



M. Charles Bakst



Howard Dean (no Rove fan) heading here

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Howard Dean, chairman of the Democratic National Committee, can barely contain himself in assessing Karl Rove, soon to depart from the White House.

“People will remember him as someone who did enormous damage to our country,” Dean said yesterday in advance of a DNC fundraiser in Little Compton tomorrow night.

In a telephone interview, Dean, the former Vermont governor who sought the Democratic presidential nomination in 2004, said Rove put the Republican Party’s interests ahead of the country’s. “He was good at winning elections, but he’s been probably the most divisive person that we’ve had in politics for probably two decades.”

Dean said Rove was willing to “scapegoat” any group necessary. You will remember the Republican move to build 2004 conservative voter turnout through anti-gay marriage referenda. Dean said African-Americans have been another target through George Bush’s harping on affirmative action programs as quotas.

Things look good for the 2008 Democratic presidential candidates, who debate again Sunday. Dean said, “The only fear I have is that Democrats will get complacent....The Republican machine is a very good election machine. They don’t know how to govern but they sure do know how to win elections.”

Dean derided the GOP field as something out of the 1950s, and he has a point. Still, you take a Rudy Giuliani or a Mitt Romney — they’re bright folks. So what’s their problem?

Tearing into the former Massachusetts governor, Dean said, “Romney’s campaign basically is, ‘I want to be president because I want to be president.’ He appears to be willing to say and do anything. He was for gay rights before he was against them. He was for abortion rights before he was against them. He was for immigrant rights before he was against them. I have yet to find a moral core.”

He gave Giuliani points for “sticking by his convictions,” though he suggested the former New York mayor can be polarizing. “Obviously, his personal life is a bit of a shambles, but at least we have some idea what Giuliani stands for.”

I assume it drives Dean to distraction to see Bush on TV and to think, “I should be president.”

He laughed and asserted, "I don't look backwards like that at all. I'm obviously disappointed for the country that he's president. But, you know, I lost."

Tomorrow's party is at the summer home of Anne and Arthur Berndt, Dean friends from Vermont. Sponsors include Sen. Sheldon Whitehouse, a top Rhode Island Dean leader in 2004.

I mentioned to Dean yesterday that a java house called Blue State Coffee has opened in Providence. "That's great!" said this promoter of blue states.

I told Dean about the Countdown Clock key chains sold there. They tell you the exact time remaining until Jan. 20, 2009, the final day of the Bush administration. Are they a touch obsessive?

Dean said he hasn't seen them. But his pal Whitehouse had no problem commenting when I spoke with him earlier in the day.

The senator said you don't have to be at all obsessive to worry where the country is headed under Bush and his reluctance to alter course in face of failure. The spirit behind the key chains is right on, he said. "There's a lot that needs to change in this country. And it's going to be very difficult to change until we get a new president."

Key chains or no, I guarantee you'll hear that same chatter at the DNC event in Little Compton.

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