

## Howard Dean target of Democratic wrath Seen as responsible for party's prez woes

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Photo by AP (file)



Democratic stalwarts who overwhelmingly elected Dr. Howard Dean as Democratic National Committee chairman may be wishing they'd gotten a second opinion, analysts said.

As the presidential primary season grinds on, the ex-Vermont governor once hailed as a 21st century grass-roots fund-raising guru now could be held responsible for procedural missteps that could squander the Dems' chance to overthrow the Republican party.

"What's going to matter is whether the convention is a big success and a nominee is elected. If those things happen no one will remember the snafu," said Larry Sabato, director of the University of Virginia Center for Politics. "If, on the other hand, the Democrats managed to blow a good opportunity here, everyone will suffer, and that includes Dean."

Hillary Clinton's victory over Barack Obama in Pennsylvania on Tuesday means the battle will continue for weeks, and recent polls have shown Republican Sen. John McCain pulling even with the Democrats as the intraparty fight becomes increasingly nasty.

Dean should have pushed to make tweaks in the Democrats' primary rules, Sabato argues, saying the system is so inclusive it makes it difficult to determine a decisive victory.

"The Democrats have developed a system that is so fair it's unfair," Sabato said.

Under the Democrats' system, delegates are appropriated proportionally, meaning both candidates win some delegates in each contest, and leaving them nailbitingly close months after McCain clinched the Republican nomination. The GOP has a winner-take-all primary system.

The candidates' vote totals also became muddled when Michigan and Florida lost their delegates after they scheduled early primaries in violation of party rules. Those decisions were made by the Dems' rules committee.

Jim Roosevelt Jr., co-chairman of the DNC rules committee and a Massachusetts superdelegate, defended Dean.

"He has provided really strong leadership that has not been biased in either direction. That's his role. He's also spoken out about importance of resolving this before too late in the season," Roosevelt said.

Until the contest is resolved, Dean is powerless to throw the weight of the party behind either candidate.

"Howard Dean is caught between the devil and the deep blue sea," said Christopher Hull, political professor at Georgetown University. "As long as there is a shooting war between two high-profile candidates for president, Howard Dean is going to be stuck in the middle."

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