

The Harold Stassen of the Left?

By SHEILAH PEPPER

The Gazette Staff

Recently, Ralph Nader, now in his 70s, announced yet another run for the presidency. This will be his fifth run, which puts him in danger of being seen as the Harold Stassen of the Left. Even I am not old enough to remember the last time Stassen ran for the Republican nomination, but research indicates he ran NINE times between 1948 and 1992. He was considered a serious candidate in 1948 and 1952. After that, his runs were increasingly met with derision, then with amusement as the decades slipped by.

Nader, who made a name as an early consumer rights advocate and an adversary of big corporations, ran as a write-in candidate in 1992. He then ran twice as the nominee of the Green Party, the natural home of many old socialists, in 1996 and 2000. He ran in 2004 as an independent.

Many Democrats, to this day, feel that Nader deprived Al Gore of the presidency in 2000, by taking enough of the popular vote to give George Bush the win in Florida.

However, in 2004, Ralph Nader received only 463,653 votes - just 0.38 percent of the popular vote, as liberals lined up behind the Democrats to try to defeat President Bush.

So, before anyone on the left cries foul or anyone on the right starts cheering, there is no reason to think that Democrats will not once again close ranks. They are likely more fired up for this election than for any since 1992.

Nader might attract some old Green votes in states such as New York or California, but given the size of the voter population in those states, he probably can't hurt the Democrat candidate. Yes, sometimes the unexpected happens in a national campaign. Nader might possibly target one or two smaller states and pull an upset just large enough to make a difference in the outcome, but I think that is only an outside possibility.

The difference in 2000 is that Nader ran to the left of Al Gore. Some voters saw Gore as tied to what they saw as compromises and half measures during the Clinton years.

But this time around, Senator Obama is as far to the left as Mr. Nader and Mrs. Clinton is not far behind in her real policy views.

Some Democrat operatives will again try to block Nader from getting on the ballot in certain states - but he will likely appear in most cases.

If he gains entry to upcoming debates, he could produce some interesting situations. He is an able debater and could force the Democrat nominee into a defensive position and some uncomfortable moments.

One thing is certain - with this fifth run, Ralph Nader has pretty much assured that he will likely become the Harold Stassen of the Left.

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