

**THE BEAT****Bill Moyers for President? Absolutely!**

posted by **JOHN NICHOLS** on 07/25/2006 @ 3:54pm

Molly Ivins is trying to get Democrats excited about the prospect of running Bill Moyers for president.

"Dear desperate Democrats," the nation's most widely-read liberal newspaper columnist begins her latest missive. "Here's what we do: We run Bill Moyers for president. I am serious as a stroke about this. It's simple, cheap, and effective, and it will move the entire spectrum of political discussion in this country. Moyers is the only public figure who can take the entire discussion and shove it toward moral clarity just by being there."

Ivins makes a great case for why her fellow Texan ought to be on the ballot in 2008.

"Bill Moyers has been grappling with how to fit moral issues to political issues ever since he left Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary and went to work for Lyndon Johnson in the teeth of the Vietnam War," she writes. "Moyers worked for years in television, seriously addressing the most difficult issues of our day. He has studied all different kinds of religions and different approaches to spirituality. He's no Holy Joe, but he is a serious man. He opens minds--he doesn't scare people. He includes people in, not out. And he sees through the dark search for a temporary political advantage to the clear ground of the Founders. He listens and he respects others."

After making her case, however, Ivins adds what appears to be the "reality" section:

"Do I think Bill Moyers can win the presidency? No, that seems like a very long shot to me. The nomination? No, that seems like a very long shot to me."

Ivins wants Moyers to make a symbolic run, with the purpose of shaking up the Democratic party, and perhaps the nation.

"It won't take much money -- file for him in a couple of early primaries and just get him into the debates," the columnist explains. "Think about the potential Democratic candidates. Every single one of them needs spine, needs political courage. What Moyers can do is not only show them what it looks like and indeed what it is, but also how people respond to it. I'm damned if I want to go through another presidential primary with everyone trying to figure out who has the best chance to win instead of who's right. I want to vote for somebody who's good and brave and who should win."

But why limit this quest?

Why ask Democratic primary voters to send a message when they can send the best man into the November competition and, if the stars align correctly, perhaps even to the White House?

With all due regard to one of the finest journalists and finest Americans I know, I respectfully disagree with Molly Ivins -- not on the merits of a Moyers candidacy, but on the potential.

I'm not suggesting that Bill Moyers -- with whom I've had the pleasure of working in recent years on media reform issues -- is a sure bet to win the Democratic nomination or the presidency in 2008. I'm not even suggesting that he would be a good bet. But the politics of 2008 are already so muddled, so quirky and so potentially volatile that I believe -- as someone who has covered my share of presidential campaigns -- that Moyers could be a contender.

Moyers would enter the 2008 race with far more Washington political experience than Dwight Eisenhower had in 1952, far more national name recognition than Jimmy Carter had in 1976 and far more to offer the country than most of our recent chief executives.

Against the candidates who are lining up for the 2008 contest, Bill Moyers and his supporters would not need to make any excuses.

After all, the supposed Democratic frontrunner is a former First Lady who ran her first election campaign just six years ago. One of the leading Republican contenders is a guy whose main claim to fame is that he did a good job of running the Olympics in Salt Lake City, while another is still best known as the son of a famous football coach. And the strongest Republican prospect, John McCain, is actually more popular with Democrats than with his own partisans.

Consider the fact that a professional body builder is the governor of the largest state in the union, and that the list of serious contenders for seats in Congress and for governorships this year is packed with retired athletes, former television anchorpersons and bored millionaires, and it simply is not that big a stretch to suggest that someone with the government and private-sector experience, the national recognition and the broad respect that Bill Moyers has attained across five decades of public life could not make a serious run for the presidency.

So, Molly, I'll see your suggestion of Bill Moyers, and up the ante to suggest that Moyers really could be a contender.

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