

Democrat Wants Chance At East's Senate Seat

BY SUSAN USHER

William Irwin Belk of Charlotte is going all out in his bid for the U.S. Senate seat held by Republican John East.

He's first got to win the Democratic nomination.

The 36-year-old has taken leave as vice president of finance for his family's chain of department stores to campaign full-time across the state. After one swing through all the counties, he plans to start over again immediately, he said Wednesday during a stopover at the Shallotte Town Hall.

The immediate past national chairman of the Young Democrats, Belk said he believes his party experience, law practice, finance background and youth, when coupled with the Belk name, could mean victory over the man he expects to be the GOP contender—U.S. Congressman Jim Broyhill of Lenoir.

Having a name that's a "household word in North Carolina," he said, "is why I have a realistic chance over other candidates."

While he has not held public office, Belk worked his way up through the Democratic Party ranks, serving as past treasurer, national committeeman and president of the N.C.

Young Democrats, on the state and national Democratic executive committees and on the 1984 national voter registration and convention planning committees.

As a Young Democrat, he said he saw the Republican Party target young voters in its growth campaign.

Democrats haven't kept pace, allowing the GOP "to take the lead away," he said. "We need to get it back."

Belk says that his age, conservative and energetic approach will help attract young voters and regain the party's strong image, counteracting the effects of that GOP campaign.

The party needs assertive leadership, leaders with vision and foresight, he said. The officials the state sends to Washington, he said, need to be young so they can have the chance to gain seniority.

While it is suddenly a popular trend to support restraints on textile imports, said Belk, the Belk stores insisted years ago that 95 percent of

their house labels be made in the United States.

With trade barriers erected by other countries, he said, "There's no such thing as free trade, not for the rest of the world."

"We need fairness. It makes sense. There's got to be some kind of protectionism."

Belk describes himself as a "conservative Democrat," not only on trade and economic issues, but on defense and fiscal management. He is a strong advocate of deterrence through improved weaponry, including President Reagan's Strategic Defense Initiative, but said he would cut down on wasteful spending.

Through his national network within the Democratic Party, he said, he can build the coalition required to make major changes.

As a senator, he said he would apply the same management tools used in his work for Belk stores, streamlining financial operations.

He advocates returning the Social

Security system for instance, to its original function as an old-age pension fund.

"It was meant to be a savings program," he said. "Right now it's cash-in, cash-out. That's got to change."

In addition to his work with the Belk stores, Belk is an attorney and is vice president of Monroe Hardware Co. He holds a B.S. in business administration from the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill, master's degrees in business administration and tax law from Emory University and a J.D. degree from the Wake Forest University School of Law.

He is married and the father of two sons.

Other Democrats seeking the party nomination include Fountain Odom, a Mecklenburg County commissioner; Melvin Daniels Jr. of Elizabeth City, a state senator; Albert Lineberry of Greensboro, a state representative; and Marvin K. Blount Jr., a former Superior Court judge.



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