

NATIONAL & INTERNATIONAL

Nader to try for White House

WASHINGTON (AP) — Ralph Nader on Sunday announced a fresh bid for the White House, criticizing the top contenders as too close to big business and dismissing the possibility that his third-party candidacy could tip the election to Republicans.

The longtime consumer advocate is still loathed by many Democrats who accuse him of costing Al Gore the 2000 election.

Nader said most people are disenchanted with the Democratic and Republican parties due to a prolonged Iraq war and a shaky economy. He also blamed tax and other corporate-friendly policies under the Bush administration that he said have left many lower- and middle-class people in debt.

“You take that framework of people feeling locked out, shut out, marginalized, disrespected,” he said. “You go from Iraq, to Palestine/Israel, from Enron to Wall Street, from Katrina to the bungling of the Bush administration, to the complicity of the Democrats in not stopping him on the war, stopping him on the tax cuts.”

Nader, who turns 74 later this week, announced his candidacy on NBC’s “Meet the Press.”

In a later interview with The Associated Press, he rejected the notion of himself as a spoiler candidate, saying the electorate will not vote for a “pro-war John McCain.” He also predicted his campaign would do better than in 2004, when he won just 0.3 percent of the vote as an independent.

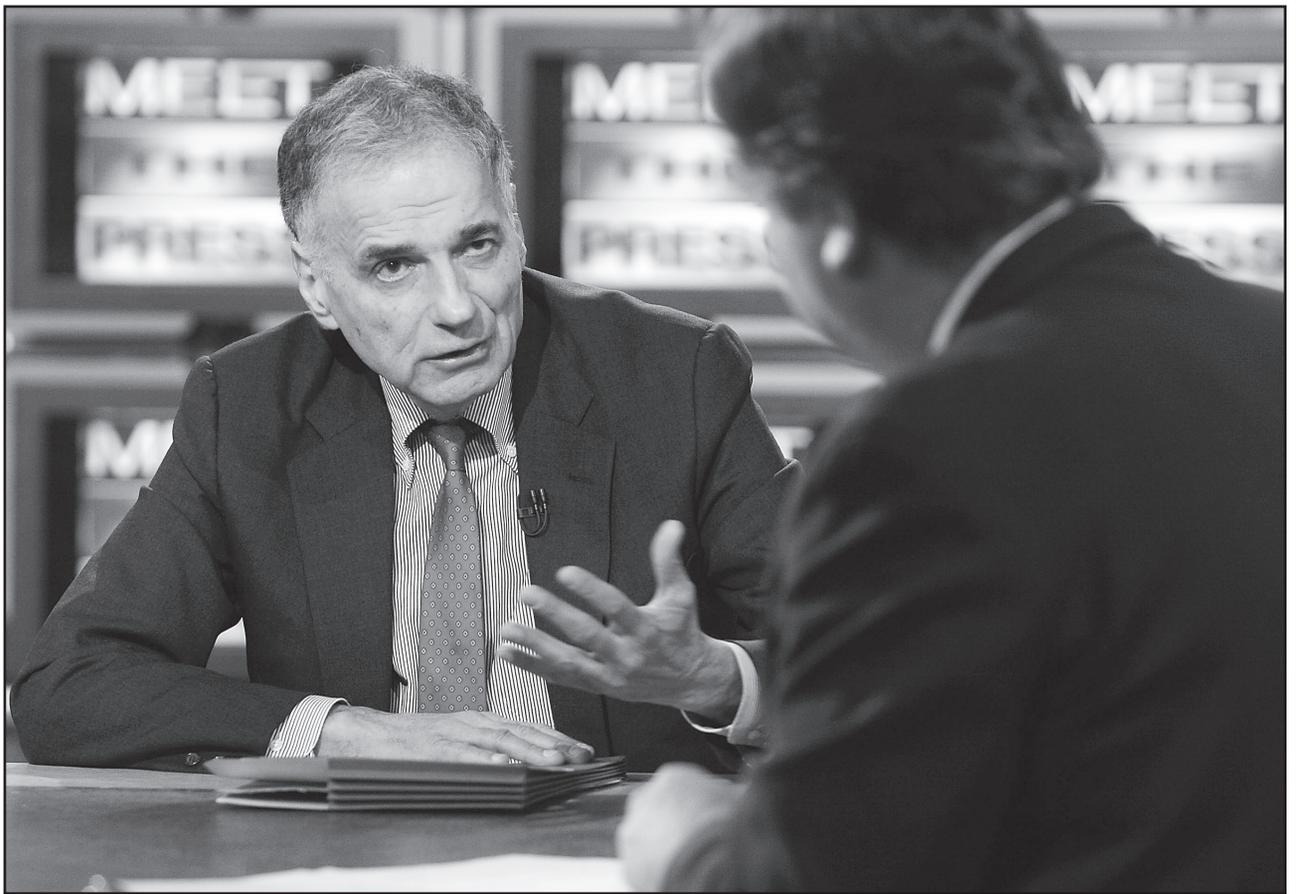
“This time we’re ready for them,” said Nader of the Democratic Party lawsuits that kept him off the ballot in some states.

Democratic candidates Barack Obama and Hillary Rodham Clinton quickly sought to portray Nader’s announcement as having little impact.

“Obviously, it’s not helpful to whomever our Democratic nominee is. But it’s a free country,” said Clinton, who called Nader’s announcement a “passing fancy.”

Obama dismissed Nader as a perennial presidential campaigner

“He thought that there was no difference between



Meet The Press, Alex Wong/AP

Ralph Nader appears on “Meet the Press” on Sunday with moderator Tim Russert at the NBC studios in Washington. Nader said Sunday he will run for president as a third-party candidate, criticizing the top White House contenders as too close to big business and pledging to repeat a bid that will “shift the power from the few to the many.”

Al Gore and George Bush, and eight years later I think people realize that Ralph did not know what he was talking about,” Obama added.

Republican Mike Huckabee welcomed Nader into the race.

“I think it always would probably pull votes away from the Democrats, not the Republicans,” the former

Arkansas governor said on CNN.

Nader said Obama’s and Clinton’s lukewarm response was not surprising given that both political parties typically treat third-party candidates as “second-class citizens.” Nader said he will decide in the coming days whether to run as an independent, Green Party candidate or in some other third party.

Campaign promises face deficit reality check

WASHINGTON (AP) — Barack Obama promises \$4,000 credits to help pay college tuition. Hillary Rodham Clinton backs \$25 billion for home heating subsidies. And John McCain wants to not only extend President Bush’s tax cuts, but eliminate the alternative minimum tax at a cost of about \$2 trillion over 10 years.

Then there’s reality.

These campaign pledges — and dozens more in the manifestos of the leading presidential candidates — face a collision with the real world come January.

That’s when the new president will start putting together a real budget and economic plan, one drafted against the backdrop of record federal deficits exceeding \$400 billion. Even more challenging is the growth of the Medicare and Social Security retirement programs, which budget experts say could require wrenching benefit cuts, politically difficult tax hikes or both to handle the retirement of the baby boom generation.

In that environment, promises to effectively rebate the first \$500 of Social Security payroll taxes (Obama), provide \$1,000 tax credits for retirement savings (Clinton) or cut the corporate



Carolyn Kaster/AP

Sen. Hillary Rodham Clinton greets supporters as she makes a campaign stop Sunday at the Rhode Island College Recreation Center in Providence.

income tax by 10 percentage points (McCain) may turn out to be campaign fantasies.

“They’re operating in Never Never Land. ... None of them are honestly addressing the real challenges that

they’re going to be facing if they’re elected,” said Leon Panetta, former budget director and chief of staff for President Clinton. “We’re facing a deficit bubble that is getting increasingly worse and at some point is going to

explode on us.”

Obama proposes tax cuts for senior citizens and college students, and \$500 for every wage-earner, totaling \$85 billion a year. He says he would pay for the tax cuts by closing loopholes and closing offshore tax havens, but those steps would fall far short of fully offsetting their costs.

McCain wants to extend the Bush tax cuts, which expire at the end of 2010. The price tag for McCain’s plan would soon exceed \$300 billion a year after government borrowing costs are factored in.

McCain also wants to eliminate the alternative minimum tax, or AMT, which would add more than \$2 trillion in accumulated deficits to the federal ledger from 2010-2020. Clinton’s campaign generally succeeds more than the others at providing offsets — revenue increases or spending cuts — to finance programs such as her plan to provide health care for all.

But even if the next president “pays for” new initiatives, he or she will still be left with an underlying budget deficit exceeding \$400 billion and the looming crises in Social Security, Medicare and the Medicaid health care program for the poor and disabled.