

Rangel, other Black leaders endorse Clark

NEW YORK (AP) - Retired Gen. Wesley Clark, who is running for president, cited his record of supporting affirmative action in the armed forces at a rally in Harlem last Thursday as evidence that he deserves the support of Black voters.

"I've fought for it, I've fought with African-Americans, I've served under African-Americans, I'm proud to have been there," Clark told a group of about 200 supporters, most of them white.

"But it's not about what you sign on paper, it's about who you are as a person. And my African-American friends know me as a person who's fair, who's honest and who believes in human beings."

Rep. Charles Rangel, a Korean war veteran who for months has backed Clark in the Democratic contest, officially endorsed Clark at the gathering.

The congressman has worked behind the scenes in his home district of Harlem, around the state, and in the Congressional Black Caucus on Capitol Hill to win support for Clark, based largely on Clark's opposition to the war in Iraq and his ability on many fronts "to beat this guy Bush," Rangel said Thursday.

"The biggest contribution that this general can make for civil rights equity and justice in this country is to get rid of George Bush,"



Democratic presidential candidate and retired U.S. Gen. Wesley Clark, left, delivers a keynote speech while surrounded by supporters, including Rep. Charles Rangel, D-N.Y., right, at a campaign event in Harlem last week. Clark trails Howard Dean in polling.

Rangel told the crowd, which included several veterans.

The Harlem congressman also took the opportunity to poke fun at Howard Dean, the former Vermont governor who appeared in Harlem this week to accept former Vice President Al Gore's endorsement, adding political

heft to his campaign.

"What I did hear was, that Dean and Gore told the cabbie to 'take us to Harvard,' and he dropped them off in Harlem instead," Rangel said.

Clark refused to be drawn into discussions about Dean and his lead over the eight other

candidates, preferring to stick to "what's wrong with George Bush and his policies."

He accused the president of supporting a policy of "perpetual war," and proclaimed himself "the person to face down the commander in chief."

Rangel agreed, saying: "In times of war, we need a warrior."

Clark told the group that Bush "looks backwards" in his vision for America, by trying to "emulate his father's war against Saddam Hussein," and "Ronald Reagan's tax cut for the wealthy."

"That's a guy who thinks America's best days are behind us," he said. "I don't. I think our best days are ahead."

Clark also picked up the support of several state and local officials, including state Senate Minority Leader David Paterson, the Legislature's highest ranking Black member.

Another prominent Black leader, Andrew Young, plans to endorse Clark at a Dec. 21 campaign event in South Carolina, according to officials familiar with discussions about the event, speaking on condition of anonymity.

The endorsement from Young, a civil rights trailblazer and former United Nations ambassador, is expected just six weeks before South Carolina's Feb. 3 primary, where Blacks vote in high numbers.

Frontrunner Dean must still compete for black support

By Hazel Trice Edney
Special to Sentinel-Voice

WASHINGTON (NNPA) - Although Democratic presidential front-runner Howard Dean has received several key endorsements, including one from former Vice President Al Gore, he does not have a lock on the Black vote, political analysts say.

"If Dean reaches out to the rank and file, when he reaches out to grass roots African-Americans by addressing the issues, by asking for their support, then Howard Dean will have a leg up in the race," says Donna Brazile, Gore's former campaign manager. "In terms of the Black vote, I think the Black vote is up for grabs."

Gore's endorsement of Dean at the National Black Theatre's Institute for Action Arts in Harlem last week, caps several important endorsements, including those by Congressmen Bobby Scott (D-Va.), Major Owens (D-N.Y.), and Jesse Jackson Jr., (D-Ill.); the American Federation of State, County and Municipal Employees (AFSCME); and the Service Employees International.

He also got the endorsement of Congressional Black Caucus Chairman Elijah Cummings (D-Md.) last week.

But the party's 2000 presidential nominee's decision to bypass his vice presidential running mate, Senator Joseph

Lieberman (D-Conn.), in favor of Dean has been the most surprising development.

"It is a line of demarcation," says University of Maryland Political Scientist Ron Walters, who has complained that Democrats have drifted to the Right. "For him, who was the highest former official in the Democratic Party leadership, to now apparently break with that and is supporting Dean, means that he supports a change in the party's direction."

And because of Gore's popularity among African-Americans - he won a larger percentage of the Black vote than Bill Clinton - political observers are eager to see if that popularity can be transferred to Dean.

"This gives Howard Dean some inroads into the Black community because Al Gore, like Bill Clinton, was very well respected, but Howard Dean ultimately has to reach out to African-Americans," says Brazile, the only African-American to manage the campaign of a non-Black presidential candidate.

Some observers feel that political endorsements are overrated.

"[Jesse] Jackson Sr. didn't have the endorsement of Black leaders in '84 and he still got about 70 percent of the Black primary vote," observes Katherine Tate, chairwoman of the Department of Political Science at the Uni-

versity of California at Irvine. Jesse Jackson Sr. has made no endorsement, but issued a statement saying the endorsements of Congressional Black Caucus members and Al Gore are "pivotal milestones on the road to the White House for Howard Dean."

Cummings says his endorsement of Dean is individual; not as chair of the 39-member CBC, which appears to be stratified.

Veteran CBC member Charlie Rangel (D-N.Y.), endorsed former Gen. Wesley Clark last week. When Clark told an audience about his worked for affirmative action in the armed services, Rangel responded, "The biggest contribution that this general can make for civil rights equity and justice in this country is to get rid of George Bush."

Also, former CBC Chairman Rep. James E. Clyburn (D-S.C.) endorsed Rep. Dick Gephardt, former House Democratic leader. During a teleconference, Clyburn said, "I will work tirelessly for him."

Gephardt, who has an African-American issues section on his campaign Web site, says: "When the Republicans took over the Congress, they tried to get rid of affirmative action. [Jim Clyburn] was the lead in fighting against the Republican effort to get rid of affirmative action and I fought by his side,

under his leadership."

No member of the Congressional Black Caucus has endorsed Al Sharpton or Carol Moseley Braun, the two African-Americans running for the Democratic nomination. As most Black political leaders line up behind Dean, Sharpton continues to make the former Vermont governor his primary Democratic target.

The day after the Gore endorsement last week,

Sharpton issued a statement asking, "Will the Real Howard Dean Please Stand Up?" In it, he cites news articles that raise questions about Dean's allegiance to issues import to Black voters, such as his support of the death penalty and his appointment of conservative judges while governor of Vermont.


Tate, the California political scientist, says Sharpton's criticism of Dean is on point.

"This [election] will be debated on the issues. And in fact, Dean has, I understand, a very mixed bag of policy positions," Tate observes. "Sharpton is liberal, so this is going to be a contrast."

Walters, the University of Maryland expert, thinks the contrast will not be sufficient for Sharpton, who was the candidate most favored by Blacks in a recent Gallop Poll, to overtake Dean.


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Theron Dickerson
Coldwell Banker Wardley Real Estate
7670 W. Lake Mead Blvd., Suite 100
Las Vegas, NV 89128
theron.dickerson@cox.net



(702)245-8227