



Gephardt: Different states, same issues

By Meg Heckman 11/4/03

A hard-hat-studded march to the State House, a little ink, a check for \$1,000 and Rep. Dick Gephardt became the first of the nine major Democratic candidates to get his name on the ballot for New Hampshire's presidential primary.

But he's not banking on victory here when the polls close in January. After attaching a triumphant signature to the filing papers, he told reporters that former Vermont governor Howard Dean, Sen. John Kerry and Sen. Joe Lieberman are tough opponents for a Midwesterner like himself.

"You've got three candidates who come from the neighborhood," he said, as camera flashes bounced around a tiny conference room in the secretary of state's office. "But I think I can get a solid finish here . . . I believe I'll win Iowa and come in very solid top-tier here."

To make this prediction a reality, the Missouri congressman has been spending plenty of time in Iowa and Midwestern states with early primaries in hopes of dominating his own backyard. At the same time, he's wooing voters in these parts by talking about the things he believes matter to people in Iowa, New Hampshire and everywhere in between.

"The ideas I have have universal appeal," he said, sipping McDonalds coffee between campaign stops yesterday. "Health care is the common denominator, education is important to people in New Hampshire and everywhere else. Jobs, trade

are important everywhere and in every state."

His trip yesterday covered it all. A group of bathrobe-clad seniors at an Exeter retirement community listened to Gephardt give an early - morning explanation of how he would increase Medicare reimbursements for rural states like New Hampshire.

Later, a slew of middle school students and a few dozen adults questioned Gephardt about his views on education and child welfare at an Every Child Matters Forum at the University of New Hampshire.

And when he got to Concord to file, Gephardt was greeted by a crowd of hard-hat-wearing union members.

"Gephardt, Gephardt, Gephardt, goooooo" Gephardt," they chanted when he told them he would create jobs and enforce worldwide work standards.

His supporters were venting more than a month's worth of pent-up energy. Yesterday was the first time in more than a month the congressman has come to New Hampshire, although his wife and grown children visit often. Supporters won't get to see him at today's Rock the Vote debate in Boston, either. Gephardt is skipping it because he has an appointment in Iowa.

While Gephardt is likely to spend many more days there in the coming weeks, his campaign is planning a final January push in New Hampshire.

"By saving our money in New Hampshire to spend later

rather than early . . . we're going to be in a position to do well," Gephardt's national campaign manager, Steve Murphy, said last week.

The congressman's absence didn't seem to hurt him here yesterday. In addition to the unions' fervent and faithful crowd, Gephardt made at least a few undecided voters take note.

"I was impressed today," Concord resident Dwight Haynes said. "He wasn't just saying jobs for Americans, he was saying we need to raise the standard for everyone . . . that's not typical politics. He's been a part of the national scene. Like Dean, he's won lots of elections. He has staying power."

Mike Watson, an airline pilot who attended Gephardt's speech in Exeter, also liked Gephardt's experience.

"He had facts available," he said. "I don't think anyone stumped him . . . I think he can probably tell everybody what Mr. Bush is really like without sounding angry. You need somebody who can say what he does without making it personal. I think Mr. Gephardt can do that."

Ralph Harwood accompanied Haynes to the State House. He championed Gephardt in the 1980s and, although he's undecided this time around, thinks the Congressman could do well in New Hampshire and beyond.

"I think he has a broader appeal over a larger section of the nation," he said.