

# Carmouche wins backing of national Democrats

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WASHINGTON — Caddo Parish District Attorney Paul Carmouche, one of four Democrats vying for retiring Rep. Jim McCrery's seat, has won the backing of national Democratic Party officials as the candidate best positioned to win.

That means Carmouche can count on fundraising and campaigning help from the national party. He was in Washington this week to meet with Democratic Congressional Campaign Committee officials.

Campaign spokesman Greg Richardson said Carmouche isn't holding a fundraiser in the capital. But he had the opportunity to meet Democratic donors and party leaders, including DCCC chairman Rep. Chris Van Hollen, D-Md., at an event Thursday aimed at kicking off the 100-day countdown to the Nov. 4 general elections.

"We think Paul Carmouche is an extremely strong candidate," DCCC spokeswoman Kyra Jennings said. "And the DCCC's sole job is to get Democrats elected to Congress."

But Carmouche must win in the first closed party primaries Louisiana has held in decades, set for Sept. 6. Democrats and voters with no party affiliation will cast ballots for one of the four Democrats running for the 4th District seat. Republican primary voters will choose from three candidates.

Last month, the DCCC listed Carmouche as one of 37 Democratic candidates selected for its "Red to Blue" program. It says those candidates are "surpassing demanding fundraising goals and skillfully demonstrating to voters that they stand for change and will represent new priorities when elected to Congress."

Carmouche has raised more than \$475,000 since entering the race last spring.

The national party's endorsement of Carmouche is an obvious disadvantage for the other Democrats in the race. But attorney John Milkovich, one of Carmouche's Democratic rivals, says he's not concerned about party politics.

"I think it's so important that our focus be on western Louisiana and not on Beltway politics," he said.

The other Democratic candidates in the race are retired Army officer Willie Banks and Shreveport Christian Church founder Artis Cash.

The winner of the Sept. 6 primary will face one of the three Republicans running for the seat — John Fleming, a Minden physician; Chris Gorman, a Shreveport businessman; and Jeff Thompson, a Bossier City lawyer who has been endorsed by McCrery and other GOP leaders.

There are also two independents running for the seat — Gerard Bowen and Chester Kelley.