



Media Reality ✓ Check

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Time, Newsweek, U.S. News Raised Prospect of Liberal Trouble, But Manuevered Dean to the Middle News Magazines Plug “Centrist” Howard Dean

The Howard Dean media juggernaut arrived in the news magazines this week, with cover stories in *Time* and *Newsweek*, and a major inside spread in *U.S. News & World Report*. Once again, as a sign of his rapid ascent to plausibility as a Democratic contender, the news magazine writers all tried to acknowledge that while Dean may be pegged by the GOP as another New England ultraliberal, he isn't really liberal. He's somewhere in the mushy middle:

Newsweek. Jonathan Alter allowed the internal party argument that Dean is too easily painted as liberal, including quotes from Lieberman pollster Mark Penn and Kerry campaign manager Jim Jordan.

But Alter argued the Democratic Party is “not so much divided ideologically as confused tactically” and that the difference between a Dean and a Lieberman on fully repealing the Bush tax cuts is a “tactical — not ideological — struggle.... **The old labels are increasingly useless.** Dean, for instance, is **hardly an old-fashioned big-spending liberal.** As governor from 1991 to 2002, he repeatedly balanced the budget, though Vermont is the only state that doesn't require him to do so by law.” Early on, Alter explained, he “developed a reputation as a **centrist.**”

Alter added in Vermont, “Dean focused on fiscal responsibility” and “**On social issues, he resisted most liberal blandishments.**” Only later does he acknowledge the radical whopper (our label, not Alter's) of Dean signing gay “civil unions” into law, which led to a Republican surge in Vermont. *Newsweek's* Q&A with Dean was introduced with the sentence: “**He may be the left's hero, but Howard Dean doesn't fit neatly into the political pegboard.**”

Time. Karen Tumulty's article raised the Democratic fears that “Karl Rove is making no secret of how he would relish...acquainting swing voters with a **shrill Northeasterner who is antiwar and pro-gay union.**” John Cloud described Dean as “the great repository of hope — and donations — from **the antiwar, anti-Bush, pro-gay, Michael Moore left.**”

But Cloud quickly manuevered Dean into the squishy center: “What's unclear is whether he has surged because

contributors and poll respondents think he is a new kind of Old Democrat — a candidate who will finally revive the left — or because those contributors and respondents know the truth — he is **a rock-ribbed budget hawk, a moderate on gays and guns, and a true lefty on only a few issues,** primarily the use of U.S. military power.” Asked whether her son is a liberal, Dean's mother told Cloud, “He's not really...I just hope they don't find that out just yet.”

We've Seen This Wishful Thinking Before

“George Bush wants to convince voters than Michael Dukakis is a big spender who will raise taxes, coddle criminals, and disarm America. In other words, a ‘liberal.’ But does the dreaded ‘L’ word stick to Dukakis? Probably not.” — *Newsweek's* table of contents, July 4, 1988.

Cloud asked: “**So is he a liberal, a conservative, or something in between? The answer is, all of the above.**” Dean's plan to create universal socialized medicine is “**modest** by Democratic standards.” Dean's civil-unions law was somehow “a **moderate** compromise.”

U.S. News. Roger Simon reported Dean opponents “say that while there might be a theoretical opportunity for enough **angry hard-core lefties,** McCainiacs, Perotistas, Greens, and Deanie Boppers to put Dean over the top in the primaries, he will be a sitting duck for George Bush, defender of America, who will use Dean's antiwar stance to paint him as a **squishy-soft liberal** who will not defend the nation in time of crisis.”

But Simon located others who “find Dean's style invigorating,” including self-declared Republican Joe Mathews, who says he'll vote Dean “because **he admires the fiscal conservatism** Dean displayed in 11 years as governor. ‘What the rest of the country is starting to find out,’ he says, ‘is **Dean is not particularly left wing.** And as far as checkbook issues, he is **to the right of George Bush,** because if it isn't in the bank, Dean doesn't spend it.’” Watch out for media outlets trying to publicize ridiculous Dean-fan claims that repealing all of the President's tax cuts puts you “to the right” of Bush. — *Tim Graham*

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