

# The Huffington Post

## Motley Crew: Potential Bloomberg Backers Run The Gamut

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November 26, 2007 07:24 PM

In May 2007, New York City Mayor Michael Bloomberg found himself in heartland, serving as the commencement speaker for the University of Oklahoma. The speech itself contained the usual graduation-day fare. But beyond that, little was customary. David Boren, the university's president and a long-time Democratic Senator, had brought Bloomberg to the Norman campus with an eye on a future political partnership. The two, according to reports, had a private discussion about a possible Bloomberg presidential run. Since that meeting in Oklahoma the Midwestern maverick and the billionaire mayor have kept in touch.

Bloomberg, according to sources, has had many such conversations and not just with Boren. Indeed, through a combination of outreach and genuine appeal, the mayor has built a strong and increasingly large group of supporters, consisting of government officials of all ideological stripes as well as major figures in media and finance. All this, despite repeatedly denying interest in the White House.

On Capitol Hill, Bloomberg is both revered and feared. The possibility that he may enter the presidential race casts a shadow over both parties. One of the mayor's supporters is Sen. Chuck Hagel, R-NE, who has been [discussed as a possible](#) Bloomberg running mate. To a lesser extent, so has Sen. Tom Coburn, R-OK. Sen. [Joseph Lieberman](#), I-CT, meanwhile, shares the title of Independent and is close to the mayor after Bloomberg stumped for him following his 2006 primary loss to Ned Lamont.

Mainly, however, Bloomberg's political support comes from those outside the Beltway. California Gov. Arnold Schwarznegger has often described Bloomberg as [his soul mate](#) - the diminutive billionaire and the buff movie-star-turned-pol forming a political odd-couple. Among New York politcos, both [Ed Koch](#) and [Al Sharpton](#) have said they would welcome having Bloomberg in the 2008 race (despite the presence of New Yorkers Hillary Clinton and Rudy Giuliani). And sources close to Bloomberg tell the Huffington Post that Henry Kissinger is a Bloomberg fan and potential supporter as well.

Former Sen. Sam Nunn summed up Bloomberg's appeal as such: "My own thinking is, it may be a time for the country to say, 'Time out. The two-party system has served us well, historically, but it's not serving us now.'"

And one high-ranking Hill official offered this assessment: "There are a couple of guys on the Hill who support Bloomberg, but mostly it's outside Washington. It all depends upon who is in the mix and who is on the ticket. If Hagel's on the ticket you can see a lot of Hill guys coming out."

Bloomberg also has some sway among the leaders of the Green and Independent parties, who see ideological common ground with the mayor, and who can provide Bloomberg with ballot access and grassroots activism in key states.

But it is the media that have buoyed Bloomberg the most. The mayor's outsider status and political success - reducing racial tensions, overseeing continued economic growth, and initiating what may turn out to be a major reform of New York's public school system - have made him the subject of countless profiles, the most recent being a glowing cover story in Newsweek.

Bloomberg's status within the fourth estate is so strong he enjoys the backing of media moguls who rarely see eye to eye. Mort Zuckerman, publisher of U.S. News and World Report and The New York Daily News [waxed glowingly](#) about Bloomberg on a number of different forums; his most recent column entitled: "An Independent to the Rescue." Zuckerman's tabloid nemesis, News Corp CEO Rupert Murdoch has also expressed support -albeit in subtler ways. In September, Murdoch's New York Post [ran a front-page](#) story entitled "RUN, MIKE, RUN... Americans like him for prez; poll." On closer inspection, however, that poll had Bloomberg at a mere 15 percent among White House aspirants; 21 percent when respondents were read a flattering description of the mayor.

Among business leaders, support for Bloomberg is understandably strong considering his personal success story. Those who have praised the mayor include Warren Buffett who, despite hosting a fundraiser for Sen. Hillary Clinton, called a Bloomberg-Schwarzenegger presidential ticket "[one hell of a team](#);" Jack Welch, who said of Bloomberg, "[I think he'd be great](#);" and even Obama-supporter David Geffen, who in June hosted Bloomberg for an "[intimate dinner](#)."

"It's clear that the election of 2008 is going to be about the economy," said Mitchell Moss, a professor at New York University and a friend of Bloomberg. "Americans are already feeling the effects of the sub-prime crisis, the decline of the dollar, and the price of oil approaching \$100 a gallon. This is not going to be an election about Iraq but an election about the economic challenges facing the country, which make Mike Bloomberg the most qualified candidate at the moment."

And yet, despite the backing the mayor enjoys in almost every sector, there is one major problem. Bloomberg has yet to commit to running and could enter the 08 race too late to pick up any meaningful support. The Huffington Post reached out to several Senators who have not, at this point in time, endorsed a candidate. When asked if they would endorse Bloomberg should he choose to run, some gave curious responses but the majority said: likely not.

"Sen. Tester hasn't endorsed a candidate yet," said Matt McKenna, spokesman for Sen. Jon Tester, D-MT. "If Bloomberg gets it, give me a call. Until then, I'd hate to speculate."

Cody Wertz, a spokesperson for Sen. Ken Salazar, D-CO, added: "Senator Salazar has not endorsed any candidate yet. Senator Salazar is a Democrat."

Spokespersons for Sen. Jim Webb, D-VA, and Claire McCaskill, D-MO, released similar statements.

Of course, with billions at his disposal and cross-party appeal, Bloomberg may be just the type of candidate who does not need political endorsements.

"He has the best American story of all: a middle-income guy who makes good," said Hank Sheinkopf, a New York political consultant. "It's a great story and it can sell anywhere. Democrats who presume he is not a threat are wrong and Republicans who presume the same thing are wrong. He is a threat to both parties. People of all sorts respect what he has accomplished and see him as a real leader."