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## Carter backs top deputy for state AG run

May 16, 2008

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By **Andy Grimm** Post-Tribune staff writer

SCHERERVILLE – Steve Carter on Thursday formally announced his support for his top deputy, Greg Zoeller, to succeed him as state attorney general.

Northwest Indiana is the home turf of Zoeller's rival, Valparaiso Mayor Jon Costas, but Carter told a small gathering of Republican state convention delegates at a local restaurant that Zoeller would continue the fight against public corruption in the region.

Zoeller, a New Albany native who has been Carter's top deputy since 2001, confirmed that he would continue Carter's voter fraud task force and a civil racketeering lawsuit against former East Chicago Mayor Robert A. Pastrick and other Lake County insiders.

"I pledge to continue that effort," Zoeller said, listing legal actions filed against local politicians while speaking at the Indianapolis Boulevard Panera Bread restaurant. "I think that's a pretty good indication of the role of the attorney general and what (the office) can do for Lake County and Northwest Indiana."

Zoeller touted his experience as his key qualification for the job. Delegates at the state party convention will choose between Zoeller and Costas on June 2.

The endorsement came as no surprise, as Carter began campaigning with Zoeller shortly after withdrawing his candidacy for a third term more than a month ago. Gov. Mitch Daniels on Monday announced his support for Costas, who has been touring the state meeting with party leaders.



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"This election is about the future, not the past," Costas said. "I have the support of the governor, which is like throwing gasoline on a fire for your campaign."

Costas, an elder law attorney, said he also would continue the no-call list and voter fraud initiatives started under Carter. Asked if he also would press the civil racketeering lawsuit against Pastrick, Costas said he had not reviewed the lawsuit in detail.

Endorsements may figure more heavily in this abbreviated race for attorney general than in a normal primary campaign. Carter's withdrawal gave candidates only five weeks to lobby support from the 2,086 delegates who will vote on a nominee at the state convention.

With Daniels and the state party backing Costas, Zoeller said he has reached out to the "grass roots," with similar small meetings with delegates.

Carter, a Lowell native, is a popular figure in Northwest Indiana, while Daniels' sale of the Indiana Toll Road has antagonized some voters in the region.

In announcing his support for Costas, Daniels cited the need to balance the GOP statewide ticket with a candidate from northern Indiana. Were Zoeller on the ticket, all the Republican candidates would hail from Indianapolis or counties farther south.

Lake County GOP Chairman John Curley has backed Costas, but said he has instructed delegates to "vote their conscience."

"We have two excellent candidates. I'm not going to split the (county) party over a statewide race," Curley said. "I don't think either of the candidates will want to see (corruption) investigations dry up."

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