

In the Presidential Race, There Are More Candidates Than You Know

Michael Petyo is a carpenter, a U.S. Navy veteran, a grandfather and Russian Orthodox church cantor who likes to boast about his homemade nut rolls. He also happens to be a candidate for president of the United States.

The 66-year-old Indiana man has no big financial backers, little political experience outside of two failed runs for Congress and his odds of winning are almost nil. But that has not stopped him from thinking he is the one to succeed President Barack Obama.

Petyo is among a rising number of Americans who aspire to be president, due to what psychology experts describe as growing narcissism, distrust of leadership and the power of social media to reach the public.

Joining more than 1,500 others, according to the Federal Election Commission, Petyo admits he is a long shot, but figures he just needs some attention: "How do they know I'm not the next guy waiting in the wings?"

The number of candidates seeking the White House has more than tripled from 417 in 2012, though some entrants have penned in possibly fictitious names such as "Disco Daddy" and "Darth Vader."

Their ranks include Susan Young, a California social studies teacher aiming to give her students a lesson in democracy, Terry Jones, the Florida pastor known for organizing Koran burnings, and anti-virus software pioneer John McAfee.

Another candidate, Edie Bukewihge, included her grandma's

chili recipe on her web site: , along with the promise that the last two years of her term could be boring because she will have repaired the country's "damages."

These hopefuls are not a factor in polls that show businessman Donald Trump and U.S. Senator Ted Cruz of Texas battling for the Republican nomination and U.S. Senator Bernie Sanders of Vermont and former Secretary of State Hillary Clinton leading the Democratic field ahead of next month's Iowa caucuses and New Hampshire primary.

'Honey From a Hive'

But a lack of attention has not diminished Petyo's enthusiasm. He frequently compares himself to the Bible's David, the shepherd who God chose to be king. Like David, "words flow from my lips like honey from a hive," Petyo said.

Petyo meets the Constitutional requirements for the job—he's at least 35 and a natural born U.S. citizen.

"I don't see how anybody can represent the people unless they're one with the people," said Petyo, who owns a construction company and has been handing out business cards at political events around the Midwest. He posts policy positions at .

In an interview, Petyo espoused conspiracy theories, claiming the Internal Revenue Service's home is in Puerto Rico, al Qaeda members who carried out the Sept. 11, 2001 attacks had help from inside the U.S. government and the Federal Emergency Management Agency is setting up detainment camps around the country.

For candidates like Petyo, the important thing is finding Americans who will listen to them, said Bart Rossi, a political psychologist.

"They want to get their thoughts and ideas out there," said

Rossi. "They want to be on the playing field even if they're not going to win the game."

Michael Maccoby, a psychoanalyst and leadership expert, said the world is going through deep changes, and more people distrust current leaders.

"It's understandable that you have a lot of people thinking they've got the answer," he said.

Petyo is a Republican, but shuns party labels as he supports unions, a typical Democratic position, while espousing the belief that U.S. companies should pay little or no taxes.

He should receive at least one vote. His long-time friend and supporter Jim Wright, a 65-year-old retired engineer who hands out flyers for the candidate, said he will vote for Petyo even though he doesn't have a "snowball's chance in hell."

(Editing by Ben Klayman and Andrew Hay)

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