

Costas, Zoeller bring experience to AG race

BY PATRICK GUINANE

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INDIANAPOLIS | Valparaiso Mayor Jon Costas left a mammoth Indianapolis law firm to return home to Northwest Indiana, a career turn his mentor and former boss says has made him a strong candidate for Indiana attorney general.

Robert Grand is the managing partner for the Indianapolis office of Barnes & Thornburg, the largest law firm in Indiana. It's where Costas landed as a litigation attorney after graduating Valparaiso University School of Law in 1989.

"He did extraordinarily well in law school, obviously," Grand said. "And if you interview with him, I think it becomes pretty apparent that he's a hell of a guy."

Costas said he stayed with Barnes & Thornburg less than three years before yearning to return home to Valparaiso, where he would go on to become a city councilman and mayor. Last week he announced plans to seek the Republican nomination for attorney general.

Grand, a Munster High School graduate and top GOP fundraiser, said the experience Costas has acquired would serve him well as the state's top lawyer.

"He's going to be managing one of the largest law firms in downtown Indianapolis (as attorney general)," Grand said. "I think that skill set is an executive skill set, and it's an ability to recognize and identify problems. And I think that's where he's fantastic."

But the other Republican hopeful for attorney general also boasts a managerial background.

Greg Zoeller, a New Albany native, unsuccessfully sought the GOP nomination in 1996. He has served as Attorney General Steve Carter's chief deputy since 2001 and says he knows what it takes to manage a team of 140 lawyers.

"It'll be a gentlemen's race," Zoeller said. "I think it's a healthy test of our candidates."

Zoeller served 10 years as an aide to Dan Quayle, and the former U.S. senator and vice president released a statement Friday supporting Zoeller's candidacy.

Costas and Zoeller are the only Republican candidates to announce, although potential candidates have until May 19 to file for the nomination, which will be decided at the state party convention in June.

"I think everybody is waiting for the governor to weigh in on this," Costas said. "If he shows his support for me, then I anticipate that I will get that nomination. I will not continue my seeking the nomination if the governor lets me know he chooses someone else."

Daniels and Carter declined to comment on the race. Carter recently announced he would forgo a bid for a third term.

Linda Pence, an Indianapolis attorney, is the likely Democratic nominee for attorney general.