

Independents emerge from Midwest

BY MARIAH BOHANON
Staff Reporter

As the next presidential election approaches, candidates are filing for candidacy all over the country, including the Midwest.

"It's a 'we' thing"

John Blyth has run the gamut of jobs in his life, including dishwasher, bricklayer and senior citizen care provider. Now he's ready for a career change: president of the United States.

"It's not even about John Blyth," Blyth said. "It's about putting us back on track."

The 47-year-old Chicago native decided to enter the 2008 election because he is dissatisfied with the direction in which the country is moving. Blyth wants to restore decency and honor to the presidency not only in America's eyes, but also from an international viewpoint, he said. He said he thinks that a non-partisan approach that focuses on unity and conclusiveness will help put the country on the right track with the right people.

"It starts with me, it starts with you, it starts with us," Blyth said.

Blyth started Group Health Insurance Sales, which provides coverage for small businesses, in 1993. He said he thinks health insurance premiums are far too expensive, especially in the private sector.

Blyth supports a national health care plan but won't disclose its details until further into the election process. The plan was posted on Blyth's campaign Web site, Blythamerica.com, but he removed it after seeing candidates on TV using some of the information he had posted. There are a lot of good ideas for providing national health care coverage that could lead to a composite solution, he said.

Blyth has a decisive stance on many of the major issues of the 2008 election. He doesn't support the war in Iraq and wants to withdraw troops as soon as it is safely possible. He estimates that it could take anywhere from a year to 15 months to end the war.

"My Catholicism has nothing to do with the war," he explained. "[The war is] just not right."

Blyth also said he is in favor of strengthening the U.S. borders but that he is not extremely anti-immigration. He thinks there is a more level-headed way to deal with illegal immigrants than resorting to the vigilantism that some Americans seem to be turning toward, he said.

Gay marriage is a non-issue to Blyth. He wants the nation to focus on matters that are more important in the large scope of things, he said.

"As far as Congress getting big bills passed, where is gay marriage compared to that?" Blyth said. "We don't need an amendment for it when things like immigration and armor for our soldiers is at



Blake Ashby



John Blyth

Steps to a Federal Office: Candidate Registration

- An potential candidate first **tests the waters** to see if a campaign will be feasible.
- When a **campaign exceeds \$5,000**, an individual becomes a candidate.
- The candidate must then file a **statement of candidacy**, designating a principal campaign committee which will receive contributions and make expenditures on the candidate's behalf.
- Once the principal campaign committee has been designated, they must file a **Statement of Organization**, identifying specific positions and information related to the committee.

Design by Julie Williams/Index
Source: Federal Election Commission

hand."

Blyth supports education reform and said the Bush administration's No Child Left Behind Act should really be labeled "No Child Left a Dime."

Blyth said he would consider making college tax-deductible or implementing other methods to make paying for higher education less expensive. Recent scandals over college funding are all too typical of the problems with politicians in Washington, he said.

Blyth campaigns in the vicinity of the nearby University of Chicago campus. He said he acknowledges that it can be hard to gain a large public forum compared to candidates with more funding but that he remains optimistic about his chances in the election. He said that having a campaign Web site is a great way to reach voters.

"After I get enough signatures in each state — which I will — then I'll be on the ballot in all 50 states," he said.

Blyth said that he wants to restore some civility in Washington D.C. and begin something totally new with his campaign.

He said he doesn't think America needs the same bureaucrats leading our nation in domestic or international affairs.

"I think we can certainly do better than what we have now," Blyth said.

He said there is a lot of work to be done to get the country back on the right track, and it will take non-partisan cooperation to accomplish that.

"It's a 'we' thing," Blyth said. "It's an 'us' thing."

"At least he's honest"

Blake Ashby, a business consultant from St. Louis, describes himself as a presidential candidate who will say what other candidates are afraid to say.

"People expect their politicians to lie," Ashby said. "That's why they aren't as disappointed in Giuliani."

A protest candidate in the 2004 election, Ashby is running as an independent candidate in 2008. He said that when he first decided to enter the election about nine months ago, he initially considered running as a Republican.

Ashby said he is frustrated with the Re-

publican party as a whole. Too many Republican candidates have to lie in order to appear suited to be Bush's heir, he said.

"The Republican party would be better off if Kerry had won the election," he said.

Ashby's campaign Web site boasts the slogan "At least he's honest." In regard to issues ranging from the war in Iraq to welfare, he has clear opinions and a set agenda. Ashby said he has a lot of quiet support from traditional Republicans who cannot assist his campaign openly.

Ashby grew up in Kansas City and spent his early twenties working for politicians such as Jim Talent. He said he thinks the most important issue for Midwestern voters is the budget deficit. Taxes will have to be raised to cover the money that the federal government borrowed from Social Security funds, he said.

"President Bush is so strange about this," he said. "He acts as if America is just going to turn around and declare bankruptcy."

Ashby also has strong opinions about the war in Iraq, which he said he thinks will not be over soon.

"We've got to face the reality that we're going to have a lot of troops in Iraq for a very long time in order to gain some stability," he said.

Ashby said Iran is a pivotal ally in winning the war. Iran is a fairly democratic nation and should not be part of Bush's axis of evil, he said.

Allowing the Taliban to participate in Afghanistan's government is another foreign policy on which Ashby takes a strong stance. The Taliban might be cooperative in capturing Osama bin Laden, and they are representative of the Afghan people, Ashby said.

"You've got to remember, before 2001, the U.S. was the Taliban's largest source of outside funding," Ashby said.

To address the energy crisis, Ashby proposes that the U.S. double its use of nuclear energy. It is realistic to use nuclear energy because America cannot have the benefits of industrialization without some risk, he said. Ashby said environmentalists often acknowledge nuclear energy as the best course to take in fighting dependence on dirty fossil fuels.

Ashby's most controversial position might be his stance on children raised on welfare. The current welfare system makes it difficult to take a child away from parents who cannot or do not care for him or her, he said. Standards for children in poor neighborhoods often are set by those children who are least cared for and behave the worst, he said. Ashby said he believes in the concept that it takes a village to raise a child, and that communities as a whole should become more responsible for children whose parents are irresponsible.

"If a parent can economically support their child, there's a chance that they're growing up with better values," he said.

Ashby said he has a firm belief that all people are equal in their ability to decide what is best for themselves. The government's highest priority except for national defense should be education, he said. He said the education system is not providing equal tools or opportunities for all students.

The costs of higher education are an example of the education system's inequality, he said.

"The funding system limits opportunities," Ashby said. "If you're going to pile on \$100,000 in debt, you're going to be stuck in the one path that helps you pay that off the fastest."

Ashby said the student loan system benefits lenders more than students. He said there is no global answer to higher education funding.

Ashby said there is a slim-to-none chance of an independent candidate winning the 2008 election.

"The truth is that Ross Perot spent a lot of money and didn't get very many votes," he said. "I hope to at least have an impact on the debates."

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