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## Q&A: Former Auburn school board member Jason Lesch vying for Republican nomination to challenge Maffei

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Then-Auburn School Board member Jason Lesch speaks to Cayuga County's state legislators about gaining more equitable state aid distribution for the school March 28, 2012. In an interview with The Citizen, Lesch said he is seeking the Republican nomination in the 24th Congressional District race.

The Citizen file

As one of eight candidates seeking the Republican nomination to challenge U.S. Rep. Dan Maffei, D-Syracuse, there is one factor that makes Jason Lesch stand out in a crowded field of contenders.

He is the only candidate from Cayuga County.

"I've lived in Cayuga County most of my life," Lesch, a Sennett resident, said in an interview announcing his candidacy last month. "We've had a long history here. My grandmother was president of the school board years ago. My great-grandfather was a member of the school board. My other great-grandfather, he was a city manager twice in Auburn. So, we've got a long history here."

Lesch is a graduate of Le Moyne College in Syracuse. As a certified public accountant, he has worked in Syracuse before. He worked for public accounting firms and a financial turnaround company in Syracuse.

Not only does he have experience working in Syracuse, the largest city in the 24th Congressional District, but he also has experience working in Oswego County.

Right now, Lesch is self-employed. He's had his own firm for the last 12 years. He said he's not a tax accountant, but rather spends time analyzing data and coming up with recommendations to help businesses plan.

"Health care, education, finance. I've got some good experience dealing with these things at the local level and the impact," he said.

Lesch, who is married and has two sons, served on the Auburn Enlarged City School District Board of Education for three years. He said it wasn't his intent to enter politics, but decided to run for school board after seeing a need for someone with his skill set.

"I got involved in it and I got heavily involved in it," he said. "I went right in and in my third year, I was school board member of the year for our BOCES district. I enjoyed advocating for children in the community."

Lesch is now focused on running for Congress. He joins a long list of Republicans — Syracuse economist Janet Burman, Syracuse attorney Rick Guy, former Syracuse mayoral candidate Ian Hunter, former assistant U.S. Attorney John Katko, retired U.S. Army Col. John Lemondes, Rome businesswoman Jane Rossi and Manufacturers Association of Central New York President Randy Wolken — vying for the party's nomination to face Maffei.

Here is a Q&A with Lesch on why he's running for Congress, whether he will continue with a primary bid if he doesn't win the party's designation and what his thoughts are on some of the key issues in the race:

**QUESTION: Why did you decide to run for Congress?**

LESCH: I think that I bring something to the table that other people don't bring and I think it's needed. We need people in Washington that have common sense, that are willing to work with people, that want to get things done and advocate for their community. We've got a great community here. We've got smart, intelligent people. We need to promote it more. I've worked with

hundreds of businesses and have been able to continue doing that by getting things done for them. I understand how things work. I'm a quick learner and you have to be if you're self-employed and living in central New York.

**QUESTION: What do you think sets you apart from the other Republicans in the race?**

LESCH: I understand numbers and I think that's important. I've lived education over three years and I'm working to understand the health care finance environment. So, I'm living issues right now. I'm frustrated with Washington. I'm tired of yelling at the TV. It's either time to do something or not do something. That's the way I look at it. And I looked at it that way when I was on the school board. Am I going to do something or not? I'm not going down to Washington to get approval to do this. I understand I'm going to probably be an underdog. I'm not from Onondaga County, although I'm very familiar with it. But I don't mind being the underdog. My first hurdle is getting into the primary. I need 1,250 signatures to do that.

**QUESTION: Would you continue to go forward and force a primary regardless of what the party does?**

LESCH: At this point, yes. It looks like there's enough candidates in there. There's going to be a primary. That will be a good opportunity for Republicans to have a good choice.

**QUESTION: What are some of the issues you will focus on in this race?**

LESCH: I understand that you're working with 434 other people (if elected to the House of Representatives), so you've got to be able to get down there and really work your butt off to have any sort of say in things. But definitely the finance (issues). We can't keep spending as much money as we're spending. We can't keep financing our deficits. It's unsustainable. I don't want my children to have a worse standard of living than I have. You can't accomplish all of that at once. It's got to be over time. It's not like going down there and we've gotta cut everything. That's not realistic. But at least someone who can communicate. When I was on the school board, I had the ability to communicate things so that people could understand the issues. I think that's what I could do down there is take all these numbers that are mumbo jumbo to a lot of people and break it down so that it makes sense.

**QUESTION: From you experiences with health care, what's your assessment of the Affordable Care Act?**

LESCH: It's going to need to be fixed. I'm not a big believer in letting people suffer for political reasons. It needs to be fixed. I'm concerned about the impact it's going to have on the people in central New York. I've already seen the impact on the hospitals that are getting significant Medicare reimbursement reductions. The next step is gonig to be on the small business owners when they eliminate health insurance.

Unfortunately, everyone is gonig to pay more, whether it's out of your pocket, premiums or your provider doesn't want to accept you anymore because of the insurance you have. It's a good goal to get everyone health insurance, but it needs to be fixed.

You're taking a law and the way it gets administered is tens of thousands of pages. It seems kind of ridiculous to me and no one knows what they're doing. All of a sudden you get hit with this — 'Oh, I didn't know about that' — because of the administration of that law. I don't think people understand that. You start off with a law that's a couple hundred pages and it ends up being tens of thousands of pages of rules and regulations.

The website (for the health care exchange), is it a security risk? I've dealt with companies that have been beta test sites with software that I would never roll out a website that's into all those databases before it was completely secure and done. It seems like a huge risk. Who was paying attention? Nobody. Nobody to that. They wanted it to fail instead of protecting everyone's interests.

**QUESTION: How would you classify yourself? Are you a conservative or moderate Republican?**

LESCH: It's tough to classify yourself because I'm a continuous learner. I got on the school board and I didn't really know anything. I think by the time I finished, I knew a lot because I love to learn. I think you have to continue to learn and I use information to make my decisions. That's the way I work. You look at the data, you look at the information and then you make the best decision possible based on the circumstances at the time. As far as social issues, my goal in Washington isn't to go down there and take away anybody's rights that they have. Those are all personal type of issues. But that's not my goal. (Washington) is messed up. I'm frustrated. Can I do something or not? I don't know, but let's give it a shot. Let the voters decide if they want someone like myself with my background to go down there.

**QUESTION: If you're successful in the primary, you would face Congressman Dan Maffei in the general election. What's your assessment of Maffei?**

LESCH: I'm looking at one step at a time. It's going to be a tough primary. There's a lot of qualified candidates. I've got to get through the primary first. Otherwise, you can get overwhelmed with this. My goal is just the primary and if I'm fortunate enough to win, then we go there. But I'm not going to have Washington run my campaign, I'll say that.



Former Auburn school board member Jason Lesch seeking GOP nomination to challenge Rep. Dan Maffei

