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Four Democrats seek party's nod for 7th District Four Democrats seek party's nod for 7th District

Friday, February 17, 2006 9:20 AM EST

2004 nominee Sharon Renier is running, along with Daryl Campbell, Chuck Ream and Fred Stra

By Erik Gable

Daily Telegram News Editor

ADRIAN - Former congressional candidate Sharon Renier announced Wednesday she will seek the 7th Congressional District seat again this year, bringing to four the number of Democrats vying to represent their party in the Nov. 7 election for U.S. Congress.

Daryl Campbell, 34, of Scio Township is a U.S. Army veteran and sergeant in the Washtenaw County Sheriff's Department. Chuck Ream, 59, a retired kindergarten teacher, has been a Scio Township trustee for 18 years. He has been active in campaigns to control development in Washtenaw County and legalize medical marijuana. Renier, 50, a paralegal and organic farmer from Munith who until recently worked for the University of Michigan Law School, was the party's nominee in 2004. Fred Strack, 44, a Navy veteran and Ford Motor Co. employee from Dexter, is longtime Democratic activist in his first bid for office.

The winner of the Aug. 8 primary will likely face either incumbent Rep. Joe Schwarz of Battle Creek or former state legislator Tim Walberg of Tipton, who are battling for the Republican nomination. Candidates have until May 16 to enter the race.

Campbell, who has been in law enforcement since 1992, said he decided to run for Congress because he saw "a problem with integrity and honor in Washington."

Describing himself as a moderate, Campbell said he would be a voice for average citizens.

"When I go to Washington, I can relate to the problems of everyday Americans, because I am everyday America," he said.

Campbell said he supports more funding for the Community Oriented Policing Services program which provides federal money to help local governments hire more police officers.

"We need to get more cops on the street," he said.

Campbell also said the government needs to adequately fund special education.



"I'm starting to hear from the other party that special education is an entitlement," he said. "I don't call it an entitlement, I call it a responsibility."

As a veteran, Campbell said, he wants to make sure soldiers in Iraq are provided for.

"My goal is to get them everything they need and get them home as quickly as possible," he said "but cutting and running is not the answer."

Ream, a native of Three Rivers, recently retired after 33 years teaching kindergarten in Monroe. was first elected a Scio Township trustee in 1988, "on a slate of people who said that we were going to control development and preserve some open space and the semi-rural character of our township."

He's been active in the Washtenaw County political scene, running for county commission in 1999 and taking part in a campaign to legalize medical marijuana in Ann Arbor. Ream said he opposes the war on drugs, saying it "creates more problems than it solves."

Drugs should be considered a medical and public health problem, Ream said, not a law enforcement issue. He said people should have the right "to put whatever you want to put into your body," with the understanding that they have "absolute personal responsibility" for their own actions when they do so.

"I think most people can understand that putting someone in jail for pot is evil and stupid," he said.

In order to create jobs, Ream said Congress should level the playing field between American manufacturers and foreign competitors by demanding that countries like Japan open their markets to U.S. imports or face increased tariffs on their own goods. Otherwise, he said, the United States will be "letting our jobs roll down the hill to these other nations."

On Iraq, Ream said, he believes in a "three-nation solution" in which Shiites, Sunnis and Kurds have separate police forces, jails and armies, if not completely separate countries. He said dividing Iraq along those lines is the only way to "provide the security necessary for us to leave."

Renier was the Democrats' nominee in 2004 and lost to Schwarz by 58 percent to 36 percent. She said she thinks she can win this time if she places more emphasis on fund-raising than in the last campaign, in which she made a campaign issue out of not having as much money as her opponent.

"This time, I'll definitely raise more money - and just work twice as hard," she said. "I don't know how, but I will."

Renier, who ran unsuccessfully for state representative in 2002, said she originally entered politics out of concern for the environment. An organic farmer, she's concerned about genetic engineering. She said she's also worried about jobs, health care and education, and criticized President Bush's slogan of "compassionate conservatism" as an oxymoron.

"I don't find anything compassionate about not helping out your fellow man," she said.

Renier has spent most of her career in the legal field, and until recently worked for feminist scholar Catherine MacKinnon at the University of Michigan.

Strack has never run for office before, but he said he's volunteered for Democratic candidates since 1988. He served in the Navy for eight years, and moved to Michigan three years ago when he was transferred to Livonia for his job with Ford.

Having been a union member and being married to the owner of a small business, Strack said he can speak to both sides of the debate between business and labor interests.

He said jobs will be the No. 1 issue for his campaign, followed by the war in Iraq and corruption in Congress.

On jobs, Strack said he would "take health care out of the realm of the employer and put it in a national health care program." On Iraq, he called for an independent counsel to investigate report that prewar intelligence was manipulated, saying Congress needs to "get to the heart of how we got in there."

To fight corruption, he said, he would push for a rule stating that if a member of Congress is censured three times by the ethics committee, he will lose his position.

Whoever wins the primary will face an uphill campaign against the Republican nominee, said Mr. Ferguson of Lansing, a 2004 congressional candidate who runs the Web site michiganliberal.com

Ferguson said the Democratic nominee's task may be easier if Walberg wins the Republican nomination instead of the incumbent Schwarz, but in races for Congress, parties usually look for candidates who have served in the state Legislature or are well-known throughout the district.

"The problem with congressional races is that it takes so much money to get anywhere," he said and he hasn't seen any signs that the 7th District race is on national Democrats' radar. He said Democrats in Washington probably looked at the race and decided the odds weren't good enough although, he added, "right now it looks like it could be a very strong Democratic year."

In terms of who's leading the pack right now, Ferguson said, "I'd have to give Strack the edge."

But it's hard to predict who will win, he said.






An informal straw poll after a candidate forum sponsored by Washtenaw County Democracy for America, which is linked to a national group founded by Democratic National Committee chairman Howard Dean, showed Campbell in first place. Of 36 respondents, 15 voted for Campbell, 10 for Strack, nine for Ream and two for Renier.

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