

An unopposed write-in: Chris Miller runs for Democrat slot in upcoming Madison County Treasurer election

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ALTON - Roxana High School graduate and entrepreneur Chris Miller is currently running unopposed on tomorrow's Madison County Democratic primary ballot, but he still requires 448 votes to make it on November's ballot against current Madison County Treasurer Chris Slusser.

Miller said he was asked to run by the Madison County Democratic Party and is running as a write-in candidate because he said he wants to "earn" his place on the ballot. He now requires 448 people to write his name on their ballot instead of filling the circle stating "no candidate." That number is around the equivalent of the amount of signatures required for Miller to have gotten on the ballot. While 448 ballots may not seem like too many, Miller said being a write-in candidate is still a bit worrisome.

"I had somebody tell me they wanted to vote for me, but they forgot my name," Miller said. "Ballots can be intimidating for some people, and having to write someone in is an extra step. Obviously the guy knew my name, but people forget things when they're nervous."

Add nerves to a normally low voter turnout during primary elections, and Miller has every reason to be unsure about his November 8, 2018, election position. He has been campaigning through flyers, word-of-mouth and even targeted Facebook advertisements.

"I don't believe anyone should ever run unopposed," he said. "I think competition is essential for democracy."

During his time at Roxana High School, Miller said he was inspired by a meeting with former Illinois Lieutenant Governor Paul Simon. Simon encouraged the 100 students visiting with him to seek careers in public service. That was a lesson Miller absorbed and has embodied, he said.

After attaining a degree, Miller said he returned to Illinois to be a part of the Illinois Coalition for Community Services for three years. During that time, Miller said he did a lot of community organizing across the state, including working on sewer systems for Eagle Park Acres – a housing development between Madison and East St. Louis.

Miller then worked for the Entrepreneurship Center at Washington University in St. Louis. He said he did not realize the amount of social entrepreneurship he had accomplished as a community organizer until he was a part of that center.

"We brought resources to entrepreneurs across the St. Louis Area," he said. "It's kind of hard being there and not catching the bug yourself."

Catching that bug for Miller turned into his dream – The Mission Center. Through that brainchild, Miller was able to help non-profits streamline their organizations through assistance in human resources, collaboration and accounting. Soon, however, he discovered many non-profits struggled greatly with providing health insurance in pre-Obamacare America.

To remedy this, Miller worked with his crew to create a more efficient way for non-profits to have healthcare. The result was something of a co-op across the State of Missouri (with a few Illinois organizations, such as Riverbend Head Start) to provide better rates for health insurance between non-profits.

By the time Obamacare rolled around, Miller said as many as 150 groups had joined that co-op. Because of his position, Miller said he read the entirety of the bill, and realized a concession by Democrats to Republicans who opposed a “single-payer system,” which Miller said he would have supported, allowed for the creation of an entirely new industry of providing healthcare to non-profits through non-profits. As much as \$3.8 billion was earmarked for this.

Since the co-op was as operational in Missouri as it was, Miller was able to take advantage of that, until negotiations during “The Financial Cliff” of 2013 eliminated these loans and their funding. Miller said his organization was unable to receive the \$90 million for which they applied, and Missouri was one of 28 states and the District of Columbia missing those funds.

After that, Miller became an instructor at Washington University in St. Louis, dedicating his teaching to entrepreneurship.

Miller plans on bringing his knowledge of entrepreneurship to Alton as well on April 6 through six-week entrepreneurial training seminar being hosted by Alton Main Street. The first three weeks will be held at Old Bakery Beer Company, and the latter will be at Post Commons.

If eventually elected Madison County Treasurer, Miller said he would bring some of that entrepreneurial spirit to county government.

“There are so many opportunities for us to get more value out of the taxes paid,” he said. “I would give the county someone laser-focused on that and creating new jobs. Over two thirds of new jobs have been created by companies less than five years old, and jobs are what Madison County needs.”

Government as well as the commercial sector could always use innovation, Miller said. He described himself as having a “long-standing philosophy” of progressive taxation, adding the government has the knowledge to produce more equitable tax structures – but simply does not do it.

“We can be more fair and equitable when paying for the business, which is county government,” he said.

For seniors, Madison County has a property tax exemption allowing seniors to potentially have their entire tax liability forgiven. If elected, Miller said he wanted to help seniors eligible for that exemption attain it.

“It's one thing to have a policy on the books, it's another thing to make sure people can take advantage of them,” he said.

This is not an endorsement for Miller.