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N.M. Governor Enters White House Race

By JENNIFER TALHELM
Associated Press Writer

WASHINGTON (AP) -- A self-described underdog in the crowded 2008 presidential race, Democrat Bill Richardson begins the difficult task of proving he can raise enough money to be a serious contender for the party's nomination.

The 59-year-old New Mexico governor announced in a video posted Sunday on his Web site that he would set up an exploratory committee that will let him raise money and assemble his campaign organization.

"I believe these serious times demand serious people, who have real-world experience in solving the challenges we face," Richardson said in the video. "I humbly believe I'm the best-equipped candidate to meet these challenges."

A former U.N. ambassador, Energy Department secretary and congressman, Richardson's resume looks presidential.

But in polls he lags far behind the other candidates, who also are popular and formidable fundraisers, including New York Sen. Hillary Rodham Clinton, Sen. Barack Obama of Illinois and 2004 Democratic vice presidential nominee John Edwards.

Some have said Richardson's background makes him an ideal vice presidential candidate. But Richardson said he is "not in this race to be vice president."

Richardson stressed his experience. He said he wanted U.S. troops to return quickly from Iraq and urged a change of leadership in Washington that would work to bridge a wide partisan divide.

"I've actually done what a lot of candidates give speeches on," he said in an interview with The Associated Press on Sunday.

Richardson has held talks on North Korea's nuclear program in New Mexico, a strategy he dubbed "green chile diplomacy" for the state's most-famous food. Most recently he traveled to Sudan to meet with the country's president and to press him for an end to the bloodshed in Darfur.

On Iraq, he advocates using diplomacy to broker an end to conflict, bringing together interested parties and nations and convincing donor countries to help rebuild the country.

He said U.S. troops should be redeployed by the end of the year to Afghanistan and other regions in the Persian Gulf.

In New Mexico, Richardson has advocated measures to combat climate change and improve schools, and he pushed through cuts in income, capital gains and food taxes. He has been a cheerleader for the state's film industry and promoted more offbeat ideas, such as a \$225 million spaceport north of Las Cruces, to develop a space industry in New Mexico.

If Richardson officially gets in the race, his candidacy would make history as the field of Democratic candidates would be the most diverse ever.



AP Photo/ROSS D. FRANKLIN

AP VIDEO

Bill Richardson Throws Hat in for White House

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Clinton would be the first female president. Obama would be the first black commander in chief.

Richardson, whose father was an international banker from Boston and whose mother was Mexican, said he believes the country "has changed enough" that voters are ready for a woman or minority president.

"The country is looking for somebody who, one, brings the country together - a unifier, a healer," Richardson said. "And two, somebody who gets things done. Those two quests by Americans override any other concerns."

Born in California and raised in Mexico City and New England, Richardson settled in New Mexico partly because of the state's large Hispanic population. He served in the House from 1982 until 1996, when President Clinton named him U.N. ambassador. In 1998 he joined the Clinton Cabinet as energy secretary. Richardson was easily elected governor of New Mexico in 2002 and re-elected in November with 68 percent of the vote.

Other Democratic contenders include former Iowa Gov. Tom Vilsack; Connecticut Sen. Chris Dodd; and Ohio Rep. Dennis Kucinich. Delaware Sen. Joe Biden has said he will run and plans to formalize his intentions soon. Massachusetts Sen. John Kerry, the party's 2004 candidate, also contemplates another run.

On the Net:

Richardson's presidential site: <http://www.richardsonforpresident.com/>

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