

LOCAL NEWS

VOTE 2008

Cohen joins U.S. Senate race

Lawyer, environment activist makes first run for elective post

BY RACHEL E. STASSEN-BERGER
Pioneer Press

Above a downtown Minneapolis nightclub with leopard- and zebra-print seating, Democrat Jim Cohen made his U.S. Senate campaign announcement Wednesday part politics and part party.

"I'm sorry, I've taken a little bit from the band time," said Cohen, a public interest lawyer and environmental activist, about 15 minutes into his first official campaign speech. The bandleader gave him the OK to talk on.

Before a crowd of supporters, Cohen said he is a "pragmatic progressive" running against slash-and-burn partisan politics.

"The largeness of our issues has been satisfied by the pettiness of our politics," said Cohen, who has been making outstate cam-



Jim Cohen

paign stops for at least a month.

He will face well-known and well-funded opposition in his quest to take on Republican U.S. Sen. Norm Coleman in next year's election.

Democrats Mike Ciresi, a Minneapolis lawyer, and Al Franken, a writer and comedian, are the best-known contenders. Banker Bob Olson recently announced he would run. And Dick Franson, a frequent candidate, is making a Senate run his 23rd attempt to win office.

"This is a long shot with a slingshot at the big shots," Cohen said. He said he wants to show that you don't have to be a millionaire, a

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Cohen joins race

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nod to Ciresi, or a celebrity, a nod to Franken, or "beholden to special interests" to run for Senate.

Cohen's interests are much like those of many of the Democrats in the Senate race. He believes in universal health care and investment in renewable energy issues and wants an end to the war in Iraq.

"Do we want to continue in Iraq?" he asked his crowd of supporters.

"No!" they shouted back.

But Cohen isn't insisting on

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Jim Cohen

an immediate withdrawal of troops. Instead, he wants combat troops out by March or April 2008.

"We got into this war in a crazy way. I want to make sure we get out in a disciplined and responsible way," he said.

Cohen hasn't held elective office before, although he was a Democratic nominee for Con-

gress in his home state of Connecticut two decades ago. But he is steeped in political activism.

He founded and led the Sierra Clubs Legal Defense Fund, created a national organization called the Environmental Task Force and was a deputy assistant director at the Federal Trade Commission.

He believes that résumé and his passion should overcome what he lacks in name recognition and financial backing.

"The kind of proven public service and public interest commitment I've had for nearly 40 years will be appealing very broadly," he said.

Cohen said he will run for the Democratic-Farmer-Labor party's endorsement in summer 2008 and will not run in a primary if he does not receive it.

Cohen joins list of Coleman's contenders

Activist's focus is environmental issues

MINNEAPOLIS (AP) — Lawyer and environmental activist Jim Cohen said Tuesday he's joining an increasingly crowded group of Democrats who want to take on incumbent U.S. Sen. Norm Coleman next year.

Cohen is billing himself as a

"pragmatic progressive," saying he'd seek to build coalitions and work across party lines. "I don't believe in this slash-and-burn mentality, this polarization in our politics," Cohen said.

Cohen, 64, faces high-wattage opponents in the Democratic field, with humorist Al Franken and trial attorney Mike Ciresi vying for the party's endorsement. Tax attorney Bob Olson and frequent candidate

Dick Franson are also in the race.

A Massachusetts native, Cohen moved to Minneapolis in 1994 to work on behalf of American Indian causes. In 1986, he ran unsuccessfully as the Democratic candidate for Congress in Connecticut's 5th Congressional District.

Throughout his career, Cohen has worked on behalf of a number of charitable and pub-

lic interest causes. He's made a particular focus on environmental activism, working with the Sierra Club Legal Defense Fund, the Environmental Task Force and as a founding member of the Will Steger Foundation on global warming.

Cohen said he won't run in the Democratic primary without party endorsement and said he thinks DFL activists will respond to his record of service.

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DFLer Cohen's goal in Senate race: 'Speak truth to power and wealth'

DFLer and longtime environmental activist Jim Cohen formally entered the U.S. Senate race Wednesday, saying that "I want to challenge the old politics that allows only the very rich or very famous to seek office."

Cohen will pit himself against two such candidates: attorney Mike Ciresi and comedian Al Franken. Cohen said he has nothing against either of them, but "I want a grassroots campaign to show that working people can still be part of the process. I'm

committed to a very different kind of politics of national renewal."

Cohen said he realizes he'll start out behind both Franken's fame and Ciresi's wealth. "I don't even know how many people are going to show up tonight," he said of his Wednesday evening announcement at Trocadero restaurant in Minneapolis. "I'm hoping for a good crowd. We've got a good message. We want to speak truth to power and wealth."

PATRICIA LOPEZ