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## Race for GOP nod down one hopeful

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San Bernardino County Sun

One of five Republicans seeking the GOP's nomination for a state Assembly seat that represents portions of San Bernardino and Los Angeles counties has dropped out of the race.

Three are from the High Desert, and one has Los Angeles County all to himself.

The GOP candidate who left the 59th Assembly District race, Kevan Otto of Sierra Madre, has pledged his support to Christopher Lancaster of La Verne. Otto said his decision to leave the race would clinch the nomination for Lancaster.

"I don't think it's productive for us to trade votes in Los Angeles County," Otto said. "I don't want Chris Lancaster and I to slug it out and put one of these other candidates in."

Otto said his decision, announced March 30, was swayed by Lancaster's experience in elected office and their similar political philosophies. Lancaster is a former Covina councilman.

If Otto's prediction is correct, that would mean the district, which includes communities as far apart as east Highland, Apple Valley and Monrovia, would continue to be represented by a Los Angeles County Republican.

Currently, the seat is held by Dennis Mountjoy, R-Monrovia. Term limits prevent Mountjoy from seeking re-election. While Lancaster touted Otto's exit as a "huge, huge advantage" for his campaign, he acknowledged that he'll need San Bernardino County votes if he expects to win the GOP nomination in June.

"I'm certainly not going to ignore the voters up there," Lancaster said. "I'm going to make sure that L.A. County doesn't suck up all the money from the transportation bond, if it does pass."

Lancaster is an advertising executive for the Los Angeles Newspaper Group, of which The Sun is a member. In March, a beyond-the-eleventh hour attempt to place a bond measure allocating funding for transportation projects on the June ballot failed in the Legislature.

While other candidates in the race said Otto's decision to support Lancaster could wind up aiding their efforts, Douglas Johnson, a fellow with the Rose Institute of State and Local Government at Claremont McKenna College, said the latest political development could help Lancaster, but Lancaster doesn't have the race sewed up.

"Lancaster doesn't have it completely clear in the (San Gabriel) Valley," Johnson said.

In the 59th Assembly District, the number of registered Republicans in San Bernardino and Los Angeles counties is almost equal. Both counties record slightly more more than 55,000 members of the GOP in their portions of the district. Even if San Gabriel Valley Republicans vote by geography in the June primary, Otto's name is still on the ballot, and another candidate, Apple Valley resident Barry Hartz has ties to Los Angeles County.

"Otto's withdrawal is very helpful to me because he's from Sierra Madre, and I went to church in Sierra Madre for 12 years," Hartz said.

Another Republican candidate, Hesperia resident Anthony Adams, also contended that he will benefit from Otto leaving the race.

Otto is a police officer with the Los Angeles Unified School District and now that he's out of the running, Adams expects to have less competition in his efforts to convince voters that he is the strongest public-safety candidate.

State Sen. George Runner, R-Lancaster, represents another district that includes part of San Bernardino and Los Angeles counties. Runner, who has endorsed Adams, said he expects Adams and Lancaster will emerge as front-runners for the Republican nomination.

Adams, a former staffer for San Bernardino County Board of Supervisors Chairman Bill Postmus, has received endorsements from several San Bernardino County officials, and his campaign has not accepted spending limits.

Runner anticipates that GOP voters will care more about issues than geography when they go to the polls in June.

"I don't believe the people of Los Angeles County vote as a bloc. It (the district) goes from Monrovia to Claremont," Runner said. "I don't think San Bernardino County is all lockstep either."

Republican candidate Susan Slater of Apple Valley also expects voters will care more about candidates' positions than their address.

"I'm heavy with illegal immigration. If that's what your interest is, then you're looking my way. If you're interested in the budget you're looking at Christopher or Barry, not that it's not important. It's not my top priority."

Whichever Republican emerges on top in June can expect to face Democrat Elliot Robert Barkan of Claremont in November. Barkan said it doesn't matter where his GOP opponent lives. He said he needs to reach out to middle-of-the-roaders throughout a district where Republicans outnumber Democrats.

"I think that the challenge is really in both counties because in such a way, it's been gerrymandered with such a Republican center in Glendora and Apple Valley," Barkan said.