

Money May Not Buy the Job for 2008 Candidates

By JOSELYN KING

WHEELING — Money may not buy 2008 candidates the jobs they are seeking.

Just as potential 2008 candidates begin to build campaign war chests, Democratic West Virginia secretary of state candidate Natalie Tennant said no one has asked her yet how much money she has raised.

“When I’m out on the campaign trail, nobody asks me, ‘Natalie, how much money do you have?’” she said. “They tell me, ‘We need someone,’ and ‘You should have had it before.’ They want to know what kind of person you are to serve them. People are just happy that I’m running.”

Candidates all admit they need money to wage a political campaign, but the better question is: Just how much is needed for them to be victorious?

A case in point was witnessed at last week’s Iowa Straw Poll. Republican presidential candidate Mitt Romney did come out on top after reportedly spending in excess of \$2 million. But former Arkansas Gov. Mike Huckabee spent less than \$100,000 to capture the second spot and — perhaps more importantly — most of the headlines.

Tennant’s opponent, current House Majority Leader Joe DeLong, D-Hancock, reports contributions thus far to his campaign at \$130,000. Donations

prior to June 15 are listed on his Web site, and when announcing he challenged other candidates in the race to list financial information on their sites.

Tennant said she hasn’t really begun her fundraising yet and hadn’t considered listing her contributors.

“What is the purpose of that?” she asked, noting that financial reports are due to the Secretary of State’s Office in March. “I don’t want to make money the issue of the campaign. The person with the most money doesn’t necessarily deserve to win.

“Money is an important part of the campaign, but you also have to use the money wisely.”

DeLong said money will play a role in his 2008 race.

“In my election, it will be very important,” he said. “My opponent is a former television news anchor. Just to get on a level playing field, I’m either going to have to get a job as an anchor or buy enough advertising to balance out the difference.

“In terms of media exposure, she probably has the equivalent of \$2 million just from working as an anchor in two markets,” he added.

But DeLong agrees it is most important to spend campaign cash wisely.

“I plan to spend my money to introduce myself and get my message out to the voters,” he said. “If I do that, I feel good about my chances. Spending is not such a bad thing if done to educate the voters and to get them to know the candidate better.”

Money Less Important at Local Level

Ohio County Democratic Party Co-chairman Shane Mallett, also an announced candidate for state Senate, equated running a campaign to running a successful business.

“Money is the lifeline of any campaign,” he said. “In today’s world of multimedia, you need to have the funds to be able to get messages or ideas to the voters. If you do not have any money, you can’t get messages out effectively and could lose the campaign.”

He added that seeking campaign contributions also is “a double-edged sword.”

“If you receive money from organizations, you can be labeled as being in bed with those organizations,” Mallett noted. “If you don’t get money from them, your opponent will say you don’t have the necessary support.

“You have to balance to run a campaign in reasonable and effective manner.”

Mallett also sees a second advantage in running a well-funded campaign — or two of them.

“In today’s races, many candidates can run a double-front campaign,” he said. “The first one is to promote their own

ideas, and they run another, separate one to attack the opposing candidate.”

Mallett has announced he will run for the seat currently held by state Sen. Andy McKenzie, R-Ohio, who has served 12 years in the state Legislature.

“Money is definitely important to a campaign, but it is not the most important thing,” McKenzie said. “There are different kinds of politics. At the presidential level, it’s at its most important. But as you get closer to the people, money becomes less important. People want to be able to touch the candidate and feel that they are a real person.”

At the local level, elections are won by the person who works the hardest and connects the most, he added.

“A candidate has to come across as genuine,” McKenzie said. “People have to see them as being a real person. If they do not have those qualities, people will see right through those expensive commercials.”

Both McKenzie and Mallett pointed to two recent examples of campaigns where spending the most money and winning the election didn’t go hand in hand.

Democrat Jim Humpheys spent millions of his own money in 2000 and 2002 in running against the victorious U.S. Rep. Shelley Moore Capito, R-W.Va.

In 2006, current Delegate Tal Hutchins, D-Ohio, spent considerably less than his three opponents in winning one of two delegate seats in Ohio County.

Money From Outside Groups at the National Level

After 25 years in Congress, voters already know U.S. Rep. Alan Mollohan, D-W.Va.

Mollohan, though, said money and advertising are going to be as important to his 2008 campaign — if not more so — than they ever have been.

His comment comes as the National Republican Congressional Committee begins a series of ads against Mollohan throughout the state.

“You don’t have to the most money to win an election,” Mollohan said. “But the problem is all the money being spent by outside groups. It’s all about who can saturate the market the most.”

He added, though, that there have been cases where the candidate who achieved

the most saturation didn’t win the election.

NRCC spokesman Ken Spain also acknowledged this fact.

“Money is a factor in elections, but there were a number of candidates who won the last cycle and were outspent,” he said. “It comes down to the importance of grassroots support and maintaining the trust of constituents.

Each individual race is different, according to Spain. He said it is up to each individual candidate to run the best campaign possible.

“If a candidate has been successful in competing in a campaign, the NRCC takes that into consideration,” he said.

“In the end, all the money in the world cannot change the fact that Mollohan continues to serve his own interests instead of the interests of his constituents.”