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Edwards forges for votes and dollars

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John Edwards may be running for president again in 2008, but his latest effort is hardly a repeat performance of the 2004 campaign that catapulted him to the Democratic vice presidential nomination.

The former North Carolina senator says circumstances have changed, America has changed, and he has changed. "In 2004 I spent a lot of time thinking about how I could be the best candidate possible," he said in Buffalo Saturday. "Now I think about being the best president I could be."

Just days after declaring his candidacy once again, Edwards recorded his 10th trip to Buffalo over his two national campaigns for a fundraising event at Forge Consulting, 737 Main St. He readily concedes Buffalo and New York as solid turf for Sen. Hillary Rodham Clinton's expected presidential bid, but calls it an important center of political and financial support for his campaign, too.

Indeed, his fellow trial lawyers in Western New York supplied a strong percentage of his New York campaign dollars in 2004, and are following suit in 2007. Tickets sold at the \$500, \$1,000 and \$2,100 levels for the Saturday event, with those purchasing the high-priced ducat gaining entrance to a private dinner in the Theodore Roosevelt Inaugural Site.

While Edwards says nothing has changed Buffalo's status as a center of support, he is emphasizing the changes in his own approach to the campaign. In an interview with The Buffalo News in which he appeared casually dressed and relaxed, he said he identified the problem in 2004 through his "two Americas" theme -- one for haves and one for have-nots.

Now the former senator said he hopes to address it with a platform that includes reducing military forces in Iraq, citizen action to combat poverty, fighting global warming, and reducing the nation's reliance on foreign oil.

He has taken his campaign to the next level, he said, by moving beyond identifying problems to identifying solutions.

"My thinking as a leader has evolved," he said. "Identifying a problem is not good enough, but taking action to solve it is key.

"And it's not just having government do it, but instead getting Americans engaged along with the government," he added.

Edwards said he has matured personally and politically, and that reaching that stage required serious "self-analysis and awareness."

"Being president is a job with a lot of lonely responsibility," he said. "I think there's a maturity and a depth required to do the job and do it well.

"I've concluded I want to do it out of service," he added. "It's a dangerous and bad thing to run if you're ego-driven. I worry that some politicians don't think about it."

As a result, Edwards has been busy in recent months setting the stage for the kind of public-private partnerships he envisions as the centerpiece of his presidency. He ticked off a list of initiatives in which he has participated that demonstrate his vision:

Helping an effort to place proposals for increasing the minimum wage on the ballot in six states -- all successful.

Assisting a program pairing government with various private entities to help students obtain a debt-

free college education.

Working with union officials to organize workers in an effort that he said paid off with higher wages, better health insurance and lifting poorer families into the middle class.

Working with the International Rescue Committee to bring attention to poverty in Uganda.

Working with the Council on Foreign Relations and pairing with another former vice presidential candidate, former Rep. Jack F. Kemp, to fight proposals by Russian President Vladimir Putin to limit nongovernment organizations in Russia that promote democracy.

"We managed to bring about change," he said about each of his efforts.

Edwards said he hopes to appeal to the patriotism and spirit of Americans by rallying them toward solving problems in the same way as the "Greatest Generation" during and after World War II.

"You can stay at home and wait for Election Day, then you can vote, and then you can sit around and complain," he said. "Or you can take action yourself and bring about change yourself."

As a practical matter, the candidate said he harbors no illusion that he could compete in New York against Clinton should she enter the race.

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- John Edwards

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