

Mike Duncan and Howard Dean



WHY THEY MADE HISTORY As leaders of the Republican National Committee and the Democratic National Committee, Mike Duncan and Howard Dean helped shape the directions of the two major U.S. political parties.

As you read the biographies below, think about the way each man has worked to promote his party and his political beliefs.

MIKE DUNCAN

1951–present

A Kentucky native, Mike Duncan has been active in Republican politics for over 35 years. After graduating from law school, Duncan interned in the Kentucky legislature, where he developed an appreciation for public service. Although he planned to go into politics, he eventually took over at a Kentucky bank owned by his father-in-law. Today Duncan owns two community banks in eastern Kentucky.

Duncan has served the Republican Party at all levels during his years in politics, from precinct captain to national officer. He is deeply involved in the Kentucky Republican Party and worked to transform it from the state's minority party in the 1970s to the dominant party in 2006, when Republicans controlled the majority of Kentucky's U.S. congressional seats, the governorship, and the state senate.

On the national level, Duncan has served as a Kentucky delegate to multiple Republican National Conventions and has worked on the campaigns of five Republican presidents: Richard Nixon, Gerald Ford, Ronald Reagan, George H. W. Bush, and George W. Bush. He has served in several prominent positions in the Republican National Committee (RNC), including treasurer and general counsel. In 2007 he was elected chair of the RNC, replacing outgoing chair Ken Mehlman.

Duncan is known for working behind the scenes to build the party. As he said in a speech after being elected chair, "My job is not to be the man who makes policy . . . or even a man who makes headlines. My job is to be the man who wins elections." As chair of the RNC, he pledged to return to the party to core Republican values of lower taxes, limited government, and individual responsibility. Duncan has also emphasized the party's get-out-the-vote strategy and the importance of building its base of volunteers at the grassroots level.

HOWARD DEAN**1948–present**

A physician and politician, Howard Dean became the leader of the Democratic National Committee in 2005, after serving as governor of Vermont and running unsuccessfully for the Democratic Party's nomination for president. Dean first turned to politics in the early 1980s, serving in the Vermont legislature and as the state's lieutenant governor; he was elevated to governor when then-governor Richard Snell died suddenly in 1991. Dean was subsequently elected governor for five two-year terms.

As governor, Dean was a strong advocate of fiscal responsibility. Under his leadership, Vermont repeatedly balanced its budget and paid off much of its debt. Dean also worked on health-care issues, seeking to improve health-care coverage for Vermonters.

The 2004 presidential election saw Dean come to national attention in his unsuccessful run for the Democratic nomination. Dean's strong opposition to the U.S.-led invasion of Iraq won him the support of many Democrats, but his campaign's groundbreaking use of the Internet to raise money and build grassroots support was key to his rapid rise in the polls.

Although Dean's campaign began to crumble when he finished a disappointing third in the Iowa caucuses, he soon returned to politics, founding the political action committee Democracy for America (DFA). DFA's goals are to support fiscally responsible, socially progressive Democrats at all levels of government.

In 2005 Dean was elected chair of the Democratic National Committee, the national organization of the Democratic Party. As chairman, Dean's goal is to improve fund-raising and to build the Democratic Party at all levels in all areas of the country. He hopes to develop capable young Democratic candidates in local races, with the hope that these candidates will eventually go on to success in state and national elections. This strategy helped contribute to the Democratic success in the 2006 congressional elections, in which the Democrats took control of the U.S. Senate and House of Representatives.

WHAT DID YOU LEARN?

1. **Recall** How have Duncan and Dean worked to build their political parties?

2. **Evaluate** Which background in politics do you think might be best for the leader of a national party: working behind the scenes or serving as an elected official? Why?
