



Dean returns to campus for the children

By Chris Simpson 11/1/03

According to Howard Dean, one difference between himself and other Democratic candidates is that many of them need to stop acting like Bush.

With the Democratic presidential primary merely months away, the Every Child Matters Education Fund has offered each candidate the opportunity to inform New Hampshire voters about their individual policy positions and perspectives on matters critical to children, youth and families. Howard Dean is the latest candidate to take up the offer, participating in the fifth (of eight) forums at UNH.

On Oct. 31, an audience of parents, students and representatives of child-serving organizations crammed into Huddleston Hall to listen to Dean field questions from both a panel and from audience members.

In his opening statement, Dean emphasized what he sees as a terrible crisis in

the United States: that there is not enough attention paid to small children. Gov. Dean said that the nation must develop a stronger focus upon children between the impressionable ages of 0-3.

"Any qualified kindergarten teacher can tell which five students are going to jail," he said.

Parents play a large role in Dean's ideas.

"Parents are the child's first teacher," he said. Dean recounted the success he had in reducing violence against children in Vermont. As governor, Dean arranged for every mother to receive a visit from a state worker at the time of birth, with an offer for a home visit soon after. He emphasized the fact that 91 percent of homes accepted the offer for a follow-up visit.

Dean also detailed the success of his health care for children program. Under his plan, 99 percent of

children under the age of 18 were eligible for state-funded health care, and an impressive 96 percent signed up. He stressed that it is "dirt cheap" to maintain a health care program for children, even a plan as comprehensive as the one implemented in Vermont.

Dean did not shy away from a chance to highlight the differences between the other Democratic candidates and himself, boldly suggesting they "stop behaving like Bush and show the difference in the parties."

Every Child Matters Education Fund President and event co-moderator Michael Petit said, "We are delighted at the energy and thoughtfulness all of the candidates are bringing to these events. New Hampshire's voters are getting exactly what they want: the focus on their kids that they have been waiting for."