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Politics

Stars Hopeful Oscar Win May Boost Gore '08 Run

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(CNSNews.com) - Al Gore looks unlikely to need a recount this Sunday, when the former vice president is heavily favored to win an Oscar for his global warming documentary, "An Inconvenient Truth."

The self-described "recovering politician" has become a star in Hollywood. Now some of Gore's biggest fans -- including some in the entertainment world -- are hopeful an Academy Award will boost his chances of entering the 2008 presidential race.

"An Inconvenient Truth" has been nominated for two Oscars -- best documentary feature and best original song, for Melissa Etheridge's "I Need to Wake Up."

"I don't know if an Oscar would help with that or not, but I would like to see him get in the race," actor and environmental activist Ed Begley Jr. told **Cybercast News Service**.

Begley, a member of the board of the Academy of Motion Picture Arts and Sciences, is known best for his role as Dr. Victor Erlich on the 1980s TV series "St. Elsewhere," went on to star in movies such as "Best in Show" and in spots on various television series. He is now actively involved in environmental issues and touts his solar-powered home.

Begley says he has known Gore since the then senator for Tennessee held hearings in 1978 on the toxic contamination of the Love Canal in upstate New York, and brought attention to climate change more than two decades ago.

"I've known him since he was a senator and think a great deal of him," Begley said. "He took a big hit in 2000 and lost his home state of Tennessee, because he was outspoken about coal. But he has always done the right thing, more than most. I'm very loyal to him. I'm a good friend of his."

Begley said although it may be a long shot, he knows many others in Hollywood who would also love to see Gore enter the 2008 presidential race.

Gore, a Democrat who won the popular vote in 2000 but lost the electoral vote to George W. Bush after the election was decided by the U.S. Supreme Court, says he won't jump into the 2008 race.

A few draft Gore 2008 websites are up on the Internet, and the Al Gore Grassroots Fan Club site reports that an online [petition](#) has gathered more than 25,000 signatures asking Gore to enter the race.

A second run for the presidency could be different, according to actor Mike Farrell, because the film showed what Gore is like when he speaks from the heart.

"I would love to see Al Gore run for president," Farrell told **Cybercast News Service**.

The actor is best known for his role as B.J. Honeycut in the popular 1970s and 1980s TV series "M.A.S.H." and is now promoting his book "You Can Call Me Mike: A Journey from Actor to Activist."

Farrell, who works closely with Greenpeace International, recently traveled to Nicaragua to campaign against illegal logging and traveled to Honduras on a similar mission last year.

"The Al Gore we saw in the film is the Al Gore we should have seen in the 2000 campaign," Farrell said. "Now he is free from his advisors and free to be himself."

He conceded that the compressed primary schedule would make it difficult to start a campaign now.

Hero or has-been?

Political observers agree that despite Gore's high profile, he would have a difficult time establishing himself among the current field of Democratic contenders.

"Sure, he would have an Oscar, and he already has the name recognition," Scott McLean, a political science professor at Quinnipiac University, told **Cybercast News Service**. "It will take a lot more than an Oscar to get him in the race as a serious contender. For fundraising, he would have needed to start earlier."

Even if the Best Documentary award is in the bag, it apparently hasn't created a political groundswell, according to a Gallup Poll of 1,006 voters published in USA Today last week. Gore has a 52 percent favorability rating and a 45 percent unfavorability rating.

That isn't much higher than the rating he had in 2003 and 2002, well before anyone had heard of "An Inconvenient Truth."

Meanwhile, in a race for the Democratic presidential nomination, the same poll garnered Gore only 14 percent of the vote among Democrats and Democratic-leaning independents, compared to 40 percent for New York Sen. Hillary Clinton and 21 percent for Illinois Sen. Barack Obama.

Gore barely edges out the 2004 Democratic vice presidential nominee John Edwards, at 13 percent.

"His time has really passed. As an elder statesman and a celebrity, I think he'll enjoy commenting on issues from the sidelines," McLean said, adding Gore has no compelling issue to run on.

"For Gore's campaign, global warming would be an inconvenient truth. Voters don't like to be inconvenienced too much by less immediate issues. There are more issues that are a higher priority," McLean added.

But James Campbell, a political science professor at the University of Buffalo, argues that Gore cannot be discounted.

"There is a 50-50 chance he'll run," Campbell said. "He could raise money quickly. He has so much [name recognition] as a vice president, a nominee in the past he would have to be a serious candidate. He did win the popular vote in 2000 and Democrats haven't forgotten that."

Others contend there is a leadership vacuum and the potential for a candidate to make climate change the defining issue of 2008.

"Al Gore is absolutely the right man at the right time," Huffington Post columnist Bob Cesca recently wrote. "We need a president who will make the climate crisis his or her number one priority ... that person is naturally Al Gore.

"He has the charisma, sense of urgency, the knowledge and the plan to take it on while everyone else, sadly, really doesn't seem to give a rip," said Cesca, a writer, producer and director of *The War Effort*, a 2003 "mockumentary" satirizing the nation's knee-jerk patriotism which arose following 9/11."

'Bigger microphone'

Even if 2008 is a Gore-less campaign, global warming will be a larger issue in the race than in past years, say actors and environmentalists who attribute that to Gore's film.

Farrell believes the documentary has already educated the public about the dangers of climate change, while Begley said an Oscar win would be just one more step in making climate a national priority.

Environmental groups, meanwhile, are cautious about expressing a presidential preference for anyone at this point. They are, however, very supportive of the impact of "An Inconvenient Truth" on the political dialogue.

"If the film does win an Oscar, it gives Al Gore and everyone associated with the film a bigger microphone," said Eric Antebi, spokesman for the Sierra Club.

"There is no question the public has been waiting for leadership on this issue. It's an incredible service for the former vice president to use his profile and name recognition to bring this issue home," Antebi said.

It's about time a national leader sheds the necessary spotlight on this issue, said Navin Nayak, director of the Global Warming Project at the League of Conservation Voters.

"At this point, you can't give enough publicity and put enough attention on the issue," Nayek said. "As more of the public pays attention, more politicians will act. Already 300 mayors, dozens of states, business and religious leaders have acted. The only ones not in line now are the national leaders."

John Bibby, a political science professor at the University of Wisconsin, doesn't believe an Oscar would make Gore stand out. The movie is "preaching to the converted" rather than a watershed moment for global warming awareness, he said.

"I'm not sure winning an Oscar proves anything given the political leanings of Hollywood," Bibby said. "I'm not sure what would make him different from other candidates who are anti-war and pro-environment. It's hard to see what his natural constituency would be."

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