

Democrats still optimistic despite gubernatorial candidacy uncertainty

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decide soon, but said he has no timetable.

Both Moul and Bohlke played down talk of possible candidacies.

Moul, who was lieutenant governor from 1991-93, said people within the party have talked to her about running. However, she said she has not even reached the stage of weighing the pros and cons of a gubernatorial bid.

Bohlke said any thoughts she has had about running for governor have been "not very serious."

Bohlke attributed the lack of an announced Democratic candidate to the large amounts of money raised by Republican candidates thus far. GOP funds have discouraged Bohlke as well.

"My banker would say it's not a good idea," she said.

Democrats banked on Robak

When Democratic leaders are asked why their party has yet to

announce a candidate, the name that continually surfaces is that of Lt. Gov. Kim Robak.

Considered a front-runner to succeed Nelson, who is barred from seeking a third four-year term, Robak announced in June that she would not run for governor. She said she wanted to spend more time with her family.

"I think everybody assumed Lt. Gov. Robak was going to run for office," Hoppner said.

Although he understood Robak's decision, Randall said, it was nevertheless "a huge disappointment."

"She could have been, and may yet be, one of the best governors this state has ever seen," Randall said.

But three months after Robak's decision, no Democrat has stepped forward to fill the void. The announcements that high-profile Republicans Jan Stoney and U.S. Rep. Doug Bereuter would not run for governor haven't yet enticed any Democrats to enter the race, either.

Nebraska Democratic Party officials note that history hasn't always favored early-announcing candidates.

At this time in 1981, Bob Kerrey had not yet entered the governor's

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TRICIA BRUNING

executive director of the Nebraska Democratic Party

race. Kerrey, now a U.S. senator, went on to win the election and serve one term in the governor's mansion.

Likewise, Nelson didn't announce his candidacy until later in 1989.

Bruning said the party wants its candidates to make their decisions based on personal convictions — after a period of what Randall called "soul-searching."

"We don't want candidates to run because they think the Democratic Party needs them to run," Bruning said. "We want them to run because the people of Nebraska want them to run."

A head start for the GOP

Republican leaders have scoffed at Democrats for failing to announce a candidate by now. Following Monday's surprise announcement that 2nd District U.S. Rep. Jon Christensen would seek the Republican nomination for governor, the GOP now has four announced candidates.

State Auditor John Breslow, Lincoln Mayor Mike Johanns and former Tecumseh Mayor Lavern Bartels have also announced their candidacy. Breslow has raised \$1.1 million in campaign funds, and both he and Johanns have organized campaign networks with offices throughout the state.

But Bruning and Randall downplayed the GOP's head start.

Bruning said Christensen's decision to run reflected the lack of strength in the Republican field. Christensen's bid for governor amounts to a "power grab," she said.

Bruning accused the Republican candidates of shifting the focus of the campaign from state issues to power and money.

At the same time, Bruning said, the Democrats aren't concerned about the Republicans' lead in fund raising. A good deal of that money will have to be spent as the GOP candidates battle each other for the nomination, she said.

"(Christensen's) entry doesn't put us in any kind of financial difficulty," Bruning said. "There's still a lot of Omaha money out there to be had."

Christensen, an accomplished fundraiser in his two successful congressional races, is likely to raise large sums of money from Omaha conservatives, Bruning said.

But she said moderate voters and corporations from Omaha would be a valuable source of campaign funds for the Democrats.

Randall contrasted the campaign strategies of the two parties to this point. While Republicans have been raising money and organizing, potential Democratic candidates have been talking to voters and listening to their concerns, he said.

"When candidates enter a political race where money is the common denominator, it does scare some people away because you're no longer looking at the issues," he said. "Christensen has espoused conservative principles, but he hasn't been talking about state issues."

Referring to Breslow and Johanns, Bruning said, "You've got two candidates who have been campaigning for two years, and no one knows what they stand for."

Bruning and Randall insisted that while the party does not have an announced candidate, recent Democratic Party gatherings in Grand Island and Omaha demonstrate it has the enthusiasm needed to win the election.

"The excitement (in Grand Island) leads me to believe 1998 is going to be a successful year for the Democrats," Randall said.

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Women's Center holds raffle

From Staff Reports

Need a new set of wheels? The University Women's Center is sponsoring a raffle this Saturday, and the grand prize is a white 1998 Chevrolet Cavalier Convertible.

The raffle is taking place in front of the University Bookstore from 10 a.m. to 4 p.m. and tickets are \$2 each.

Proceeds will go to the Friendship Home. It will use the money to purchase and remodel a home that will be a safehouse for battered women and children.

Daily Nebraskan

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