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LESCH DROPS OUT, ENDORSES JOHN KATKO

Former Auburn school board member Jason Lesch bows out of congressional race, backs John Katko

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Jason Lesch of Sennett speaks a Republican congressional candidates forum Thursday, Feb. 27 hosted by CNY Conservatives.

The only Republican from Cayuga County vying for the GOP nomination to challenge U.S. Rep. Dan Maffei, D-Syracuse, in the 24th Congressional District has dropped out the race and backed the party's designated candidate.

Jason Lesch, a Sennett resident who served on the Auburn Enlarged City School District Board of Education for three years, said in an email Saturday evening that he talked to Cayuga County Republican Chairwoman Cherl Heary and Onondaga County Republican Chairman Tom Dadey and has decided to support John Katko, who **received an overwhelming majority of the vote at the GOP convention Saturday in Syracuse to win the party's designation.**

"As mentioned in my speech today, I met with Tom Dadey, Cherl Heary and John Katko after the delegation today. John is a great candidate for the Republican Party, and won overwhelmingly," Lesch wrote.

"He requested support from the other candidates and I have decided to back John 100 percent and help him in any way that I can. We will be hearing a lot from John in Cayuga County."

Following the convention, Lesch offered praise for Katko, a former federal prosecutor who stepped down from his post to run for Congress.

"He's got a good base of supporters," Lesch said in an interview. "He's been out there working hard and it showed in the results."

Lesch **announced his candidacy in an interview with The Citizen in late January**. At the time, he was the seventh Republican to enter the race.

When he joined the race, Lesch said he might be considered an underdog being the only Cayuga County candidate going up against mostly Onondaga County candidates. While he wasn't successful in winning the party's designation, he said running his first congressional campaign was a good experience.

"It's an interesting process," he said. "It was good for me. I got to know a lot of different people so far and I think I've gotten some positive feedback from the people that have heard me speak."

Lesch is the latest Republican to drop out of the race. Jane Rossi, a Rome businesswoman, was the first when she informed Dadey that she was bowing out before Saturday's convention started.

Dadey and other Republican leaders hope the party will unify behind Katko, but a primary is still possible.

Syracuse businessman Ian Hunter said he will **pass petitions to appear on the June 24 primary ballot**. Syracuse attorney Rick Guy and retired Army Col. John Lemondes haven't decided whether they will continue their campaigns and collect signatures to secure a spot in the primary.

The 24th Congressional District includes all of Cayuga, Onondaga and Wayne counties, plus the western part of Oswego County.



Q&A: Republican Party designee John Katko to Maffei: 'Get ready for the ride'

