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Carmouche: School year brings predictable jitters

On the eve of the first day of school in the Carmouche household, my parents fed us a good meal, made sure we said our evening prayers and laid out a fresh set of the next day's clothes. I always had a hard time falling asleep on those nights because I anxiously thought about what the year ahead would bring.

In my household, the importance of education was stressed daily. My mother taught English and Latin, and my father was the school superintendent in Assumption Parish for 28 years. My siblings became teachers, and I spent a semester before law school teaching eighth-grade reading. I decided that the challenges of teaching children were tougher than the challenges of learning the law.

Throughout my congressional campaign, people always ask me how I plan to help fix our education system, and this newspaper has often asked about what candidates plan to do about education.

The problems are complex. The strongest economies have a strong educational foundation. At a time when our national economy is struggling and our local economy is proving to be resilient, we must commit ourselves to ensuring that we look at ways to improve early childhood education and that our teachers are well trained.

We must make sure that our work force is agile. Yesterday's GM line employees can become tomorrow's film industry and Haynesville Shale workers with widely available work force retraining programs. We must make sure that our children excel in science and math so that we have a homegrown discovery that could lead to lower gas prices.

In Congress, education will be a priority of mine just like it was a priority in my household. I recently read a report that said in the last 25 years, education spending has risen 240 percent, while performance has barely changed. Clearly it will be smarter spending that will fix our education system; not higher taxes.

An educated work force is the key to our future. Widely available, quality education is the key to attracting good companies with good jobs to come to our area. The demands of today's global economy require a deep commitment to educating our work force of tomorrow. An educated community opens the door to innovation, creativity and higher incomes. In short, education drives growth.

I will fight for legislation that promotes secondary education, technical education and college education. I recognize that education begins at home with the family, and I will promote any piece of legislation that ensures northwest Louisiana schools have the resources they need to educate our young people.

As soon as I am elected to Congress, I will form an advisory committee of educational leaders — from school boards, community colleges, vocational schools and four-year colleges — from all over this district to constantly inform me on school needs, so students have access to the tools they need to succeed and to learn.

While No Child Left Behind was well intended, the unintended consequences are too many to count, and it seems that we are leaving our children behind. Teachers teach to the test, rather than teach students to learn. Accountability is important, but not at the expense of some teachers gaming the system to ensure that their students have the best test scores.

The evening before the first day of school brings the same set of nerves year in and year out.

In Congress, I look forward to making a personal commitment to working with our 4th District communities toward a brighter future for our children, so that everyone can rest a little easier.

Caddo Parish District Attorney Paul Carmouche is a Democratic candidate for the 4th Congressional District.