by March.

Nevertheless, Dean has strong support in Oregon, which has thrown more fund-raising house parties for him than every other state but California.

Citing Oregon’s persistently high unemployment rate during a recent visit to Portland, Dean said the president needs to “stop running a half-trillion dollar deficit and get us some jobs.” He’s made the same point in stump speeches in Washington state, which has lost an estimat-

ed 47,000 jobs in recent years — most of them at Boeing.

With Missouri Congressman Dick Gephardt out of the running, members of more than a dozen labor unions who supported him now have to pick someone else. It might turn out to be Dean, whose endorsements include the Service Employees International Union and the American Federation of State, County and Municipal Employees.

Tom Keefe, head of Gephardt’s Washington state campaign, announced his support for Dean the day after the Iowa caucuses.

While Dean has the largest, most organized staff and volunteer base, party officials say Kerry and retired Gen. Wesley Clark are appealing to Democrats looking for a candidate with military and foreign affairs experience.

North Carolina Sen. John Edwards, who finished second in Iowa, has pledged to stick with a positive message, which could woo voters weary of all the bickering among candidates.

The New Hampshire primary on Jan. 27 will be the next big test.

“Howard Dean has to do very well in New Hampshire and prove himself a viable, electable candidate,” said Robert Eisinger, a political science professor at Lewis & Clark College in Portland. “Until he does that, it’s fair to say all the pundits, as well as all the citizens who follow politics, will see him as a person who peaked too soon.”

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