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# American Independent Party presidential candidate makes pitch to Inland area

                                                    

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By **MICHELLE DeARMOND**  
The Press-Enterprise

Another presidential campaign stopped in the Inland area Thursday, albeit without the usual trappings of a national campaign: no motorcade, traveling press or Secret Service.

In fact, Chuck Baldwin's appearance at the Mission Inn Restaurant was so low-key that diners probably had no idea there was a presidential candidate in their midst. Baldwin, the nominee for the Constitution Party, quietly ate bacon and eggs with a half-dozen supporters, trading tales of deer hunting and lamenting the influence of "liberal Democrats."

Baldwin, 56, is on a swing through Southern California this week to build support for his presidential bid. His stop at the downtown Riverside restaurant was one of several meetings and radio interviews scheduled for the next few days.

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Silvia Flores / The Press-Enterprise

American Independent Party presidential nominee Chuck Baldwin, center, takes a quick call during a breakfast meeting with supporters Bill Lussenheide, left, of Menifee, and Jim Griffin, of Mira Loma, at the Mission Inn in Riverside.

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He and his party, which is known as the American Independent Party here, have little name recognition but hope to woo voters not interested in Sen. John McCain, R-Ariz., or Sen. Barack Obama, D-Ill.

Baldwin, a pastor from Pensacola, Fla., describes the two major parties as having not a "nickel's worth of difference" between them. Sprinkling his remarks with words like "kinfolk" (his relatives in Arkansas) to "terrific" (his diehard supporters), he said voters are ready for something new.

"I want the American people to hear from a guy who will shoot straight," he said. "They're not hearing it from" the two major parties.

Unfortunately for Baldwin, two better-known minor-party candidates already pitching themselves as alternatives to the major parties. Bob Barr, a former Republican congressman, is running as a Libertarian and Ralph Nader is an independent candidate.

"He's going to be scrambling with Barr and Nader for media coverage," said Shaun Bowler, a UCR political science professor. "It's never a good time to be a minor party candidate; it's an especially bad one now."

Even though voters often tell pollsters they'd like a third-party choice, it doesn't mean they want the Constitution Party or American Independent Party, Bowler said. Also, Baldwin still has to clear a number of hurdles in multiple states to get on the ballots, although he has qualified in California.

The American Independent Party may be best known for its former figurehead, Alabama Gov. George Wallace, who helped the party qualify for the California ballot in his effort to run for president. The party is conservative and advocates a government limited to its original constitutional functions. The party opposes gay marriage, abortion and gun control.

Those socially conservative positions are appealing to some former Republicans, who said Thursday they switched to the American Independent Party out of frustration.

"George Bush was the final straw," said Bill Lussenheide, a Menifee resident with congressional aspirations. "The religious right was abandoned."

Hector Barajas, communications director for the California Republican Party, said there's room for diverse opinions in the party and Republicans are not afraid of Barr, Baldwin or others stripping away support.

"The Republican Party is a big-party tent," Barajas said. "We have a lot of different voices and a lot of different ideas, and that's what continues to unite us."

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