

Advertisement



Home Improvement MADE EASIER




Powered by  Clickability

Thompson's to-do list looms

By Susan Page, USA TODAY

Five months after suggesting he might be interested in the Republican presidential nomination, former Tennessee senator Fred Thompson says he'll formally announce his candidacy Thursday — first on the Internet, then at a Des Moines rally. Has he waited too long? Maybe not, but he does face a formidable set of challenges and not much time to complete them.

Here's a look at Thompson's to-do list:

Get organized in Iowa and New Hampshire. Thompson's rivals have been opening campaign offices and recruiting county chairmen for months. The political on-line newsletter *Hotline* calculates that former Massachusetts governor Mitt Romney already has made 29 campaign trips to Iowa, which holds the opening caucuses, and 24 to New Hampshire, which holds the first primary.

"Obviously, he's got a lot of catching up to do," Steve Roberts, a Republican national committee member from Iowa, says of Thompson. "He has to get acquainted." His celebrity as an actor is a plus: "We've got excellent candidates, but we don't have the rock-star types" in local campaigns, Roberts says.

Thompson seems to get that message. He plans to stump in Iowa from Thursday to Saturday before heading to New Hampshire for events Sunday.

Stake a flag in South Carolina. Among the states with early contests, the Palmetto State, which holds the second primary, should be the friendliest territory for a fellow Southerner. "South Carolina will be where Fred Thompson is measured most," says Rich Bond, a former GOP national chairman.

South Carolina party chairman Katon Dawson warns Thompson's late entry has carried a cost. "The McCain campaign and the Giuliani campaign and the Romney campaign ... have been picking up IOUs and endorsements and making friends," he says, "and that goes a long way when it comes down to Election Day."

Step up fundraising — and by the end of the month. Thompson must detail his fundraising through September to the Federal Election Commission by Oct. 15. A report filed to the Internal Revenue Service showed \$3.4 million raised in June, less than the \$5 million aides predicted beforehand.

"It's the mother's milk of politics," says Republican strategist Chris Wilson, calling fundraising Thompson's first task. "I think he's got to be at \$20 million by the next filing. Anything short of that and he'll be so far behind the other candidates."

Romney had raised \$44.4 million by July and spent \$32.3 million of it; Giuliani raised \$35.6 million and spent \$17.3 million.

Put to rest the "he's lazy" jibe. The question above Thompson's photo on this week's cover of *Newsweek* asks, "Lazy Like a Fox?" The article repeats criticism that Thompson left little mark on the Senate after eight years and seems to have little appetite for the rigors of retail campaigning.

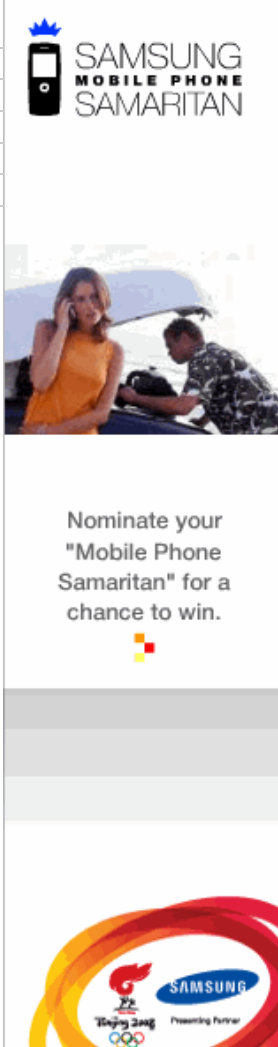
"Thompson has to take this laziness issue head-on and show he has a high level of energy and is willing to shake some hands," says Scott Reed, who ran Bob Dole's presidential campaign in 1996. "But that can be taken care of in the first two days of the

Share this story:

[Digg](#)
[del.icio.us](#)
[Newsvine](#)
[Reddit](#)
[Facebook](#)


What's this?

Advertisement



SAMSUNG
MOBILE PHONE
SAMARITAN

Nominate your "Mobile Phone Samaritan" for a chance to win.



announcement tour," he said. "It's good to be underestimated in politics over something you can fix."

Join the debate(s). The *Union Leader* in Manchester, N.H., expressed annoyance that Thompson was skipping tonight's debate in the Granite State to appear on NBC's *Tonight Show with Jay Leno*.

In coming weeks, advisers say Thompson will unveil "bold policies" that will "set the table" for the candidates' forums that follow. His first campaign ad airs on Fox News Channel today.

"You have the platform, you're new and fresh, and you've got big ideas," says Ken Khachigian, a California Republican strategist and former Reagan aide who is advising Thompson. "That gives you a chance to shape the debate, which could be important going into the next debate that'll be his debut, so to speak."

MORE: [Thompson to skip debate but will run ad](#)

Capitalize on Republicans' dissatisfaction with the rest of the field. The opening for Thompson's late-starting campaign is the failure of the current candidates to capture the support of the Republican base. In the USA TODAY/Gallup Poll last month, he trailed only Giuliani in support nationwide, suggesting Thompson's well on his way.

"The fact that a pro-choice, pro-gay rights ex-mayor of New York is leading shows the base has not begun to solidify behind a candidate," Wilson says.

Reed sees a "void" in the GOP field for "a true-blue conservative" that Thompson might be able to fill. "Labor Day is the starting gun for this race," he says. "He hasn't waited too long as long as he's prepared to sprint."

Share this story: [Digg](#) [del.icio.us](#) [Newsvine](#) [Reddit](#) [Facebook](#) [What's this?](#)

Find this article at:

http://www.usatoday.com/news/politics/election2008/2007-09-04-thompson-campaign_N.htm

Check the box to include the list of links referenced in the article.

Copyright 2007 USA TODAY, a division of Gannett Co. Inc.