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Seith scores on third try

The astounding comeback of Alex Seith, the political soundrel of 1978, is the big surprise so far in this election campaign. Six years ago Seith ran a despicable campaign against Sen. Charles H. Percy (R-Ill.) and lost. Four years ago he tried to get the Democratic nomination for the Senate and failed. Last summer he began his third try, looking like an early bet to fade. But with six weeks to go till the primary, Seith remains very much in the running with a show of strength.

Seith is the only one among the four Democrats who has pushed up in the polls. Rep. Paul Simon remains the front-runner but has slipped. State Comptroller Roland Burris has not budged significantly in the standings. The party organization's man, Illinois Senate President Phil Rock, seems strangely stuck at the bottom.

Cash, catchy themes, persistence and pluck have helped Seith climb back into serious consideration. Cash has been the most important ingredient. In the pursuit of ambition this time, Seith already has plunked down \$400,000 on his own. It came from his earnings as a Loop lawyer and an influential Cook County official and inheritance from Seith's wife, who died after his 1980 failed Senate bid.

His personal dole—which is more than Burris has been able to raise in the campaign yet—enabled Seith to go on TV with his catchy campaign themes. Some of them including his "Revenue Keeping" and "Take Home Pay Protector" plans are from old campaigns. Others, such as his "Pentagon Tax Equalizer" and "Personal



Basil Talbott Jr.

Social Security Account" are new. To conserve money, Seith's spots were homemade. His superb campaign chief, Thom Serafin, helped write and produce them. A few are corny but effective. One shows a big friendly woman complaining about politicians who care more about cocktail parties than taxpayers' money. When she praises Seith, he says, "Thanks mom."

Seith's positions are an ideological mix. He told me that he's "the most conservative of the Democrats." That contention has merit. Seith is the only Democratic challenger favoring tax indexing—adjusting income taxes to account for inflation—which would effectively give a tax break next year.

But Seith also is for phasing out nuclear-energy plants, making him an enemy of the electric utilities. Seith has served up a populist stew.

Persistence has paid off for Seith because his competitors were slow to start. The other three challengers all thought they might get the party's endorsement. They hoped to narrow the field by discouraging others from entering. Only Seith knew at the beginning that he was persona non grata with party leaders. Seith had to campaign, and he did.

So far, Seith has introduced the greatest number of substantial issues. He has suppressed his instinct for negative tricks. His style and content have improved. With little party and labor, Seith has kept his campaign moving.

Simon told me he plans to air \$500,000 in TV ads produced by a fancy East Coast consultant in the final four weeks.

If Burris and Rock stay stagnant and the East Coast TV is good, Simon will win. If the field is tighter, Seith will be in the running. He has one more asset that could stand him well in the finish. Seith has more guts than the others.