

Interest in Blaum's seat increasing

Veteran state legislator announced this week he won't run again

By James Conmy
Staff Writer

A multitude of potential candidates have emerged for state Rep. Kevin Blaum's seat less than a week after the 26-year veteran legislator announced he would not seek re-election.

The seat is crucial to Wilkes-Barre City and its surrounding communities because the representative, along with Sen. Ray Musto, lead the charge to funnel state money into the 121st Legislative District. The district includes Wilkes-Barre City, Ashley, Plains and Wilkes-Barre townships and two



Kane



O'Donnell



Reilly



Healey



Katsock

Dan Flood decided not to run, eight people jockeyed for the open seat, Mitchell said. He expects a high number of candidates, political veterans and newcomers, in this race as well.

wards in Hanover Township. Democrats mulling a run include Wilkes-Barre City Councilwoman Kathy Kane, Wilkes-Barre Area School Director Dr. Brian O'Donnell, Luzerne County Clerk of Courts Bob Reilly and Wilkes-Barre Attorney Bill Vinsko.

Others who have expressed interest are Kevin Greenberg, a member of the county voting machine committee and public relations consultant; Sally Healey, former director of the city's Neighborhood Impact

Team and Wilkes-Barre Township resident Bob Caruso, another member of the voting machine committee.

Republican Christine Katsock, who lost to Blaum in 2004, already has declared her candidacy.

"I think they'll be a lot of people taking the attitude that this is the first time in 25 years this seat has opened up," said Ed Mitchell, a local political consultant. "It could be 25 years before it happens again."

When the late Congressman

Political insiders say Vinsko, 30, may have the most ability to raise money and secure the backing needed to get elected, despite it being his first attempt at public office.

Mitchell would not handicap a favorite.

"Certainly, Vinsko is a contender, there is no doubt about that, but I haven't seen any polling data," Mitchell said. "I

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think he is going to have to increase his name ID, that is going to take some money. He doesn't have an electorate base like Kathy (Kane) does, but he definitely has political allies."

Kane, Reilly and Vinsko have not confirmed whether they will run.

"I am strongly interested, but I have not made a definite decision as of yet," O'Donnell said Friday. "It's the holidays and I think people are focused on their families. I'll enjoy the holidays with my family and have a more concrete decision after the first of the year."

Others interested in the election speculated the high num-

QuickInfo

The starting annual salary for a state representative is approximately \$69,700.

Beside full health care coverage, the representative also is eligible for the state pension plan, a \$650 monthly reimbursement for a vehicle lease and \$128 per-day in living expenses when the House is in session. Their average staff consists of a chief of staff and two administrative assistants, one in Harrisburg and the other in Wilkes-Barre.

ber of candidates could influence a Plains Township resident to run. The hope would be a divide among city voters would give a township candidate a stronger chance.

Township Supervisor Brigid

O'Connor is not in the race, but her son Martin has been encouraged to run. Martin Murray, Brigid's father and Martin's grandfather, was a state representative and senator.

Residency should not influence the outcome, Mitchell said.

"I don't know if geography is as important as message and media," he said. "It's hard to say Wilkes-Barre automatically goes for a Wilkes-Barre person, or Plains goes for a Plains person. The candidate's message or how he or she does in forums or debates, things like that (will decide the winner)."

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