



JOHN CHOI'S FACEBOOK STATUS: POSSIBLE CANDIDATE - FRIENDS USE POPULAR SITE TO URGE CITY ATTORNEY TO RUN FOR COUNTY POST

St. Paul Pioneer Press (MN) - Wednesday, April 15, 2009

Author: Jason Hoppin ; jhoppin@pioneerpress.com

Facebook is many things. It's a way to find old friends, kill time or post funny pictures of your pets. It is also now a way to launch political campaigns.

Last week, two friends of St. Paul City Attorney John Choi put up a Facebook page urging him to run for Ramsey County attorney. Susan Gaertner is stepping down from the post after four terms to run for governor, and another potential candidate, St. Paul resident and Scott County prosecutor Cory Tennison, recently decided against a run.

Since then, more than 150 (and counting) people have joined the Facebook group, including Tennison, Duluth Mayor Don Ness, St. Paul first lady Connie Coleman, aides to Ramsey County commissioners and St. Paul City Council members, union officials and a quartet of state DFL lawmakers: John Lesch, Yvonne Prettner Solon, Sheldon Johnson and Nora Slawik.

Choi said he is considering running, and it sounds like he's taking a long, hard look at a campaign. No announcement is imminent, though, and Choi said he's still talking to people and weighing the effect of a candidacy on his family. He also said he loves his job as city attorney.

"I'm not a Facebook person. I've never been on it before, but it's a pretty powerful tool," Choi said. "My (potential) candidacy ... attracted over 125 people through the Easter weekend. That's really encouraging and very humbling."

It's yet another example of politicking in the Internet age, the power of which was demonstrated by President Barack Obama's sophisticated Internet-based campaign fundraising and volunteer operations. Larry Jacobs, director of the Center for the Study of Politics and Governance at the University of Minnesota's Humphrey Institute, said social sites such as Facebook and MySpace can be a draw for candidates.

"It's all that networking that goes on on the Internet. The 21st-century crowd thinks of the Internet as digitized bulletin boards," Jacobs said.

Lawyer David Schultz, Roseville City Council Member Tammy Pust and Assistant Ramsey County Attorney Dave Pinto also are in the mix to run. Pinto's campaign has a Facebook page, and Pust set one up for her city council campaign. But using Facebook to test the political waters before making a decision -- Choi has never run for office before -- may be something new.

"This is, I think, a new way (to use Facebook). I haven't seen anything like this before," Jacobs said.

Many in heavily Democratic Ramsey County had seen Tennison as a frontrunner.

In 2006, Tennison waged a competitive bid to wrest the DFL endorsement from Gaertner. He's spent much of the time since preparing for the 2010 race, racking up an impressive list of DFL supporters. The decision to step away was something of a surprise.

Tennison said this week that two things changed his mind -- the recent and unexpected death of his father-in-law, and the birth of his son Thursday. He already has a 2-year-old daughter.

"I, first and foremost, want to be a good husband and a good dad," Tennison said.

And he has enthusiastically thrown his support behind Choi.

"I believe he will be a candidate. John is my friend. John and I have a lot of supporters in common. I think if John gets in, he will be the DFL-endorsed candidate," Tennison said.

Edition: *St. Paul*

Section: *Main*

Page: *A1*

Record Number: *0904150059*

Copyright 2009 Saint Paul Pioneer Press