

**A Strategy Memo Prepared for
DraftWesleyClark.com**

Is it too late for Wesley Clark to enter the 2004 race
for the Democratic nomination?

The First of a Two-Part Analysis of the Candidacy of Wesley Clark

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The Drafting of a Presidential Candidate - Gen. Wesley Clark

The possible candidacy of former General Wesley Clark emerges as a fascinating backdrop to the Democratic race for the presidency. Fueled by the emerging power of the Internet, daily weblogs, and the dogged passion of a growing army of activists and volunteers organized through various “draft Wesley Clark” websites, Gen. Clark is being considered a candidate for president even though he has yet to formally declare his candidacy or party affiliation.¹ Assuming he would run as a Democrat, the key question asked by many Democrats, pundits, and the media is whether it is too late for Wesley Clark to enter the race for the Democratic nomination. The simple answer is that it is not.

Although it will prove a challenge to organize and execute a national presidential campaign, the dynamics of the 2004 Democratic nomination race provide Wesley Clark with an obvious and historically rare opportunity. Wesley Clark, if he chooses to run for president, can enter a nomination race that is not only wide open, but where it appears many Democrats remain undecided as to who is the best candidate to defeat President Bush in 2004. With respect to the state of the Democratic nomination race, recent polling results and an analysis of the trends of public opinion support for the nine Democratic candidates, leads to five significant conclusions.

Based on this first analysis of the Wesley Clark candidacy, it is possible to derive five key conclusions: (1) the current Democratic race remains very competitive, in varying degrees, among at least four to five candidates; (2) except for Howard Dean, the trend of support for all other candidates remains stagnant or declining; (3) the number of undecided is high both in state and national polls; (4) the current Democratic race for the nomination lacks a true frontrunner or dominant political figure; and (5) even at this “late stage,” the opportunity exists for Wesley Clark to enter what is, in fact, a wide open nomination race. These conclusions all suggest that if Wesley Clark decides to enter the race he would not face any insurmountable political obstacles - such as a commanding lead by one or two candidates in the national and state polls. To the contrary, Clark would enter a race where the support of Democratic voters is diffused among a number of candidates, where no candidate enjoys a high level of support, and where a large percentage of Democrats remain undecided about whom to support.

Where the Democratic Race Stands – Analysis of National Polls

Ironically, the real promise of Clark’s candidacy may be as reflective of his own unique strengths as it is the weaknesses among the current field of candidates and their campaigns. None of the candidates, not Governor Howard Dean, Senator Joe Lieberman, Senator John Kerry, Senator Bob Graham, Congressman Dick Gephardt, Senator John Edwards, Congressman Dennis Kucinich, Rev. Al Sharpton, or former Ambassador Carol Moseley Braun, have yet to emerge as frontrunners or dominant political actors. Interestingly, none of the six

¹ A select list of Clark websites are as follows: www.DraftWesleyClark.com; www.DraftClark2004.com; [Clark 2004 Meetup.com](http://Clark2004Meetup.com); www.Women4Clark.com; www.WesleyClark.us; and Draftthegeneral.blogspot.com;

congressional candidates – even with some very impressive professional accomplishments and political networks – have been able to capture the attention or support from wide swaths of Democratic voters. Among the nine candidates, only the campaign of the former governor of Vermont Howard Dean, who many pundits thought had little chance back in January 2003 when his polls numbers were at 3 percent, can be thought of as surging forward.² Aside from Dean's growing support, the state of the current Democratic race can be accurately described as divided among campaigns that are, at best, either truly stagnant or trending in reverse.

A review of national polls from July and early August 2003 highlight divided support among an upper elite tier of Democratic candidates. Given the margin of error, it is methodologically impossible to determine which candidate, among the top four or five, truly leads the current Democratic race (see Table 1). At a minimum, it is fair to state that at least four or five candidates are in a position to contend for the Democratic nomination. However, no single candidate among the top five enjoys a significant percentage of support among Democratic voters or can even be considered a marginal favorite.

Table 1. The National Standing of the Democratic Race

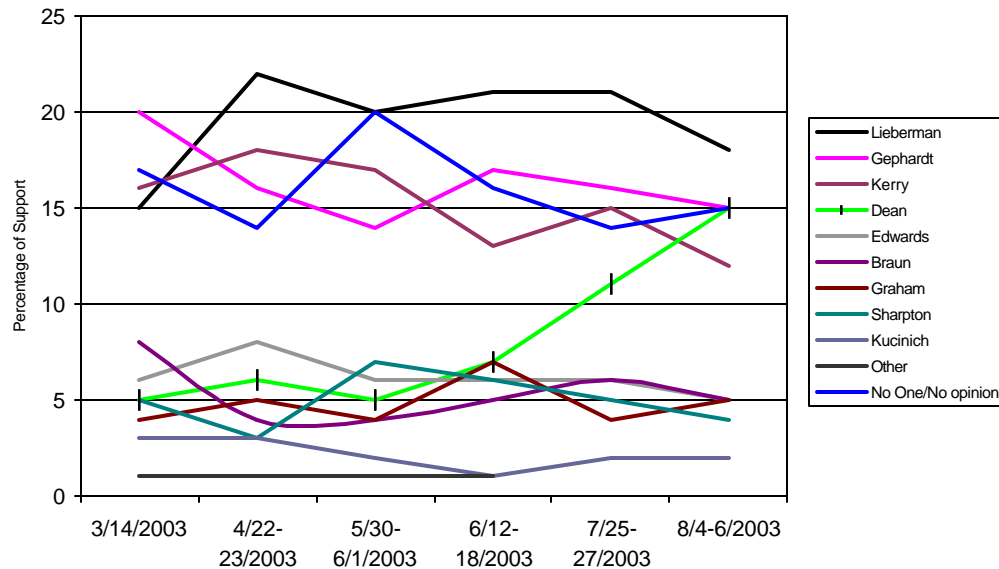
<i>CNN/USA Today/Gallup Poll</i>		<i>CNN/USA Today/Gallup Poll</i>		<i>Quinnipiac University Poll</i>		<i>Time/CNN Poll</i>	
	%		%		%		%
Joe Lieberman	18	Joe Lieberman	21	Joe Lieberman	21	Joe Lieberman	16
Dick Gephardt	15	Dick Gephardt	16	Dick Gephardt	16	John Kerry	14
Howard Dean	15	John Kerry	15	John Kerry	13	Dick Gephardt	12
John Kerry	12	Howard Dean	11	Howard Dean	10	Howard Dean	10
John Edwards	5	John Edwards	6	Al Sharpton	6	John Edwards	6
Carol Moseley Braun	5	Carol Moseley Braun	6	John Edwards	4	Al Sharpton	5
Bob Graham	5	Al Sharpton	5	Carol Moseley Braun	4	Bob Graham	4
Al Sharpton	4	Bob Graham	4	Bob Graham	3	Carol Moseley Braun	4
Dennis Kucinich	2	Dennis Kucinich	2	Dennis Kucinich	2	Dennis Kucinich	3
Don't Know/	15	No one	2	Don't Know	21	Other	3
No Opinion		No Opinion	12			Not Sure	23
August 4-6 +/-6		July 25-27 +/-6		July 17-22 +/-5.1		July 16-17 +/-6	

An even more disconcerting indicator for the majority of the Democratic nominees should be the stagnant or weakening trend in their support among Democratic voters. As of August 2003, only the Howard Dean campaign can accurately claim a surging trend in support among Democrats over the last five months. Based on Gallup Poll data of Democratic voters and Democratic leaners, the trends of support for every other campaign appears stagnant or in decline. With respect to the Lieberman, Kerry, and Gephardt campaigns, early leads enjoyed in March and April 2003 have disappeared or weakened. For each of these three candidates, a declining trend of support is evident among Democratic voters/leaners (see Figure 1). Such trends suggest that the campaigns of Lieberman, Kerry and Gephardt are losing support as their message and policy positions are discussed. For Lieberman, Kerry, and Gephardt, who were

² Howard Dean's national support among Democrats in January and February 2003 ranged between 3 and 5 percent. For a review of the select polls, please go to www.pollingreport.com/wh04dem.htm.

considered by many pundits as the expected frontrunners for the Democratic nomination, the failure of their campaigns to widely resonate with Democratic voters should raise substantial concerns. If this trend continues well into the fall, it must be expected their candidacies will be placed in ever increasing jeopardy.

Figure 1 -The Trend of Democratic Public Opinion



In comparison, the trends of support for Edwards, Graham, Sharpton, Moseley Braun and Kucinich, are all but stagnant and reflect little variance from initial poll numbers recorded in March and April 2003. Essentially, such a lack of movement over a five-month period indicates that either the candidates' message has not reached the voter, or that their message and/or campaign strategies are ineffective given the dynamics of the 2004 election. With respect to Edwards and Graham, substantial movements must occur over the next four to five months or the perception among Democratic voters will be that their candidacies are no longer viable. With respect to the bottom three candidates, while it is possible that Sharpton, Moseley Braun, and Kucinich may have an impact on certain state primaries, their national support remains tepid and weak among Democratic voters. Overall, as pollster John Zogby recently stated, "*with only six months to go before Iowa, and seven months before South Carolina, there is no magic name rising above the pack.*"³ Aside from these national polls, an even more accurate understanding of the Democratic race is available by analyzing the standing of candidates in the early primary states.

³ John Zogby, Released: August 1, 2003 Lieberman Continues Lead in South Carolina, Gephardt and Sharpton Tied for Second; 65% of Likely Democratic Primary Voters Think Bush Will Win Re-Election, New Zogby Poll Reveals

Where the Democratic Race Stands – State Poll Analysis

Table 2. The State of the Democratic Race – the Early Primaries

Des Moines Register Iowa Poll		Franklin Pierce College- New Hampshire		Zogby South Carolina	
	%		%		%
Howard Dean	23	Howard Dean	22	Joe Lieberman	13
Dick Gephardt	21	John Kerry	21	Dick Gephardt	8
John Kerry	14	Dick Gephardt	6	Al Sharpton	8
Joe Lieberman	10	Joe Lieberman	6	John Edwards	5
John Edwards	5	Wesley Clark	2	John Kerry	5
Dennis Kucinich	4	John Edwards	2	Howard Dean	4
Bob Graham	1	Joe Biden	1	Bob Graham	3
Carol Moseley Braun	1	Bob Graham	1	Carol Moseley Braun	3
Al Sharpton	1	Al Sharpton	0	Dennis Kucinich	0.2
Uncommitted/Don't Know	20	Dennis Kucinich	0	Undecided	42
		Carol Moseley Braun	0		
		Undecided	37		
July 22-29		July 20-24		July 26-30	
+/- 4.9		+/- 6		+/- 4.5	

Based on the most recent state polls taken in Iowa, New Hampshire, and South Carolina, a very competitive image emerges among an upper tier of Democratic candidates (see Table 2). Within these three primary states, no one candidate emerges as a dominant political force or a true frontrunner. To the contrary, given the margin of error in these state polls, as many as four candidates are in a competitive position to contend for and win these early primaries. Among the candidates, Howard Dean, Dick Gephardt, John Kerry, and Joe Lieberman can claim to be in a position to win one or more of these critical primary states. Surprisingly, even without any formal campaign, Wesley Clark's support in New Hampshire is equal to Edwards, and is greater than four of the other declared candidates.

At this stage of the primary race, none of the current nine candidates can suggest that they enjoy any substantial or significant degree of support among Democratic voters. With over five months before the first set of primaries, the race for the nomination at the state level remains even more wide open than the national polls would suggest. More importantly, given the number of undecided in these state polls, it is evident that none of the candidates— not even the current leaders – are in a position to deter or defeat any new candidate from entering the race for the Democratic nomination. Rather, because of the substantial number of undecided primary voters, it is fair to argue that none of the nine current candidates has yet to effectively capture the *hearts or minds of a majority of Democratic voters*. As the poll data suggest, the state primary race is extremely wide open to another new candidate – be it Wesley Clark or any other Democrat.

The Power of the Undecided

A striking statistic of the current Democratic nomination race is the significant number of undecided. In the August 4th-6th Gallup poll of national Democrats, at least fifteen percent of respondents were undecided or had no opinion as to whom among the nine candidates to support. In fact, the number of undecided in the national poll was equal to or greater than the

support for eight of the nine candidates running for the nomination. The power of the undecided to determine who will be the next Democratic nominee becomes even more pronounced when each of the state polls are fully dissected.

The number of undecided voters in three of the earliest primary states is staggering. Since many of the Democratic primaries have been rescheduled to occur within the eight weeks of the Iowa caucuses, early victories or strong placing by the various candidates will be essential to their political survival in 2004. Arguably, the Democratic nominees that place in the top three spots in some or all of these three contests - Iowa, New Hampshire, and South Carolina - will be in the strongest position to contend for the Democratic nomination. Because of the diffused support among so many candidates, and given the importance of achieving early victories in these three primaries, a substantial amount of power resides in the hands of the undecided Democratic voter. Clearly, such numbers of undecided indicate that no single candidate or campaign has been effective in gaining the support of the Democratic voter. Essentially, the sheer size of undecided suggests that a new candidate, whether it is Wesley Clark or another, can enter the nomination race and immediately compete for the nomination.

The number of undecided in Iowa is as high as twenty percent. Only Dick Gephardt and Howard Dean have a greater percentage of support from Democratic voters that exceeds the total number of undecided in Iowa. In New Hampshire, a state that is of great importance for the Democratic nominee who wishes to contend for the nomination, as many as thirty-seven percent of state Democratic voters are unsure whom to support. With respect to South Carolina, forty-two percent of the voters are undecided, and no candidate enjoys more than thirteen percent of support. Again, even by the most conservative analysis of the current field, the polling results - both national and state - suggest that the Democratic race for president remains as competitive and wide open as any in recent history.⁴

A recent Zogby poll confirms the extent to which the current field of candidates has yet to resonate within the Democratic voter. Interestingly, the Zogby poll found as many as thirty-nine percent of the Democratic respondents were unsure which of the nine candidates to support. In addition, as many forty-eight percent of Democrats would like another candidate to run for the nomination, while only forty-one percent were pleased within the current field.⁵ Most striking, sixty-nine percent of Democratic and independent likely voters expect President Bush to be reelected. The Zogby poll raises credible doubts over how effective most, if not all, of the nine Democratic campaigns have been at creating a positive and winning vision for the Democratic

⁴ Please note: National or state polls do not accurately gauge the true strength or level of support for a particular candidate. At this early stage of the primary race, the results are often a better measure of name recognition than where the primary race actually stands. In terms of the current field, the most interesting conclusion based on national and state polls in Iowa and New Hampshire is that Dean's candidacy is the only one showing strength. Senator Lieberman remains ahead in the national polls and South Carolina, but it is unclear whether this reflects the Senator's strong name recognition from the 2000 election or is indicative of actual and stable support for him among Democratic voters.

⁵ Results based on national polls by pollster John Zogby, released on July 29, 2003. Please see: Zogby International's "Road to Boston" Series, www.Zogby.com.

**Zogby Poll of Democrats
July 16-17, 2003**

- 39% unsure which candidate to support
- 48% of Democrats would like other candidates to run vs. 41% who are pleased with the field
- 69% of Democrat and independent likely voters expect President Bush to be reelected
- 66% desire a candidate who stands up for their beliefs vs. 30% who prefer a candidate who can defeat Bush
- +/- 4.4%

voter. Without question, such a lack of confidence among Democratic and independent voters is worrisome. At a minimum, the Zogby poll suggests that a new Democratic candidate, like a Wesley Clark, could enter a nomination race where Democrats have yet to coalesce around any one or two candidates. Irrespective of whether Wesley Clark enters the race, it does appear that a strong sense of defeatism is emerging among Democrats who have concluded that none of the current candidates are likely to defeat President Bush in the 2004 election. If such defeatism lasts well into 2004, it must be expected that the electoral conditions for a Bush landslide will emerge.

The Democratic Money Race

Underscoring the race to win the support of the Democratic voter is the race to win the essential support of financial donors – the so-called “wealth primary” (see Table 3). Winning the money race is integral since no campaign can compete against eight or nine candidates without substantial monies. Without doubt, with such a tight primary schedule in 2004, every candidate who wishes to be a credible contender must raise enough funds to create a strong political organization in each and every one of the early primary states. Arguably, the more competitive the race for the Democratic nomination becomes, the more important it will be for each campaign to successfully fundraise.

Table 3. The Democratic Money Race

Cash on Hand Leaders		Second Quarter Fundraising	
John Kerry	10, 927, 807	Howard Dean	7.6 million
John Edwards	8, 118, 998	John Kerry	5.9 million
Howard Dean	6, 401, 348	Joe Lieberman	5.1 million
Dick Gephardt	6, 252, 571	John Edwards	4.5 million
Joe Lieberman	4, 044, 865	Richard Gephardt	3.8 million
Bob Graham	1, 787, 850	Bob Graham	2 million
Dennis Kucinich	1, 063, 508	Dennis Kucinich	1.5 million
Carol Moseley Braun	22, 127	Carol Moseley Braun	144, 658
Al Sharpton	12, 061	Al Sharpton	54, 759

With respect to the current wealth primary, the fundraising totals as of July 15, 2003 suggest that five candidates lead the money race or wealth primary (see Table 3). In terms of the candidates, Dean’s second quarter results exceeded all others by over 1.7 million dollars. Dean has focused his fundraising on an Internet strategy that has used his campaign’s website and emails to inform and rally supporters to donate monies. Most remarkably, the Dean campaign highlights the immense power of the Internet to exploit the potential for “grassroots fundraising.” For example, the Dean campaign cited donations from “73,226 individuals in the second quarter,

and it estimated that more than 60 percent of the total it has raised this year qualifies for federal matching grants.”⁶

Based on “cash on hand,” John Kerry leads the pack but is closely followed by John Edwards and Howard Dean. Among the upper tier of candidates – based on second quarter results and cash on hand – the most disappointing fundraising results are those of Joe Lieberman and Dick Gephardt. Given the substantial name recognition of these two candidates, the superior fundraising performances of Dean, Kerry, and Edwards raise real doubts as to whether Gephardt and Lieberman will even prove as competitive as current public opinion polls suggest. Obviously, Dean’s Internet fundraising is possibly the most amazing aspect of the current Democratic wealth primary. Dean’s incredible success has helped redefine the role and power of “grassroots fundraising” in modern campaigns and elections. More importantly, Dean exemplifies how a candidate with little to no name recognition can, once their message and ideas entice the voter, become an immediate contender in the money race by utilizing innovative approaches like the Internet to fundraise.

Although winning the wealth primary is not essential, it is important that the candidates who wish to contend for the nomination raise enough monies to be near or atop the money race. The success in fundraising is especially important since the amount of money the respective campaigns raise is a measure the media and pundits use to assess the future viability of the Democratic campaigns in the forthcoming primaries. The conventional wisdom that is often cited, for example, is the fact that since 1984, the “Republican and Democratic candidates who raised the most money now – the year before the election – ended up winning their party’s nomination.”⁷ While such conventional wisdom may not apply perfectly to the current 2004 nomination race, it is impossible to ignore the brutal reality that in such a competitive and wide open race, the Democratic candidates who wish to contend for the nomination will have to raise substantial funds.

The State of the Race - A Wide Open Race?

As of August 2003, none of the Democratic candidates dominate or even appear to be a frontrunner for the nomination. Of the nine candidates, only Howard Dean’s candidacy shows any signs of momentum both in the polls and fundraising. While the polls indicate that the other eight candidates have either stagnant or declining trends of support, the degree of current support and fundraising abilities of Kerry, Edwards, Lieberman and Gephardt suggest that should be able to remain competitive well into the first few primaries. Depending on their performances in the fall debates, it is possible that the number of elite candidates will be winnowed down to two or three by the beginning of the primary season. Overall, because the current nomination race remains so competitive among candidates with marginal support from democratic voters, and because a high number of Democratic voters are undecided, it is very possible for a new candidate to effectively

⁶ Dan Balz and Thomas B. Edsall, “Bush Raises More than all 9 Rivals.” MSNBC.com, July 16, 2003

⁷ Editorial/Opinion, “The Wealth Primary,” The USA Today. July 7, 2003

compete for the nomination. In short, the nomination race remains wide open because popular support for the current set of candidates is diffused, even weak, and a high number of undecided suggests that a new candidate could enter this race with the ability to challenge the elite field.

<p>The Current "Democratic Nine"</p>
<p>The Elite Howard Dean John Kerry Dick Gephardt Joe Lieberman John Edwards</p>
<p>The Unlikely Bob Graham</p>
<p>The Futile Al Sharpton Dennis Kucinich Carol Mosley Braun</p>

Based on money and polling numbers, an "elite" set of candidates is emerging who will likely contend for the Democratic nomination. Without any new candidates, like a Wesley Clark, the Democratic nominee will emerge from this elite set of candidates - Howard Dean, John Kerry, John Edwards, Dick Gephardt, and Joe Lieberman. This elite set of candidates can be roughly determined by evaluating the array of national and state polls and success in fundraising as of August 2003. Still, the image of the Democratic race is one that appears to be jumbled between a group of candidates who lead in key primaries and national polls, while other candidates are near or at the top in the wealth primary. Again, no one or two candidates appear dominant across all or most facets of the current primary race. To some extent, each of the various elite candidates is in a position to compete for the nomination. As for the rest of the Democratic field, it will require varying degrees of political miracles for them to win the nomination.

Poor fundraising and a less than dynamic campaign have severely weakened the candidacy of Senator Bob Graham. Although Senator Graham may focus on a "southern primary strategy" to rekindle his candidacy – and there is always hope – the Senator is more likely to be running for re-election in Florida than winning the Democratic nomination. Short of a true miracle, like the collapse of the entire elite field, Bob Graham will not be the nominee in 2004. Although one could make a case that Graham could represent a viable choice for Vice President, his candidacy for the presidency is all but over and it is just a matter of time before Graham concedes. As for Al Sharpton, Dennis Kucinich, and Carol Moseley Braun, their candidacies and campaigns have little public support and appear to be more about redefining the political debate than seriously contending for the Democratic nomination. Each of the candidacies will likely persist – even in the face of the obvious political reality – to ensure that the Democratic debate does not move too far to the center or to emphasize their own ideological and policy interests. Realistically, their candidacies will not seriously compete for the Democratic nomination. In sum, the 2004 Democratic race is unique in that no one candidate can claim to have the nomination within his or her grasp - nor can any one even approach saying such a bold statement. Indeed, the 2004 Democratic race is as wide open today as it was months earlier.

The State of the Race – Wesley Clark's Opportunity

As the current poll results indicate, a Wesley Clark candidacy remains viable should he decide to run for the Democratic nomination "at this late stage," because the race for nomination

remains wide open with no clear frontrunner or truly dominant set of candidates. Most importantly, and this is critical for Clark, the number of undecided in all three of the first primaries is extremely high. While high rates of indecision do not necessarily translate into “Clark Voters,” it does show that Wesley Clark would be able to campaign in what would be a wide open race for the Democratic nomination.

At the primary level, Clark would enter a race where one-fifth of the Democratic respondents in Iowa, for example, are uncommitted or don't know whom to support. In New Hampshire, Clark would be able to target the thirty-seven percent of Democrats who remain undecided.⁸ With respect to South Carolina, Clark could gain a commanding lead by, again, gaining the support of the forty-two percent of the Democrats who are undecided. Again, a Clark candidacy remains viable because, in part, no candidate has been able to establish a strong foothold in these early primaries among Democratic voters. Furthermore, because it is so early in the nomination race, and since no such “frontrunner” is emerging, it is unclear how committed the Democratic support will be for many of these candidates as the primary race evolves over the next five months. By attracting and mobilizing the large segments of voters who are undecided, as well as attracting weakly committed voters from the other Democratic candidates, a Wesley Clark candidacy could immediately become viable and competitive. Clearly, such rate of undecided does imply that many Democratic voters either want other options – like a new candidate to enter the race – or remain unconvinced that the current candidates have the image, the message, and the policy positions that is best if the Democratic Party is to defeat President Bush in 2004.

If there is an obvious weakness to a Clark candidacy, it is the immediate pressure and need to raise substantial monies to fund a national campaign. To be viable, Clark will have to fundraise roughly 3 to 5 million dollars each month within the first months of his campaign. Clark will also have to employ an especially aggressive fundraising strategy that must tap both traditional sets of political donors and the Internet's power for “grassroots fundraising.” How effective will Clark be at fundraising? It is almost impossible to gauge this beforehand with real confidence or accuracy. Nevertheless, since it appears that many Democratic donors have yet to become committed, and given the power of the Internet, it is more than possible that Clark, like Dean, could raise substantial funds to fuel a strong national campaign.⁹ What will also be helpful to a Clark candidacy are the various “Draft Wesley Clark” grassroots efforts that will be able to provide a relatively large donor base to aid fundraising. Additionally, if and when Clark support grows among Democratic voters, it is all but inevitable that fundraisers and donors will quickly move to support Wesley Clark's candidacy. Nevertheless, it is clear that if there is an Achilles heel to a Clark candidacy, it is in the need to raise literally millions of dollars quickly.

⁸ John Zogby, “Road to Boston Series.” Zogby International. July 29, 2003.

⁹ Please review: Sharon Theimer, Many Big Democratic Donors Uncommitted. Associated Press. March 2, 2003; Liz Marlantes, “Web may revolutionize fundraising.” The Christian Science Monitor. July 31, 2003.

The obvious strategic opportunity that exists for candidate Clark is that even among the so-called elite five candidates, no outright frontrunner exists. As the polls show, none of the top five candidates holds a commanding lead given the number of undecided. As a recent Zogby poll found, *39 percent of Democrats remain unsure whom to support and 48 percent of Democrats would like other candidates to run for the nomination.*¹⁰ In short, a clear opportunity does exist for any viable candidate to enter this race – irrespective of whether it is Wesley Clark or not. While it is quite possible that after the six fall debates and by the beginning of the primaries, a “true frontrunner” will emerge, there is no current political obstacle to a Clark candidacy that would endanger the viability of his campaign to win the Democratic nomination.

With six debates scheduled in the fall, and over five months before the Iowa caucuses, the only potential obstacle to a Clark candidacy is the need to enter before the first debate on September 3, 2003 in Albuquerque, New Mexico. Because of the importance many Democrats and the media will place on these debates, it is apparent that Clark must be present if he is to be considered a contender for the Democratic nomination. If Clark does not enter the race, the American public should expect to see a series of very competitive primary races among the elite set of Democrats. In Iowa and New Hampshire, for instance, Howard Dean, John Kerry, and Dick Gephardt, will fight for critical victories. More likely than not, one or two of these three candidates will not survive if they experience early setbacks at this stage in the primary season. In comparison, Edwards or Lieberman will attempt to capture the centrist/conservative wing of the party by winning key primaries in South Carolina and Arizona. If Edwards or Lieberman can score early victories among these states, their campaigns will garner substantial strength. The potential for Clark is that he could be a candidate with widespread ideological, geographic, and political appeal that would imply he would be able to compete in each and all of the early primaries.¹¹ Without such a candidate, it does seem that Dean, Gephardt, and Kerry will challenge Edwards or Lieberman for what will be an intra-party clash among the liberal and centrist/conservative wings of the Democratic Party. Arguably, such a heated primary contest may further weaken the Democratic Party’s chances to win back the White House in 2004.

If Wesley Clark does enter the Democratic race, much like a former governor from Arkansas in 1991 who became president, he will confront an open but very competitive race among an elite field of candidates who all want to be president.¹² In theory, Clark could easily wait until the last days of summer before making a formal announcement because it is unlikely that the current dynamics of the race will change much before the fall debates. From a strategic perspective, Clark could even gain an advantage by waiting to formally declare till just before the

¹⁰ John Zogby, “Road to Boston Series.” Zogby International. July 29, 2003.

¹¹ The competitive nature of Wesley Clark candidacy will be explored in the forthcoming second part analysis titled: Can Wesley Clark Win?

¹² It is important to note that then Governor Bill Clinton did not enter the nomination race until October of 1991. It is now somewhat ironic that certain pundits suggest that in August 2003 it is too late for Clark to enter the race for the Democratic nomination. It is the quality of a Clark candidacy – not the timing of his candidacy with more than five months before the primary season – that will determine how well Clark competes in the race.

first debate. Assuming that the next month is dominated by tepid media coverage, the entrance of a new candidate would indeed dominate election coverage and political discussion for many days. If Clark's intent is to maximize name recognition, which would be logical for any political newcomer, the timing of his formal candidacy is critical.

In order to effectively prepare, organize, and begin fundraising, certain preliminary steps will have to be taken within the next two-to-four week period. While the pressure and strain to organize a national political campaign will prove incredibly tasking, a disciplined and well-qualified campaign staff will quickly redress any initial weaknesses from a so-called "late start." In terms of organization, while the other campaigns are already well stocked with policy and political advisors, pollsters, and fundraisers, a Clark candidacy is likely to attract a significant number of capable and experienced campaign personnel. Clark will be able to tap a venerable army of political professionals, consultants, and fundraisers within and across the Democratic Party who have yet to become involved or tied to any one of the current campaigns. The point being, that while establishing an organization at this stage of the nomination race will be tasking, the lasting negative effects are greatly exaggerated. If Clark declares, a well-experienced and innovative campaign manager and staff will quickly redress any short-term difficulties. Simply put, while competent campaign staff and strong organization are obviously critical for any successful candidacy, the greatest challenge for any campaign is to field a strong and attractive candidate with ideas and issue positions that can reach Democratic voters whose present attentions are diffused and whose support remains undecided or spread among nine candidates.

Integral to the viability of Clark's candidacy will be his performance in the first few debates. Assuming he performs well, a significant number of new donors, supporters, and staff will quickly bandwagon onto the Clark campaign. Strong performances in the fall debates, for instance, will fuel fundraising – both online and traditional. Clark also has the added advantage of exploiting the many Draft Wesley Clark grassroots efforts that have built a small army of volunteers and potential donors over the last six months.¹³ Much like the Dean campaign, Clark will be able to tap an impressive number of Meetup.com supporters for a national network of volunteers who can assist in advance work for the campaign, can help promote Clark gatherings, and will be essential to assisting fundraising. Simply put, the logic that it is too late to enter the race for the Democratic nomination belies the reality that the current primary campaign is wide open, that Clark enjoys a growing number of volunteers, and that the Internet provides an immediate path to fundraise and accomplish campaign advance work.

If Clark does enter the race, an enormous amount of critical public attention will be placed on him as the "new" candidate. It must be expected that the media and pundits will have high expectations. Even though Clark has never run for political office, the media and pundits will

¹³ Just this one group, for example, helped organized 7000 members on Meetup.com, developed an email base of over 30,000 supporters, conducted outreach to political leaders in Washington D.C. and state legislators and political leaders in Iowa, New Hampshire, and South Carolina, and has begun an aggressive fundraising campaign.

expect Clark to present a solid understanding of both foreign and domestic policy issues and problems. More importantly, a Clark candidacy, to be truly successful, must be quickly perceived as having a strong level of policy competence, a clear vision for America, and a “winning image.” If Clark is viewed as credible, the necessary monies, donors, and financial support that fuel all modern campaigns should flood in. If Clark can showcase a high level of policy acumen in the first set of debates, coupled with a charismatic and impassioned message to the public, one should expect the standing of a Clark candidacy to surge within the first months of his candidacy.

The most important and difficult step for Clark will be to develop and present a vision that appeals to a Democratic base, moderate Democrats, and independents, who are clearly frustrated with the current state of political affairs. As many of the current nine candidates have displayed, balancing such views proves a challenge to even the most seasoned of political animals. To truly stand out in the current elite field, Clark must avoid a retread of old messages, tired aphorisms, and obtuse or confusing policy positions that have plagued many of the current campaigns. Clark must also avoid a campaign that is overly stolid and mechanical – as some of the campaigns come across. While it may seem idealistic and naïve to the more seasoned political operatives, the reason why Howard Dean has displayed such signs of strength, is because of a growing perception among Democrats that he is the only impassioned candidate with a vision for the nation – irrespective of whether it is the best vision or not.

For Wesley Clark, the obstacle is not whether it is too late to enter the race or whether he lacks the necessary monies and staff to campaign, but whether he can articulate an impassioned vision on how he can better lead the nation. The challenge, of course, is that as a political novice, with little name recognition outside certain circles of interest, Clark will have to expend considerable energy to both familiarize and inform the voter about his vision for America. The strategic goal for Clark is that he will have to win the hearts and minds of voters who will be hearing and seeing him for the first time. The first public impressions of Wesley Clark – as a candidate on the stump and at the first set of debates – will be telling as to whether his candidacy gains strength and proves competitive. In other words, the lateness of the campaign start pales in importance to the vision, ideas, and message Wesley Clark presents to the voter.

Conclusion

While some pundits may emphasize the significant disadvantages from Clark’s possible “late start,” one must seriously ask what advantages – aside from Dean – have the other elite candidates gained from being in this race early? The answer is **not one of the expected leaders of this race** – with all the money, organization, campaign experience, political contacts, name recognition, staff, pollsters, and consultants – can claim that they are the “true” frontrunner. As already stated, many of the campaigns seem to be stagnant or, in the case of Lieberman and Kerry, losing the early leads they seem to have once enjoyed. If there is even a semblance of a frontrunner emerging, it is the innovative and aggressive campaign of a candidate many thought

had little chance among this field - Howard Dean. In short, with over five months before the first primary, not a single one of the current elite candidates appears in a dominant or strong position.

This first analysis of Wesley Clark's candidacy suggests that because the race is so wide open, Clark can readily and immediately compete for the Democratic nomination. The argument that it is too late for Clark to enter the race for the nomination is, at best, weak and appears to ignore the findings and trends of recent polls. In the absence of one or two dominant political figures in the race, a Clark candidacy can – based on how well he performs on the stump and in the first few debates – be a viable and competitive one. Of course, if Clark were to wait until after the beginning of the first set of debates, his candidacy could be weakened permanently. Rather than argue whether it is too late for Wesley Clark to enter the race, the focus of the debate should be on how competitive Clark will be if and when he enters the race for the Democratic nomination.

A Final Thought

Does Wesley Clark, a former four-star general and political novice, have the winning image and policy positions that suggests he could credibly challenge the current field of democratic candidates and the president in the 2004 election? The short answer is yes. The forthcoming second part of this analysis will review the expected themes of the next general election, examine Wesley Clark's strengths and weaknesses as a candidate, and assess how well he would compete with nine Democratic candidates and President Bush. The preliminary findings suggest that Wesley Clark's image, his extensive national security bona fides, and moderate policy positions, provide Clark with all of the political ingredients to be an extremely competitive candidate in 2004. Arguably, the real challenge for Wesley Clark will be to translate his political potential into political reality. If Wesley Clark can exploit this unique opportunity by entering what is a wide open Democratic race, and if he can translate this potential into reality, it is quite possible that General Wesley Clark could indeed become the next Democratic nominee and the president of the United States.