

*TIE asked six experts how
the early stages of the
2004 Democratic primary
season could shake out.*

Iowa/ New Hampshire Winter Book

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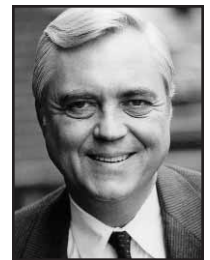
Kerry, Edwards, and Gephardt
have a small edge over the others

JOHN SEARS

Campaign manager for President Reagan

If the past is prologue, we will know the Democratic nominee for president by March 1, 2004. While the Iowa caucuses and the New Hampshire primary are often described as the beginning of the nomination race, in fact these two events mark the culmination of the process. After these two encounters, a clear frontrunner emerges whose advantages in raising money, securing endorsements, and earning superior publicity ensure his ultimate success even though he may lose a primary now and then. An anointed challenger is allowed to remain in the race in case the frontrunner's own incompetence during the remainder of the process renders him un-nominatable. So far, no frontrunner has failed to prevail.

The question of who will capture the frontrunner's mantle during the next year is confusing. The field is weak and no one has a national following significant enough to mention. Only Representative Dick Gephardt (MO) has had experience at the national political level and one must quickly add that his last attempt at winning the nomination left his supporters wondering whether they should support him again.



THE COMING SPEED RACE

Will one of these candidates
be the de facto Democratic presidential nominee
by as early as this fall?



*Senator **John Kerry** of
Massachusetts:
Mistake-prone
frontrunner?*



*Senator **Joseph
Lieberman**
of Connecticut:
Experienced, but too
conservative?*



*Senator **Bob Graham**
of Florida: GOP's
greatest worry?*



*Representative
Richard Gephardt
of Missouri: Tan,
rested and experi-
enced, but is that
enough?*



*Senator **John Edwards**
of North Carolina:
Fresh face, southern,
but better chance
were he governor?*



*Former Governor
Howard Dean of
Vermont: the
Democratic McCain?
(He even looks like the
AZ Republican.)*



*Former Senator
Carol Moseley-Braun:
No chance, but does
she rain on
Rev. Al's parade
and live to tell?*



*Reverend **Al Sharpton**
of New York: Does
being the most enter-
taining sound bite
artist get you elected?*



*Representative
Dennis Kucinich
of Ohio: Who?*

Primary voters demand yes-or-no answers and often this provides an advantage for governors (Carter, Clinton). Instincts honed in Congress teach that there is safety in qualified answers and grave danger in simple, easily understood responses. But only Governor Dean has announced his can-

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didacy and it is impossible to imagine a national Democratic ticket headed by the governor of Vermont.

As we now start the nomination process, three candidates have a small advantage over the others:

■ **Senator John Kerry (MA):** An acceptable liberal with strong ties to veterans, Kerry's family wealth is a double advantage. If he can win in Iowa, victory in New Hampshire would be assured and his popularity in the large, delegate-rich states of the northeast and Midwest unbeatable. However, he has a short fuse and will find it difficult to endure the hand-to-hand combat necessary to win in Iowa. A Republican who knows him well predicts, "John will blow. He will find the process degrading."

■ **Senator John Edwards (NC):** A youthful candidate with more charisma than anyone else, Edwards would normally have a better chance of success. But his attempt comes only two years after the end of the Clinton Administration. In 1984, Senator Dale Bumpers of Arkansas strongly considered a presidential race but concluded that insufficient time had elapsed since the demise of Jimmy Carter for another southerner to be successful. "No matter what I might do, the liberals will demand the right to nominate one of their own," he said. Edwards has the same problem.

■ **Representative Gephardt:** Strong union backing won the Iowa caucuses for Gephardt the last time he ran and, if Kerry falters, he would be a comfortable landing place for most party liberals. Even if he wins in Iowa, he is unlikely to win in New Hampshire if Kerry makes a strong showing in Iowa. Second place, or even a strong third, in Iowa gives New Hampshire to Kerry as well as entitlement to the liberal wing of the party in the remaining primaries.

The black candidates are unlikely to affect the outcome. Most black officeholders are unwilling to see either Sharpton or Moseley-Braun assume a higher role as spokesperson for the black movement, something that

didn't bother them as much about Jesse Jackson. Many black voters feel the same way.

This all sounds like good news for the Republicans but, as a Republican friend of mine says, "Let's not forget that President Bush's father demonstrated that the American electorate is more than willing to elect a clown if they simply cannot stomach another few years of you."

Democrats have a long history of looking behind or beyond Iowa and New Hampshire

JACK GERMOND
Political columnist



The first thing you have to understand about the contest for the Democratic presidential nomination is that winning the most votes in the Iowa precinct caucuses or the New Hampshire primary doesn't make you the winner. That depends upon the outcome of what is always called "the expectations game"—meaning how each candidate is perceived by the political community and press once the votes have been counted.

The last time the Democrats were choosing a candidate to oppose a Republican Bush in the White House, for example, Paul Tsongas won the most votes in the 1992 New Hampshire primary but Bill Clinton was The Winner. He finished second and declared himself "the comeback kid," thus making an asset of sorts of the furor over the Gennifer Flowers episode in which, we learned four years later, he had lied about his complicity. The run for the nomination was essentially all over.

The Democrats have a long history of looking behind or beyond the returns. In 1968 President Lyndon B. Johnson won the primary but was mortally wounded by Eugene J. McCarthy in the war of perceptions. In 1972 Ed Muskie captured the most votes but George McGovern won the expectations game with a strong second.

It can happen in Iowa, as well. Jimmy Carter's triumph in the caucuses in 1976 made him the favorite in New Hampshire. In 1984 Gary Hart became an overnight wunderkind by capturing 16 percent of the Iowa vote, a distant second to Walter F. Mondale but enough of a surprise to give Hart the momentum in New Hampshire a week later.

At this point, there appear to be four Democrats who make up what might be called the first tier: Senators John

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Kerry, Joe Lieberman, and Bob Graham, and Representative Dick Gephardt. These are the candidates who automatically qualify as heavyweights by virtue of their experience and political credentials and their ability to raise the kind of money that would make them competitive. A step behind them in the pecking order but enjoying at least a realistic chance are John Edwards, serving his first term in the Senate, and Howard Dean, a former governor of Vermont.

It is always possible that the strength of some of those first-tier candidates will prove illusory. In 1976 Democratic primary voters rejected Birch Bayh, a senator from Indiana considered a big hitter in Washington. The same was true of an Indiana Republican, Senator Richard Lugar, in 2000. So it is possible the qualities that have made, for example, Bob Graham such a political force in Florida won't travel well in the compressed and frenetic world of primary campaigning.

Indeed, none of the putatively leading Democrats has answered all the questions about himself. Lieberman is not widely admired among the liberals who play such a disproportionate role in the primary process. Some consider him too conservative. Others, including many Jews, are uncomfortable with his conspicuous religiosity.

Although the favorite of much of organized labor, Gephardt's performance the one time he ran for the nomination, in 1988, has left a lingering sour taste among those with long memories. This means that for the man

from neighboring Missouri, anything short of a clear triumph in Iowa will be seen as evidence of weakness that cannot be cured with campaign money alone.

Even Kerry, the nominal frontrunner of the moment, still must answer questions about his appeal as a candidate outside of home ground in Massachusetts. A loss in New Hampshire would be difficult, perhaps impossible, for him to overcome.

So the operative question is whether one of the relative longshots, Edwards or Dean, can make waves by winning or perhaps finishing a strong second in Iowa or New Hampshire. Edwards' rhetorical skills, honed as a trial lawyer in North Carolina, have earned him a growing following among activists. And Dean, untroubled by a voting record in Congress, is the first pet rock of the liberals in this election cycle.

Much depends on the shape of the campaign. It is clear that several more states will crowd with South Carolina into the primary calendar a week after New Hampshire. That makes it far less likely an instant celebrity candidate can simply roll to the nomination unless he has the kind of money that allows him to compete effectively as the competition for delegates becomes increasingly conducted with television commercials rather than personal stumping.

Finally, how will the Democrats view their best hope of defeating an incumbent president? If military experience seems to count, war hero Kerry might appear strongest. If the doubts about the competence of George W. Bush have not been resolved in the coming year, the time could be ripe for a Graham or Gephardt. The only certainty is uncertainty.

For Democratic primary voters, it's a national shopping spree

DONNA BRAZILE
*Campaign manager,
Gore-Lieberman 2000*

Democratic Party operatives, activists, donors, and voters are on a major political shopping spree for a new presidential standard bearer who can defeat President George W. Bush in 2004 and catapult the Party of Roosevelt, Truman, Kennedy, Carter, and Clinton back into the political majority. One



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DEMOCRATIC 2004 PRIMARY SCHEDULE

As *TIE* goes to press, the Democratic primary calendar is far from settled, with many states jockeying for early position and some GOP-dominated legislatures trying to scuttle their opponents' primaries altogether. By March 10, 2004, half or more of the delegates to the Democratic nominating convention will have been chosen.

January 19	Iowa Caucuses
January 27	New Hampshire, possibly Michigan*
February 3	South Carolina, Missouri, and Arizona, possibly Delaware, Pennsylvania
February 10	possibly Virginia, Maryland
February 17	Oklahoma
February 24	Washington State
March 2	California, New York, Ohio, Georgia, Massachusetts, Connecticut, Rhode Island, and Vermont
March 9	Texas, Florida, Louisiana, Mississippi, and Tennessee
July 26	Democratic National Convention begins in Boston

*Michigan will decide by April 26.

thing is clear: this presidential shopping season will be long on sales (candidates with a compelling national message) and full of short-term bargains (candidates who make you feel good). The choices before the voters will vary between those with slim records of accomplishment and others with deep political experience and a fat wallet.

As in the previous electoral shopping seasons when opposition parties launch their new political lineup, this new crop of candidates is remarkably experienced and culturally as well as politically diverse. As the new line is launched and Democratic voters sit down to review their choices in the primary fashion show of politics, I like to offer you a behind-the-scenes glimpse of what will sell next fall.

Like voters in 1992, 1996, and 2000, the Democratic Party is hungry to pick another winner. Democratic voters, especially those in the early states such as Iowa, New Hampshire, South Carolina, Delaware, Michigan, and others, are shopping for a new brand of leader who will, among other things, wear the Party's label when it comes to championing the fight for working families and defending American values. While Democratic primary vot-

ers in Iowa and New Hampshire may trend leftward in their vision of America and its promise to all its citizens, they often vote centrist or mainstream in selecting a true standard bearer for the White House.

In the winter of 2004, the voters in Iowa may once again turn to Representative Richard A. Gephardt (MO), who understands the price of pork and beans and has the stomach of an auto worker. But Gephardt will not garner all the press attention that placing first or second would give to a Senator John Kerry of Massachusetts, Senator Joe Lieberman of Connecticut, former Governor Howard Dean of Vermont, or Senator John Edwards of North Carolina. After the Iowa caucuses, the shoppers will quickly turn their wallets to the northeast to hear another regional sales pitch. Senator Kerry's presidential team is all steak and potatoes. Kerry has branded himself well by choosing the Cadillac style of organizers and fundraisers to help steer his political cart through the primaries and caucuses. They run faster and are more efficient in fully understanding how to navigate a political pothole that could ruin a newcomer to presidential politics like Senator Bob Graham of Florida. Other hot contenders will look for signs of Kerry's weaknesses and exploit them, which could leave Kerry with a sizeable hole in his wallet. The beneficiaries of Kerry's favorite-son status in the northeast region are clearly Lieberman and Dean.

All of this leads me to ponder: Whether Iowa and New Hampshire can actually assist Democratic voters in selecting a fresh face this presidential season? I doubt it! This new presidential shopping season is rather odd because for the first time in forty years, the Democratic Party is out of power inside the Beltway. Therefore, insurgent-style candidates will garner lots of early attention and appeal to seasonal Democratic shoppers.

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After the sudden withdrawal of former Vice President Al Gore from the 2004 presidential race, the Democratic field came together in the winter of 2003 with an unusual array of talented leaders and political activists. According to press reports and seasoned Democratic strategists, the plethora of candidates, including former Senator Carol Moseley-Braun (IL) and civil rights activist Alfred Charles Sharpton (Rev. Al to the voting public), suggests that the Democratic Party is rehearsing for the 2008, not the 2004 presidential season. It is true that Democratic primary voters are simply hungry for change—the kind of change that answers several important questions: Can the Democratic Party lead America in a time of national and international crises? What core values will Democrats offer to the American people? How will the Democrats solve America's pressing domestic problems? Will the Democrats work across the aisle to build a true bipartisan agenda and not just fight for majority rule?

The true test of voter interest in a new brand will come in states such as South Carolina, Michigan, Delaware, Arizona, Maryland, Virginia, and Missouri who will also demand a first-rate fashion show before mega Tuesday on March 2, 2004, when the presidential season will enter its final stages. It is clear that during the month of February, this new lineup of stars will be struggling to find their niche with primary voters looking for a seasoned winner. Perhaps with the front-loading of the system, primary voters will come close to selecting their top pick of the season.

Given the enormous political stakes of reclaiming the White House, primary voters need to hurry up and attend the biggest political shopping season ever to preview the new sales and bargains before the Republicans pick them over and send them back into inventory.

This shopping season, Democratic base voters and those who have consistently cast their ballots for the Party will no longer have the luxury to wait to hear from the candidates, they must put on their shopping groove and pick a winner.

Watch the “Invisible Primary”

THOMAS E. MANN
The Brookings Institution

The ever-growing field of candidates for the 2004 Democratic presidential nomination (including at least a half-dozen first-tier contenders) reflects a



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widespread belief among party activists that President Bush has no lock on reelection. Whether that belief proves to be justified depends crucially upon the course of events in Iraq and other hotspots around the world, the state of homeland security, and the performance of the U.S. economy. But assuming a politically accommodative environment for Democrats in 2004, will they nominate a candidate able to take advantage of the opportunity?

Many analysts argue that fundamental features of the contemporary nominating process increase the risks to the Democratic party of choosing a candidate not well suited to compete effectively in the general election campaign. Senator George McGovern's nomination in 1972 is routinely proffered as Exhibit A bolstering this argument. The pragmatism of party leaders, it is said, has been supplanted by the more emotional and ideologically skewed sentiments of primary voters and caucus participants. The decisive early tests in Iowa and New Hampshire place great weight on the choices of distinctly unrepresentative electorates. The sequence of early events makes possible a media-generated momentum on behalf of a candidate without widespread support. The frontloading of the primary calendar ensures an early end to the contest, denying a chance for the party to correct an initial mistake and to deliberate properly on who would be the strongest nominee.

From this vantage point, the nominating process is a crapshoot, and Democrats could easily end up with a nominee unable to appeal to crucial swing voters. But is this really an accurate portrayal of recent electoral history?

The truth is that in every election since 1976 both parties have nominated candidates with broad support among party leaders, who were not ideological outliers, and whose victories in the early caucuses and primaries re-

flected their success moving to the front of the pack in the months before the commencement of the official delegate selection events. The “invisible primary”—the year-long contest before the Iowa caucuses and New Hampshire primary in which candidates vie for money, endorsements, consultants, organization in the early states, credibility with gatekeepers in the political community and the media, and public support—has become the decisive stage in determining presidential nominations.

I offer this not as an iron law of presidential nominations, just a pattern that has dominated the process for over two decades. The Democratic nomination in 2004 could well depart from this pattern. But my best guess is that it will not. This suggests that the critical time for determining the outcome of the Democratic nomination will not be next January, February, and March but the remaining months of this year.

While there is no sitting vice president or other heir apparent to move immediately into the position of front runner, the contest for that standing is already well underway. Senator Joseph Lieberman (CT) begins with a modest lead in the polls, thanks to his experience as Al Gore’s running mate in 2000. Representative Richard Gephardt (MO) is very well known among party officeholders and activists, and has the best chance of garnering an endorsement from the labor movement. Senator John Edwards (NC) offers a profile—an articulate Southern moderate—similar to the Democrats’ most successful recent candidate, Bill Clinton. Edwards will be challenged for that identity by Senator Bob Graham, who has the advantage of having served two terms as governor of Florida, an office that has proved a much more successful launching pad for the presidency than that of U.S. senator.

Yet much of the early interest in the field has focused on two other candidates. Former Vermont Governor Howard Dean has generated the most excitement among Democratic audiences. And Senator John Kerry (MA) has garnered kudos for his effective start, sufficient to elevate him in the initial, informal ratings to something approaching a frontrunner.

As I write this essay, it is much too early to forecast which of these (or another) candidate will win the 2003 invisible primary. But one of them is likely to emerge before the end of the year, based on a demonstrated ability to define a compelling candidacy, identify significant issues, raise money, organize in the early states, win crucial endorsements, and perform successfully in the many settings in which candidates are assessed. Then the tailwind from that informal victory is likely to be sufficiently strong to overcome any initial setback in Iowa, New Hampshire, or South Carolina and generate the momentum to win an early and decisive nomination.

Watch for Kerry as a surprisingly strong favorite!

JEFFREY BELL

Principal, Capital City Partners. Mr. Bell has played key roles in the campaigns of Richard Nixon, Ronald Reagan, and Jack Kemp.



Democrats have a habit, unlike Republicans, of nominating first-time candidates (George

W. Bush was the exception that proves the rule: the eventual GOP nominees from 1968–96 had all sought the presidency before). So it is not as implausible as it might first seem that Massachusetts Senator John Kerry is the early frontrunner to be President Bush’s opponent in 2004.

Forget, for now, the national preference polls. There are three measurable criteria to watch this year, before a single vote is cast: fund-raising, Iowa, and New Hampshire. The phenomenon of “front loading”—placing more and more primaries at the start of the year, in January, February, and early March—accentuates the importance of fund-raising, where Kerry, Connecticut Senator Joseph Lieberman, and Missouri Representative Richard Gephardt are expected to be strong—but it by no means eliminates the pivotal roles of Iowa and New Hampshire. Because there is so little time to recover from an embarrassment in one or both of these states, it may even accentuate their importance.

There is a good chance the winner of the Iowa caucus will win the nomination. The only Democrat since George McGovern to lose Iowa and go on to win the nomination was Michael Dukakis in 1988. Iowa’s caucus electorate is the epitome of the white portion of the Democratic base: union members and left-of-center activists, particularly (in the context of today’s politics) anti-war voters. Both of these elements present a huge problem for the centrist, pro-war Lieberman; the anti-war aspect is a problem for Gephardt, who used his labor following to win here in 1988. Iowa is the best opportunity for an underfunded long shot such as former Vermont Governor Howard Dean, but among the well-funded candidates the terrain

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seems to favor Kerry, whose unerring sense of liberal political correctness is well suited to today's militant mood among Iowa's Democratic activists. There will be at least one important straw poll during 2003 to test the candidates' strength in a way that no random survey can.

Should Kerry win Iowa, he would go into the New Hampshire primary as even more of a favorite than he already is in early polls. Anyone who hopes to stop him needs to beat him in New Hampshire, or at least put a dent in him the way George McGovern did to Muskie in 1972. South Carolina will be better turf for Lieberman, Gephardt, and North Carolina Senator John Edwards than either Iowa or New Hampshire, but my guess is that tacitly conceding the first two states will not work for a centrist. Assuming a Kerry victory, a centrist or pro-war challenger would need at least a strong second-place showing in New Hampshire to be sufficiently competitive in the South to reverse Kerry's early momentum.

How could a centrist achieve that? The temptation will be to become more dovish to survive Iowa and New Hampshire—but that would mean little differentiation from Kerry in the public mind going into the less dovish states. If Lieberman, Gephardt, or Edwards wants to be a viable centrist candidate post-New Hampshire, he will have to rally a hawkish minority in New Hampshire and perhaps even Iowa, knowing he's going against the grain of the dominant Democratic mood in those states. He would then have to beat Kerry in a fight likely to divide and polarize the Democratic electorate. It is a difficult and psychologically demanding task, which in my mind leaves Kerry as a surprisingly strong early favorite.

The telling factor? Early money!

CHARLES E. COOK, JR.
*Editor and Publisher of
The Cook Political Report*



Only a fool would try to predict the outcome of the Democratic presidential nomination convention sixteen months before the gavel bangs it to order, but the contours and some of the dynamics of the race have already begun to emerge.

If Representative Richard Gephardt (MO), the former House minority leader, does not win the Iowa caucus, tentatively scheduled for January 19, his candidacy will be effectively over. Expectations for a good showing are raised by the fact that he won his neighboring state's caucus in

1988 when he sought the nomination. This time, Gephardt starts off ahead there. Assuming that he wins, the next question is which candidate places second and does anyone come in a very close or unexpected third place. Today Senators John Kerry (MA) and John Edwards (NC) are thought to be in second and third place respectively, though former Vermont Governor Howard Dean has begun to make inroads among the state's many anti-war Democratic activists.

Whoever comes in first and second in Iowa will have considerable momentum going into the New Hampshire primary, currently slated for January 27. If Kerry from neighboring Massachusetts does not win in New Hampshire, his candidacy will be on life-support as well, particularly considering his early lead in the polls there and the fact that his hometown television stations in Boston blanket the southern half of New Hampshire. At this early stage, Kerry has a very strong hold on first place, with Gephardt seemingly in second place. Interestingly, the Missouri congressman ran second there in 1988 among a seven-way Democratic primary field. Dean, from neighboring Vermont, and Edwards are probably running third now, but both are within striking distance of at least Gephardt and possibly Kerry if things go their way. Again, Kerry has to win here. Whoever places second and possibly a close or unexpected third place garners momentum, benefiting from what has been called the "slingshot effect," catapulting them into the next phase of primaries.

After Iowa and New Hampshire, things get a little fuzzier. While the calendar is still undecided, as of now the next contests will be in South Carolina, Missouri, and Arizona on February 3. By this point, any candidate who has not come in first, second, or third in Iowa or New Hampshire is likely to be facing dwindling political and financial fortunes. Volunteers and donors may have become attracted to the one or two candidates, possibly three, that have won and established something resembling what former President George H.W. Bush called "the big Mo"—momentum. Edwards, who is from North Carolina, will be under enormous pressure to win in his neighboring state. After all, if he doesn't win in South Carolina, where outside of North Carolina could he be expected to win? Again, the question in South Carolina will be whether anyone upsets Edwards, forcing him to come in second or a close and unexpected third.

Though Missouri and Arizona are already slated to hold primaries on that same date, and others may move up to that point, the national media has already fixated on South Carolina as the February 3 contest that they are watching most closely as a surrogate for other southern states that fall later on the schedule.

If Gephardt has won Iowa and has either won or come in second place in New Hampshire, then he should have sufficient momentum to capture his home state of Missouri, also on February 3, without any difficulty. But if he

hasn't, then the state is fair game for the others. Keep in mind that Missouri would be the largest and most representative state in that early calendar to vote. Arizona, which is new to the early calendar and has no track record of contested presidential primary voting behavior to tip us off about its tendencies, would be wide open.

In all likelihood we will be able to effectively narrow down the field of contenders to three or less, most likely two, viable candidates by February 4. We may also very well have a good idea of which candidate is most likely to prevail, though primaries will continue on through the first week of June. By this stage, most candidates will have suffered repeated losses and their donors, volunteers, and even their staffs will have bailed out with little apparent hope of victory.

Between now and the Iowa caucus, the single most important factor to watch is money. As a general rule, the candidate raising the most money during the odd-numbered year before the presidential election always wins their party's nomination. The only notable exception in recent years was 1996, when then-Senator Phil Gramm outraised all his Republican rivals yet failed to catch on politically and dropped out before the Iowa caucus. Generally speaking, money follows the candidate doing best politically, driving many from the race long before the first ballots are cast. In April, the first-quarter fundraising and spending figures will be released, giving us a first glimpse of the levels of "love money" that each candidate will have attracted. For the most part, the money raised during the first quarter of the campaign is from those most committed to the candidate, with many donors giving to them regardless of their real chances. In July, second-quarter figures will come out. With most of the "love money" already in, this is the "smart money," money from those whose support was not preordained, but who are now jumping on board the campaign they think has the best chance of winning. The third- and fourth-quarter numbers, out in October and January respectively, are more of the same, effectively winnowing out those candidates not catching on and boosting the momentum of those that are. At that point, the voters generally take over, but the flow of money to repeated losers inevitably dries up, forcing candidates from the race.

Remarkably unmentioned until now are Senators Joseph Lieberman of Connecticut and Bob Graham of Florida. Though some argue that, of the entire Democratic field, these two are the most electable in a general election, it is very difficult to see where either breaks through in an early state, a necessity for the momentum to remain viable until states where they can expect to be stronger come along. Most expect that all but their most bedrock supporters will abandon them if they don't produce a first or second place finish in at least Iowa or New Hampshire, which at this point is not anticipated. Lieberman, who was then-Vice

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President Al Gore's running mate in 2000, would likely have drawn considerable support from the African-American community had Reverend Al Sharpton of New York and former Senator Carol Moseley-Braun not entered the race. Now, most believe these candidates will siphon off a strong piece of the black vote, eroding a key part of the "Gore legacy vote," those who supported the Gore-Lieberman ticket in 2000 and are most likely to stay with Lieberman this time. Florida is an important fundraising state and has a big block of delegates, not to mention importance in the general election. Lieberman and Graham are, in a way, competing on several levels. They both have strong support in Florida, are the two most moderate candidates in the race, and both currently have exceedingly low expectations, which are good to have if you can beat them along the way. Should either candidate suddenly exceed expectations, their prominence in the race could be significantly elevated.

Today, one could say that Kerry has jumped out to the strongest start, with Gephardt, running stronger than almost anyone expected, in second place. Kerry put together the best organization early, bringing on board many of the most valued staff members, consultants, and in-state political operatives, with many expecting him to tap into his wife's considerable financial resources to help fund the campaign if necessary. Gephardt got off to a slow start, but has performed with great passion and has been winning good notices in recent party functions, reviving his hopes and the assessments of his potential. Edwards and Dean are at the next tier, with Edwards possessing far greater fundraising potential and a better established campaign infrastructure, but Dean has momentum from his unequivocal position against the war in Iraq, which has boosted him among the anti-war faction of the party. While Edwards possesses more raw talent than perhaps anyone else in the field, the thinness of his resume and experience, particularly in the area of foreign policy, has undercut early assumptions of his political potency. Dean has put all his eggs in the anti-war basket, a real gamble, though it probably was his only hope of breaking through against more establishment-oriented candidates.

This may well be one of the most fascinating Democratic presidential contests in years, with the value of that nomination totally unknown at this point, but largely driven by circumstances such as war, peace, and the economy. ♦