



Benefits of a Presidential Bid

With So Many Candidates in the Field, What Happens to All the Losers?

By WILLEM MARX

Feb. 1, 2007 — - So far there are 20 bids in the presidential race. But have you ever wondered why the long-shot candidates even bother?

Perhaps because even presidential losers can end up as financial winners.

Beside the heavyweights like John McCain, Hillary Clinton, Rudy Giuliani and Barack Obama, many other politicians are vying for their party's nomination.

This is nothing unusual, according to political science professor William Mayer of Northeastern University. "The nonincumbent party -- which in 2008 is the Democrats -- usually has a very large field, and on the Republican side they are in the same boat because there's no vice president [running for election]," Mayer said.

The long-shot candidate's motto might be "remember Jimmy Carter." When the race for the 1976 Democratic nomination began, Carter was widely seen as a long shot. But by the time the primary season was half finished, he had left the other, better-known Democratic contenders in the dust.

Nevertheless, today's field certainly has a number of candidates who could charitably be described as having outside chances. That includes Rep. Duncan Hunter of California. Hunter is a conservative in the Republican field, but he has barely registered a percentage point in the latest, albeit early, polling.

In fact, the 14-term congressman is aiming to be the first sitting House member elected president since James Garfield in 1880.

Hunter admitted he is less than a shoo-in when he spoke to ABC's George Stephanopoulos. "On the other hand, somebody's got to win this race," Hunter said on ABC's "This Week."

But Dennis W. Johnson of George Washington University's Graduate School of Political Management disagreed: "It's got to be some kind of psychic ego problem with Hunter. He's got zero visibility, so why is he out there?"

"The best short answer may be, what have they got to lose?" professor Mayer added. "A run gets them a bit of time in the limelight, it can get you in on the political dialogue, and Al Sharpton is a good example of that. He is now a serious player in Democratic politics."

Rep. Tom Tancredo of Colorado readily acknowledges the challenge he faces for the 2008 Republican

nomination. "Yeah, I'm an underdog, but it's been the case almost every single time I've run," he told the Associated Press recently at a GOP event in New Hampshire.

Others at the bottom in the hopefuls hierarchy -- taking no more than 1 percent in recent early polls -- are Sen. Chris Dodd and Gov. Tom Vilsack, both Democrats, and Tommy Thompson and Rep. Ron Paul, both Republicans.

Dodd has been a Connecticut senator for more than a quarter of a century, while Vilsack began life in a Catholic orphanage and went on to serve two terms as governor of Iowa.

Thompson hopes to capitalize on his four years of experience in the Bush administration as secretary of health and human services, as well as his experience as governor of Wisconsin. This will be Paul's second run for the White House. His first was as the Libertarian candidate way back in 1988.

Some of the extreme fringe candidates for 2008 will be competing in their third or fourth campaigns, but as presidential historian Bruce Buchanan noted, "Nixon and Reagan ran a load of times before they got the recognition they needed."

So it would be unsurprising if this glut of latest presidential hopefuls causes some voters to ask, "what are they hoping to gain from a White House run?"

If previous contests are anything to go by, the answer to this might be quite a lot.

"They qualify for a very privileged circle, with money and influence," said Buchanan, who currently lectures about the criteria for a successful presidential campaign at the University of Texas in Austin.

Conservative activist Gary Bauer, a domestic policy adviser in the Reagan White House, pulled out of the 2000 presidential election after a poor showing in the primaries. Since then, Bauer founded the nonprofit, anti-abortion group American Values, has occasionally co-hosted a radio talk show, and told ABC News that when he is giving a speech anywhere other than a church or synagogue audience, "I normally expect between \$5,000 and \$7,000 for my public appearances."

It's not only the fringe players who benefit from the experience of running a presidential campaign. Even a loss can raise a politician's public profile -- to their benefit.

Howard Dean became the governor of Vermont after his predecessor Richard Snelling died in office, but after 12 years in the gubernatorial chair he launched a presidential bid for the 2004 election. Though he lost out to Sen. John Kerry for the Democrat nomination, successful Internet fundraising during his campaign helped land him the job of chairman of the Democrat National Committee.

"Howard Dean did sufficiently well in his presidential run to become a major player in Democratic politics, which he would not otherwise have been as the ex-governor of a small state," said Professor Mayer.

Former Sen. Bill Bradley, D-N.J., was defeated by Vice President Al Gore in the 2000 primaries, but a previous high-profile role with investment bank JP Morgan was followed in 2001 by his appointment as adviser to the premier consulting firm McKinsey & Company.

Bradley was also given a managing director role at the well-connected New York bank, Allen & Company, and given a seat on the Starbucks corporate board.

Former Sen. Gary Hart failed to make the Democrat ticket in both the 1984 and 1988 campaigns. Since then Hart has assumed the role of a national security expert, co-chairing a Clinton administration panel aimed at safeguarding American interests in the post-Cold War era and studying for his doctorate on Thomas Jefferson's American ideals at Oxford University.

Alan Keyes was considered a serious long shot when he pursued the Republican nomination in both 1996 and 2000. Since then the Harvard doctorate has kept himself busy, hosting a 2002 MSNBC talk show, writing books and reportedly earning between \$10,000 and \$20,000 for public speaking appearances.

So there is some hope, even for the long shots, according to Mayer's research. "Normally the nomination is won by the early front-runner, but hope springs eternal with these people," he concluded.

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