PLANNING TO BECOME A CANDIDATE FOR OFFICE FOR THE CONSTITUTION PARTY

I. At the outset, consideration should be given to the threshold question: What is the purpose of a political party?

While there may be many aspects of a political party, its main purpose is to offer candidates for public office who support the principles stated in the party platform and to elect those candidates to office. If a party does not offer candidates for office then it ceases to be anything other than a discussion group or, perhaps, an educational organization. Only by offering *candidates* can an organization justify its existence as a political party.

In new parties, such as the Constitution Party, there is often an emphasis on the office of President, at the national level, and Governor at the statewide level. This usually occurs because (1) these offices are higher in visibility and attract more interest, and (2) the party often needs to secure a certain percentage of the vote for these offices in order to its maintain ballot status in the state. The latter reason is one that cannot be ignored and is of utmost importance that we run candidates for these offices. We must remember, however, that it is at the more local level, where our candidates will have a better opportunity to make actual contact with the voters, that we have a more realistic opportunity for success on election day. For that reason we must recruit candidates who are willing to run for State Legislative and Congressional seats and local partisan races as well as for statewide and national office.

II. Qualifications

Are you qualified to run? Don't sell yourself short! The founding fathers and those who followed their lead kept the requirements to run for office very basic and generally limited those requirements to age, residence and citizenship. The purpose of this was to encourage the average man (and later) woman to participate in their government. We are supposed to be government of, by and for the people, not the elite.

III. An active campaign or “a name on the ballot?”

The suggestions set forth herein and in the next installment generally assume that you are planning to wage an active campaign for whatever seat you decide to target. Obviously, from the standpoint of the Constitution Party, the optimal situation is for its candidates run active, responsible and visible campaigns to generate positive attention to and interest in the Constitution Party and to elect its candidates to office. This is certainly the preferred scenario.

The Constitution Party is a new and still growing party, however, and sometimes the circumstances of the situation may require that our Party settle for something less than what is considered “preferred and optimal” in order to make sure that we have candidates in as many ballot slots as possible. Therefore, if you are asked to be a candidate for an office and are willing to put your name on the ballot as a service to your party, but know that you can do little or nothing in the way of waging an actual campaign, and the party has no other viable option for having a candidate in that district, by all means go for it. While it is better to have candidates running for office who are actively promoting their candidacies, it is likewise much more preferable for the party to have candidates who are listed on the ballot and who will win votes by virtue of that alone and establish a “presence” for the party on the ballot in that election, than to have a blank spot on the ballot. One of the saddest parts of my job as National Field Director has been, on too many occasions, to receive a call from a voter who wants to vote for a Constitution Party candidate in his or her district or state and I have to inform them, “I’m sorry, we don’t have a candidate running for office in that area.”

In the end, everyone must do what their conscience and good judgment dictates is right for them. While everyone who is thinking about being a candidate on behalf of the Constitution Party should consider doing everything possible to run an active and effective campaign, it is even more important that everyone understand how urgent it is for our party to field candidates and provide the voters with a Constitution Party alternative on the ballot!

IV. For which office should you run?

In some states the more local races, like city council, and various types of boards, are non-partisan, meaning there is no party label designated on the ballot. This may raise the question as to whether you should consider running for a non-partisan position. On the one hand, there may be a far greater opportunity to get elected to a local office, where there is no “party label” holding back a so-called minor party candidate.

That person, if successful, then will get an opportunity to gain experience and build credibility and recognition by holding public office. Once voters have elected this person one time and, assuming he or she has done a respectable job while in office, they will be more likely to have confidence in that person and vote for him or her for further office, including one with a partisan Constitution Party label on the ballot. That is certainly one way to gain credibility and respectability both for the candidate and the party.

The downside of this scenario is that it may take awhile for this process to play out. In the meantime, and in the short run, the Constitution Party does not receive the exposure or recognition or any other tangible benefit from this candidate's efforts.

The foregoing is a dilemma for which there is no easy solution. One must balance the pros and cons of the particular situation. One important consideration is whether a person has an immediate prospect of being elected to office as a non-partisan candidate. If not, the benefit of running "non-partisan" as opposed to running as Constitution Party candidate is reduced dramatically. Sometimes, of course, non-partisan elections are held at different times than partisan elections and then there is not necessarily a conflict making it an either/or proposition.

Generally speaking, the Constitution Party needs candidates who are willing to run under its banner to give the party visibility and recognition; to carry the party's message to the voters in that district; and build a foundation for future electoral success in that district.

In deciding which office to run for, you should think about 1) Where the party needs a candidate, 2) What type of issues are most interesting to you, and 3) The opportunities provided by circumstances in particular races?

Certainly the answer to the first question is that the party needs candidates for all races, legislative, Congressional, partisan local races, and all statewide races.

If your interest is primarily on national issues, then, if possible, you should probably think about running for the United States House of Representatives or perhaps, the U.S. Senate, where those issues will be the focus of the campaign. If you are more interested in local, regional or statewide topics then it might be better to focus on a state legislative or statewide constitutional office. Our party has general philosophical underpinnings which can apply to any office, but you should have some interest and knowledge in the issues which will be the focus of your particular campaign.

While, in the optimal situation, our party should run candidates for every available office, there are two types of seats which we should always consider targeting. First, is the occasional open seat. You will find that candidates will "come out of the woodwork" to run in the Democrat and Republican primaries, but most of the time these candidates will *not* be all that well known. The Constitution Party candidate, who runs an active campaign, who participates in the debates and who holds the other candidate's feet to the fire can make an important impact for the party in this type of election. While the major candidates usually will spend a great deal of money in the primaries for an open seat, the Constitution Party candidate can usually save at least some resources for the general election. The chances of getting attention during the campaign and a more sizeable vote in the general election in this type of race are better simply because the public more than likely has yet not developed a great passion for or against one of the major party candidates.

The other type of election which should be targeted is one in which the incumbent is known to be corrupt or has taken very unpopular position on an important issue. There have been several cases lately of congressman who have been exposed for corruption in terms of either morals or financial ethics. In most cases these officials have been forced to resign creating what is tantamount to an open seat. There are also situations where there are clouds of suspicion hanging over the head of an incumbent, but there has been no indictment or pending resignation. In these cases voters who are disgusted with that particular incumbent may desire to register their protest, but be hesitant to vote for a member of the opposing majority party. This is a situation where a Constitution Party candidate may have an opportunity to register a significant percentage of the vote.

The same is true where the incumbent politician is not necessarily corrupt, but supports positions that a large segment of his or her own party strongly disagree and where our party is in agreement with the views of these disillusioned voters. An example of this can be seen last year in Utah, where Republican Congressman Chris Cannon alienated a significant portion of his constituency because of his support for open borders and amnesty for illegal aliens. In his circumstance, his GOP primary opponent received well over 40% of the primary vote. Obviously there was significant discontent with this incumbent among the voters of his own party. Our Constitution Party candidate, Jim Noorlander, who waged a strong campaign, was able to secure over 10% of the vote in the general election against Cannon, and certainly would have done a great deal better had he had more money to spend to get his message out.

Still, when our candidates, such as Jim Noorlander, start receiving double-digit percentages of the vote, particularly in three or more way races, we start to be taken seriously by the media and when that happens we will have suddenly develop a great deal more credibility with the public.

V. Deciding to run and preparing to run…early!

It is never too soon to get started in preparing your campaign. Before even beginning to organize your campaign there are many things that a potential candidate should do.

1. Prepare yourself.

This entails sort of “clearing the decks” so that you will be able to campaign for office without the experience being a complete disruption of your personal and economic life. It is very important, if at all possible, to have the support of your family, even if it is only tacit support. It is likely to be an unpleasant experience if your family views the campaign as an unwelcome intrusion into the life of the family. Also, it is a good idea to think about how you will allot time so that the campaign does not interfere with the all-important business of making a living, which most Constitution Party candidates must still do during the campaign.

2. Get to Know your District.

Spend time in different parts of the district. Get to know about the district in which you plan to run. In highly urban areas, this takes little effort because the population density will probably result in the size of the district being rather compact. In other less populated areas, the district may be rather large and diverse and it is worth the effort to visit and get to know areas outside of that in which you reside.

(This brings up another point: You do not have to live in the same district in which you run for the United States House of Representatives. Although it is not a requirement, in most cases, however, it is a much better idea that you do run in a district where you live if you intend to do anything more than put your name on the ballot. There have been times when our candidates, in various states, have run in Congressional Districts, outside of their own, so as to ensure that the party has candidates in all of the districts. This is an understandable reason. Just be aware, however, that the issue of your location of residence might be brought up as a campaign issue by an opponent.)

Research important facts about the make-up of the district: Demographics, major industries, important issues and so forth. You may have a philosophy, but do you understand the district that you want to represent? This will help immensely during the campaign. The voters will be impressed if you seem to know your district and will almost certainly dismiss you as a serious candidate if you do not.

3. Research and preparation.

Secure election maps, voter lists, past election data, information about possible opposing candidates, etc. as far in advance of the campaign season as is reasonable possible.

4. Get involved in community activities

By getting involved in community activities you can kill two birds with one stone. First, it helps you learn more about the local issues and, second, it helps you get to know more people, and in many cases, influential people which, of course, could be very beneficial to your campaign. The fact is that people are much more inclined to vote for someone who they know (or at least who they are familiar with) than somebody they don't know. The people you get to know at chamber of commerce meetings, or other community activity functions, are very likely not only to be voters, but to have influence over others as a result of there civic involvement. Your civic involvement will greatly maximize your exposure and credibility with the voting public.

5. Stay on top of Current Events

It is of utmost importance that the potential candidate stay abreast of current events in the world, nation and in your district. You should always be aware how these events may impact your district. Remember, you don't have to support "pork barrel" politics to care about what happens in your district and how your prospective constituents may be affected.

6. Practice speaking and develop your theme

In most civic forums a candidate will be afforded a couple of minutes to introduce himself and the reasons for his campaign while the rest of the time is generally taken up in answering questions. Think about the points you want to make in your introduction and conclusion. What message will you want the voters to remember? Practice ways in which you are most comfortable at expressing that message. Generally speaking, keeping up on current events will help you handle most question and answer sessions, but you must have your reasons for running so ingrained that you a ready to state them at any time. Don't ever get caught without an answer to the question "Why are you running for this office?"

7. Start your campaign preparations as far in advance as possible.

Ideally, you should begin your preparations for your campaign at least a year before the next election. This summary is being offered in April, 2007 and this is a perfect time to start thinking about and planning for running for office in 2008.

As you begin your campaign you should start to make plans for your campaign organization, recruiting volunteers and for fundraising. Of utmost importance is the threshold issue of getting on the ballot. All of your plans are meaningless if you do not get on the ballot. While it is possible to run a write-in campaign they are almost never successful, and are only in the

rarest situations worth the time and effort to the candidate or the party. This raises the all important threshold question: "How do I get on the ballot?"

This is a general discussion aimed at a national audience so no attempt will be made herein to go into detail regarding achieving ballot status for your candidacy, since each state's requirements are different. Just be aware that this is absolutely of the utmost importance. All of your other plans will go right down the tubes if you fail to understand and satisfy the technical "nuts and bolts" requirements of getting on the ballot in your state. By the way, just because your state party may already have ballot status does not necessarily mean that you as a candidate automatically have ballot status. Most often the contrary is true and there are further requirements that the candidate must satisfy in order to secure a position on the ballot. It is imperative that you research the rules pertaining to ballot access for your candidacy and that you understand them and follow them.

VI. Financing Your Campaign

Probably the most famous and accurate statement ever made concerning political fundraising was made by California's Jesse Unruh, when he said "Money is the mother's milk of politics."

Every campaign needs funds with which to operate. Those funds don't appear by magic, particularly in a Constitution Party campaign. In order to secure necessary funding some real work needs to be done. Successful fundraising requires that the campaign in general and the

candidate in particular, spend quality time planning and executing a fundraising plan. It is estimated that winning candidates on every level—federal, state, or local— spend a minimum of 50% of their time fundraising.

You are not alone if you find the idea of asking people for donations unseemly or perhaps even a bit terrifying. If you plan to mount a meaningful campaign, however, you must disabuse yourself of such notions and/or fears. It is a task that cannot be avoided if you plan to wage a meaningful campaign.

The number one reason that people do not donate to a political campaign is because they have not been asked to do so! Give people some credit. They know that political campaigns are expensive and a reasonable person will understand that you cannot be expected to fund it yourself. They will not look at it like you are asking for charity or welfare. While not everyone will say “yes”, many will, especially as you get better at doing the asking.

Your campaign must figure out how much money it needs to carry out the activities it plans and then it needs to figure out how to raise the money. This is referred to as the *fundraising plan*. By knowing what your campaign will entail you will be able to better determine the amount of funding you will require. Someone who may be considering making substantial contribution to your campaign may ask you what your specific campaign plans and needs are. If you cannot provide an answer to that question you may not receive that contribution or may receive a far lesser amount.

As you consider preparations for your campaign, and for fundraising in particular, you should give thought to three basic methods you will probably need to employ in order to achieve your fundraising goals:

1. Personal Solicitation
2. Mail Solicitation
3. Fundraising Events