

Dark horse candidate hopes for GOP nod

By KEVIN HARDEN
Of the Emerald

Ben Fernandez knows it is a long way to the White House, but he isn't worried. The dark horse candidate likes to think of his presidential campaign as part of the American dream.

"I like to think of the Ben Fernandez story as the miracle of America," he told the Lane County Republican Roundtable luncheon June 22. "I can't think of a better example to every poor kid in America than a man like me who went from a boxcar to running for president of the United States."

Fernandez was in Eugene to plug his 1980 Republican presidential campaign and to raise funds to qualify for the state's primary election in May, which would also help him qualify for federal matching funds for the

presidential campaign next year.

Fernandez joined an already crowded field of Republican candidates for the presidency last November. Since that time his campaign has been stumping from Los Angeles to Chicago for support and contributions. Over the weekend following his Eugene speech, Fernandez was one of nearly a dozen candidates to speak to the National Republican Committee in Washington, D. C. about his plans for the coming election.

During his speech, Fernandez criticized Pres. Jimmy Carter for nearly every woe facing the country, from inflation to the civil war in Nicaragua. If elected, Fernandez predicts his presidency would work to solve

domestic problems before he takes on the problems of the world.

Fernandez sees himself as a "hot candidate." Hoping to use his background as an advantage, he predicted that he would not only win the GOP primary in Texas, but he would also go into the New Hampshire primary next February with a definite advantage: 14 delegates from Puerto Rico's primary ten days before.

As the only declared Hispanic candidate, Fernandez said his candidacy will have one slight edge over the rest of the candidates.

"I am the only Republican candidate that will come to you with a program to help middle America," he said. That plan includes incentives to small

businesses, de-regulation of big business and cutting the waste in government spending to help the poor.

Being poor is one thing Fernandez knows a great deal about. Born in a converted boxcar just outside of Kansas City, his family worked during the summer to earn enough money to stay off welfare in the fall, he said.

While in college, Fernandez worked as a dishwasher, a waiter and an instructor at a local YMCA to earn money for his education.

Through his life Fernandez learned that "the American system still works." His life story should be an example to the poor, he said.

"The system really works. We need to go back to the fun-

damentals of the work ethic, the freedom of choice, opportunity and the free enterprise system. I think the Ben Fernandez story emphasizes all of those principles."

So far Fernandez has qualified for matching funds in ten states. In order to qualify in Oregon, Fernandez needs at least 20 persons to pledge \$250 to his campaign. He has already received several pledges from interested Republicans in Portland, but several more are needed before he will become eligible for matching federal campaign funds, Fernandez said.

Ben Fernandez expects to be a contender at the GOP convention in 1980 and he says he owes it all to the "miracle of America."

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