

RIVALS MAKE CASE AGAINST MARLINGA FOUR CANDIDATES VIE FOR INCUMBENT'S JOB

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Body

When Carl Marlinga made his last-minute withdrawal from the Michigan Supreme Court race in May, the maxim of political observers was this: If he wants to keep the job of Macomb County prosecutor, all he has to do is say so.

After all, the Democratic powers-that-be begged him to stay home; crime was down; and Marlinga made a name for himself by cracking down on lake polluters and developing programs to help victims, among other things.

But consider the furious campaigning and large war chests of some of his opponents who got a jump on Marlinga while he bid for another office.

Combine it with the 16-year veteran prosecutor's vulnerable spots -- repeated attempts to seek higher office; his support of a convicted rapist and friend, former Sheriff William Hackel, and the worsening problem of Lake St. Clair polluters -- and Marlinga could have a battle on his hands.

"I wouldn't say he has it locked up. It's going to be a tough race in November," said political consultant Richard Sabaugh.

Two other Democrats hope to beat him in the Aug. 8 primary: Tom Marrocco, a 57-year-old Warren attorney who is expected to spend more than any other candidate, and Roy Transit, 41, a Fraser attorney who is taking no contributions because, "I don't want to owe anyone any favors."

Retired Macomb County Circuit Judge Robert Chrzanowski, 63, and C. Michael Kimber, 74, a St. Clair Shores criminal defense attorney who lost to Marlinga in 1984 and 1988, are on the Republican ticket.

"If this is a good year for Republicans in this county, Marlinga could have some problems. I don't believe he's a shoo-in at all," said Joe Munem, a campaign consultant.

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The prosecutor oversees 53 assistant prosecutors and a \$6-million annual budget.

Marlinga, 53, said he doesn't expect to waltz to a fifth 4-year term.

"I don't take anything for granted," he said.

That would explain Marlinga's campaign budget of at least \$100,000 and his plans to bombard voters with at least 200,000 flyers. Marlinga's money comes from contributors, some of it courtesy of a well-heeled and controversial political action committee called the Southeast Michigan Business Network.

But Democratic challenger Marrocco has his own money to spend, thanks to a wrongful termination settlement from the City of Warren. Marrocco was fired as Warren city attorney by then-Mayor James Randlett in 1981.

He has already taken out a two-page newspaper ad, and his campaign signs are plastered across the county.

Marrocco is also bringing laughs to the campaign.

He appears at Warren City Council meetings wearing a sandwich board with various gripes. One calls for a grand jury investigation of corrupt politicians.

He also criticizes Marlinga for getting in and out of the Supreme Court race at the 11th hour.

"He's a man who cannot make up his mind," Marrocco told TV Warren, a cable news program. "He's made a clown of the whole county."

Although Republican Kimber contends that knowing the skills of defense law would make him a better prosecutor than Marlinga -- who seldom tries cases -- he said he expects Marlinga to win, mainly because of Macomb voters' preference for Democrats.

"Even Jesus Christ couldn't get elected south of 14 Mile," he said.

On the other hand, Republican Chrzanowski said, "People are telling me they're sick of him changing his mind.

"You want a prosecutor to be consistent, decisive and dependable."

In addition to serving 18 years as a Macomb County Circuit judge, Chrzanowski was a Macomb County assistant prosecutor and chief judge of Warren's 37th District Court. He retired as county judge in 1992 and was a city attorney in Warren until 1995.

"I'm encouraged everywhere I go that people want a change. My race involves the question of character and integrity," said Chrzanowski, who has promised, if elected, to donate half his nearly \$99,000 annual salary to victims-rights organizations.

Marlinga said, "People will understand I was offered a new position," and that there's nothing wrong with wanting to advance in a career. He felt obligated to "stay home" after being asked, he said.

"They're both jobs in the justice system. It's not like I was leaving to go into private industry."

His record includes appointing minorities and creating programs that help the environment and victims of crime. He also takes partial credit for a 42-percent drop in crime in eight years.

As for supporting former Sheriff Hackel by testifying in his rape trial, Marlinga said he has no regrets.

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Notes

SEE MICROFILM PAGE 2B FOR CANDIDATE VIEWS ON POLLUTION IN THE CLINTON RIVER AND LAKE ST. CLAIR, THE DEATH PENALTY AND PUBLIC CORRUPTION

Graphic

Photo;
Robert Chrzanowski
Republican
C. Michael Kimber
Republican
Carl Marlinga
Democrat
Tom Marrocco
Democrat
Roy Transit
Democrat

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