



FORMER PRESIDENTIAL CANDIDATE RALPH NADER ENTERS 2004 RACE

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Former presidential candidate Ralph Nader announced Sunday that he would once again run for president, upsetting many in the Democratic Party who feel his presence in the 2000 election directly contributed to Al Gore's slim defeat by George Bush.

Nader, a well-known consumer advocate, denied responsibility for the Democratic loss in 2000 and said that his candidacy is about giving voters a choice beyond the Democratic and Republican parties, which he accuses of being dominated by corporate lobbyists who don't care about average Americans.

"With 100 million people not voting, we've got to give them more voices, choices, more exciting involvement and participation so they're not just spectators watching candidates parade in front of them with emotional slogans," Nader told ABC News.

Election 2000

In the 2000 election Nader, who ran as a Green Party candidate, got about 3 percent of the vote; Al Gore and George Bush each got 48 percent. But Nader's involvement in the race was crucial in at least two states, New Hampshire and Florida. In New Hampshire, President Bush won by 7,211 votes over Gore. Nader received 22,198 votes. In Florida Mr. Bush beat Gore by 537 votes. Nader received 97,488 votes.

Nader said the polls show that in 2000, 25 percent of his supporters were Republicans and 38 percent were Democrats. Democrats have argued that if those 38 percent of Democrats had voted for Gore instead of Nader, Mr. Bush would have lost the election and Gore would now be president.

Leading Democrats, who have urged him not to run, have accused Nader of being egotistical and irresponsible.

"This is an act of total vanity and ego satisfaction," said New Mexico Gov. Bill Richardson (D). Nader, he added, "cost us the White House last time, and he could again."

Nader's impact in 2004

Nader, who announced his entry into the race Sunday on NBC's Meet the Press, has predicted that his candidacy is more likely to harm President Bush than the Democratic nominee.

"I'd go after Bush even more vigorously ... in the next few months in ways that the Democrats can't possibly do because they're too cautious and too unimaginative," Nader said.

But even former Nader supporters from 2000 have announced their disappointment in his decision to enter the race.

"I'm very disappointed because I believe that the risk of him helping reelect the most reactionary president in our lifetime greatly exceeds the possible benefits of him making helpful arguments about corporate power in America," said Mark Green, the former New York City public advocate who worked for Nader.

Nader also faces unique challenges that he didn't face in 2000. He is no longer a Green Party candidate, which means that he must get on the ballot as an independent candidate in all 50 states. This would mean collecting about 1.5 million signatures on nominating petitions in all states. Deadlines for collecting the signatures begin as early as May 13.

As an independent candidate, Nader won't be eligible for up to about \$18.6 million in government funding for the primary season, Federal Election Commission spokesman Bob Biersack said. And his failure to capture 5 percent of the vote in 2000 -- he got 2.7 percent -- also prevents him from receiving taxpayer funding in the general election.

Democrats have also pledged to challenge Nader in court to keep him off the ballot.

Responses to the decision

Both leading contenders for the Democratic presidential nomination, Sen. John Kerry of Massachusetts and Sen. John Edwards of South Carolina, have said Nader's entrance into the race would not affect their campaigns.

President Bush's campaign team declined to speculate about the impact of Nader's candidacy on Mr. Bush, but other Republicans openly embraced Nader's running.

"We're happy that Ralph Nader's joined the fray. Good. Bring some more on. Maybe Jesse Jackson can run, and Justin Timberlake will get on the ballot. Who knows? Bring in all of them ... because we're solidly united behind George Bush," Arkansas Republican Gov. Mike Huckabee said.

By Annie Schleicher, NewsHour Extra

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