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Re-invented Gore re-emerges on the scene

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He's walking the red carpet as the star of a new film. He chatted with Jay Leno on late night television. He's made the cover of *Vanity Fair*. And he kicked off an episode of *Saturday Night Live* by talking about all the world's problems he would have solved as President Gore.

Of course, Al Gore isn't the leader of the free world, but the way he's been popping up all over the national landscape lately, you could believe he's been thinking about it.

Gore, 58, has been devoting himself to a more-than-30-year passion — the threat of global warming — as he promotes his new film and book, "An Inconvenient Truth."

Some speculate Gore is, once again, refining his image — so long stiff and dull, hello witty and relaxed — to set up another run for national office.

The Democrat, for his part, said he does not intend to run in 2008.

"I'm not making any plans to run for president again," Gore said in an interview with *The Tennessean*.

"I haven't made a Sherman statement because it just seems inappropriate," he said, a reference to the quote, "If nominated, I will not run; if elected, I will not serve," famously made by Civil War Gen. William Tecumseh Sherman.

"I haven't reached the point where I'm willing to say, 'Under no circumstances and the rest of my life would I ever think of such a thing,'" Gore said.

Gore has settled into a Nashville home with his wife, Tipper, spending his time doing "all the normal stuff," he said, like going to movies, spending time with friends and visiting the family farm in Carthage, Tenn.

He's also building a business empire.

He launched an upstart television network geared toward youth, *Current TV*, and an environmentally conscious investment firm, and he has been lecturing around the country.

"It's not exactly an explicitly political path, so you could call it a redefinition," political scientist John Geer said.

"Is he being himself or reinventing himself? Critics will say he's reinventing himself. Supporters will say he's the real Al Gore," said Geer, a Vanderbilt University professor.

If Gore makes a bid for the Democratic presidential nomination, possibly pitting him against former first lady and U.S. senator, Hillary Rodham Clinton. If he wins, he would be following the path of Republican Richard Nixon. Nixon, who like Gore also was a vice president, lost a close race to John F. Kennedy in 1960 and sat out the next presidential election before winning in 1968.

By declining to rule out a political comeback, Gore is keeping his options open, said Bob Tike, a Gore friend who is chairman of the Tennessee Democratic Party.

"It would take an overwhelming mandate," Tike said. "People presently being considered, saying, 'I will not run

against Al Gore.' It would take almost a rising by Democrats."

Public once again

The story behind Gore's re-emergence is the tale of melting glaciers and violent hurricanes.

It's a narrative he's told ever since he learned about global warming pollution as a college student. He later polished the story into a traveling slide show that is now a full-length documentary. The film has earned about \$4 million since it opened May 24.

"It's the most serious challenge human civilization has ever faced," Gore said. "It has the potential for literally threatening the future of all civilizations. That sounds shrill to some ears, but unfortunately it's true."

Gore is taking his message to the masses, urging them to become more knowledgeable about global warming. A good start: Reading his book and seeing his movie. The aim is to inspire people to cut back on the amount of pollution they generate through wasteful habits. Hopefully the enlightened will become activists.

"Here he is as the world's spokesman on something that is a world issue," Tuke said.

"Some can make the argument that that is much more important than being president of the United States," Tuke said. "If Al Gore could be some kind of world leader in this admittedly enormous problem we have to deal with, maybe that's his calling. Maybe Al Gore is the guy to show the world how to survive."

Most observers in Washington, D.C., are taking Gore at his word that he has no plans right now to run for president.

Charlie Cook, of the influential *Cook Political Report*, said he interpreted recent Gore answers to the presidential question as "totally disavowing any possibility of running without actually uttering those words."

"He said he could not conceive of a set of circumstances in which he would run. Sounds to me that we should take him at his word," Cook said in an e-mail response.

Cook thinks the speculation about a presidential bid gets in the way of Gore's message on global warming.

"If Gore were perceived as using the issue as a vehicle to run for president, it would hurt the acceptance of the message."

Someone who has known Gore as long as anyone, Rep. Jim Cooper, D-Nashville, also sees little chance of a Gore presidential run.

"I'm proud that people are supporting his ideas, I'm proud that people are supporting him," Cooper said. "My theory of politics is that you only get one or two chances, and he's had his one or two chances."

Limited political action

The Gores have not contributed much money to political campaigns in recent years — something that is nearly mandatory for someone running for national office.

Recent records in the key presidential states of Iowa and New Hampshire show no contributions.

Overall, Al Gore has given about \$16,000 since 2002, according to PoliticalMoneyLine, a service that compiles campaign finance data. Contributions have included \$5,497 to the Tennessee Democratic Party; \$4,000 to the Senate campaign of former White House aide Erskine Bowles; and \$10,000 to his own campaign committee.

Wife Mary Elizabeth "Tipper" Gore has donated \$19,000 during the same period, including \$1,000 each to John Kerry's and Howard Dean's presidential campaigns and \$10,000 to her husband's committee.

More interesting than the contributions themselves are the various occupations that Al and Tipper have listed when making the donations.

Al Gore refers to himself as "Self-employed/Former VP," "Consultant," "Teacher," "Author," and "Retired." Tipper variously defines her occupation as "Author," "Photographer," "Housewife," and "Lecturer."

In Nashville, the former vice president's rising profile drew chuckles from the state Republican Party.

"Is that guy still around?" said Bob Davis, chairman of the Tennessee Republican Party.

"I mean no ill will or disrespect to Al Gore, but a chameleon can change colors in a brief second, and I'm guess that's what Gore is trying to do," Davis said.

Nancy Lynn Nagy, who lives in Lewis County and is a data analyst in the health care industry, said she is thrilled about Gore's comeback.

She has supported Gore since he first caught her attention in 1980s when he was talking about global warming. "I think he has taken the leash off and has finally realized he is not playing the game anymore," Nagy said of his resurgence.

Those who know Gore scoffed at the notion that he has "reinvented" himself — a word that conjures up bad memories of his much-ridiculed campaign strategy of switching to earth tones.

"This is absolutely, not remotely, a reinvention," said Heather Marabeti, 36, who worked as an executive and special assistant to Gore when he was vice president. She is now executive director of staff development for development and alumni relations at Vanderbilt University.

"He's not the vice president anymore. He doesn't have the weight-of-the-world feeling on his shoulders. Maybe that's the part of it."

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