

The Gazette

AN INDEPENDENT NEWSPAPER IN IOWA'S TECHNOLOGY CORRIDOR

Published November 09. 2007 4:30AM

Edwards wins budget group's endorsement



John Edwards Presidential hopeful

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The Gazette

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John Edwards has been endorsed by Caucus4Priorities, the grass roots campaign dedicated to shifting \$60 billion from Cold War weapons in the Pentagon to fund unmet social needs.

More than other candidates, Edwards embraces the message and priorities of Caucus4Priorities, which has 10,000 pledged Iowa caucus-goers, according to the group's leader, Ben Cohen, the co-founder of Ben & Jerry's Ice Cream Company.

"We have lots of friends in this race but only one champion," he said Friday.

In accepting the endorsement in Des Moines, Edwards said the hundreds of millions of dollars' worth of no-bid contracts that have gone to companies like Blackwater and

Halliburton "are examples of what's wrong in Washington, D.C.," where large sums are being wasted on military and defense spending.

"These are examples of what Iowa caucus-goers and what American voters want to see changed. They want something different," he said. "This is about a fight and everyone should understand this is a fight. This is a fight to make this government work, to weed out the corruption, to weed out the waste and to make America what it's capable of being, a government that represents everybody — not just the powerful, not just the wealthy, not just the big multinationals."

All of the candidates for the Democratic presidential nomination responded to the group's questionnaire. No Republicans responded.

Caucus4Priorities was impressed by the detail Edwards offered in how he would go about cutting government waste in the Pentagon's included spending on nuclear weapons, missile defense, offensive space weapons and Cold War weapons designed to thwart the defunct Soviet Union that have no utility in making Americans safe in today's threat environment.

"John Edwards demonstrates not only a belief in new budget priorities for America, but also the greatest commitment to incorporate that message into his campaign," said Peggy Huppert, state director for Caucus4Priorities.

His commitment exceeded that of his rivals, Cohen added. "A bunch of them lost points there. They just weren't willing to stand up and be vocal," he said.

The endorsement caps a 10-month process in which Priorities members attended more than 550 events and asked 250 questions about the budget priorities of each candidate. That "bird-dogging" worked better than expected, Cohen said.

"Part of it was that we tapped a vein of public feelings that the federal budget is out of sync and out of whack with the public's priorities," he said.

Now the group shifts gears to prepare its 10,000 pledgers for participation in the Jan. 3 Iowa caucus. It will explain to them why Edwards was endorsed and offer caucus education, especially for those who haven't caucused before.

And, finally, Caucus4Priorities will operate a get-out-the-vote campaign to get as many of its supporters as possible to caucuses.

They will be encouraged to caucus for Edwards. However, Huppert said, if caucus-goers are committed to other candidates it's unlikely they will change their minds.

"But we could be the tipping point for those people who tell us they are undecided between two or three candidates," Huppert said.