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Pasadena Star-News (California)

August 26, 2007 Sunday

Romero setting sights on schools

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SECTION: NEWS

LENGTH: 781 words

Senate Majority Leader Gloria Romero has set her sights on the state's top school post, according to documents filed with the California Secretary of State's Office.

Romero, D-Los Angeles, filed a statement of intention to run for state superintendent for public instruction in 2010, when current Superintendent Jack O'Connell's term expires. Romero filed the documents Aug. 17, according to a spokeswoman for the secretary of state.

Romero's communications director, Russell Lopez, said the senator was in New York helping her daughter move to graduate school and was unavailable for comment. He said she has yet to put together a staff for her run at the superintendent's post.

The secretary of state's Web site lists her committee, Romero for California 2010, as active, but notes that the committee has yet to raise any money this year. Romero also declared that she would accept campaign finance limits for her superintendent run, which would qualify her for matching state funding.

Also throwing their hats into the superintendent race are state Sen. Tom Torlakson, D-Antioch, Assemblywoman Betty Karnette, D-Long Beach, and former Democratic state Sen. John L. Burton of San Francisco.

Romero, a former assemblywoman who is in her last term in the Senate and is the first woman to hold the majority leader post, started her career as a California State University teacher. She holds a doctorate in psychology from UC Riverside and serves on the Senate Education Committee and is chairwoman of the Urban School Governance Committee.

In addition to her educational background, Romero's name recognition and well-established political track record make her a formidable candidate for the superintendent's seat, said political expert Douglas Johnson.

"She has good organization, good labor ties and a good track record of raising money," said Johnson, a fellow with the Rose Institute of State and Local Government at Claremont McKenna College. Romero is still a member of the California Faculty Association, the state's leading university instructors' union.

Johnson said many elected officials in their last terms file a statement of intent to run for another office even if they do not plan to compete for the seat, because that is the only way they can establish a committee to raise funds and pay off past campaign debts.

But he doubts that is the case with Romero, who represents the San Gabriel Valley communities of Azusa, Baldwin Park, Covina, Duarte, El Monte, Industry, Irwindale, La Puente, Monterey Park, Rosemead, South San Gabriel and West Covina.

"I highly doubt the state Senate is the last stop in her political career," Johnson said. "It is still too early to tell, but she is definitely a strong, leading candidate."

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Former local Assemblywoman Judy Chu also has declared her intent to run for a second term in the state Board of Equalization's 4th District race in 2010.

Chu, the wife of Assemblyman Mike Eng, D-El Monte, did not rule out running for state Senate as well. She is facing a challenge to her seat by state Sen. Bob Margett, R-Glendora.

"I haven't made any final decisions, and am contemplating all possibilities that are out there," said Chu.

She added that among the actions taken by the Board of Equalization she is most proud of during her tenure is a recent decision to tax so-called "alcopop" beverages as hard liquor, as opposed to beer.

That decision means such drinks, which include Zima and Mike's Hard Lemonade, will now be taxed at a rate of \$3.30 per gallon, as opposed to 20 cents per gallon.

"We hope that this action will be a disincentive for young people to buy these drinks, which the industry markets to young adults," Chu said.

As for her competition from Margett, Chu noted that the Board of Equalization's 4th District is overwhelmingly Democratic. In the last election, only 25 percent of voters were Republicans, while about 52 percent were Democrats.

"I do think the senator would have an uphill battle," she said.

Margett said he doesn't believe voters take party affiliation into account as much when it comes to positions like the Board of Equalization.

"This is a board position where you are not dealing with legislative bills, so I don't think when people vote they are looking at whether you are a Democrat or Republican," said Margett. "It is like running for county supervisor. It is more about name recognition, and what you can do for the taxpayer."

Margett, whose term expires in 2008, has endorsed Assemblyman Bob Huff to replace him in the Senate. Huff will run against former Assemblyman Dennis Mountjoy for the Republican nomination to the 29th District, which is dominated by the GOP.

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LOAD-DATE: August 27, 2007

LANGUAGE: ENGLISH

PUBLICATION-TYPE: Newspaper