

McCaskill gets big endorsement on Day One

Former Gov. Wilson backs auditor as she challenges Holden in primary

BY VIRGINIA YOUNG AND JO MANNIES of the Post-Dispatch

Missouri Auditor Claire McCaskill launched her bid for the Democratic nomination for governor Monday with help from one of the party's heavy hitters: former Gov. Roger Wilson.

Wilson, who endorsed the auditor at a midday campaign stop in Columbia, painted McCaskill as a leader who would focus on finding solutions instead of fighting the Republican-led Legislature. He praised her straightforward style and open-door policy.



GABRIEL B. TAIT / POST-DISPATCH

"She knows how to get things done through cooperation, and I think that's extremely important," said Wilson, who briefly served as governor after the death of Gov. Mel Carnahan in October 2000.

McCaskill, in a three-city

Missouri Auditor Claire McCaskill embraces her daughter Maddie Esposito after McCaskill announced here Monday that she would challenge Gov. Bob Holden. McCaskill's younger daughter, Lily Esposito, is at left.

swing across the state, promised a positive campaign focusing on government accountability rather than personal attacks on the man she is trying to oust, Gov. Bob Holden.

But her announcement filled some Democrats with dread. They fear that a battle between Holden and McCaskill will deplete their campaign funds and cause a rift similar to the schism that divided party regulars in 1980.

That year, Treasurer Jim Spainhower, a Democrat, challenged Gov. Joseph Teasdale for the party's nomination. Teasdale fended off Spainhower but was defeated in the general election by Republican Christopher "Kit" Bond.

See McCaskill, A4

Claire McCaskill

Home: Ladue

Age: 50

Occupation: State auditor

Family: Married to developer Joseph A. Shepard; three children — Austin Esposito, 15, Maddie Esposito, 14, and Lily Esposito, 11; four adult stepchildren — Benjamin Shepard, 28, Carlton Shepard, 25, Marilyn Shepard, 23, and Michael Shepard, 21.

Education: Graduated from Hickman High School, Columbia, Mo., 1971; bachelor's degree in political science, University of Missouri at Columbia, 1975; law degree, University of Missouri at Columbia, 1978.

Political career: Elected to Missouri House of Representatives, 1982-90; Jackson County Legislature, 1990-92; Jackson County prosecutor, 1992-98; state auditor, 1998-present.

Personal: Father, William, was state insurance commissioner, and mother, Betty, was the first woman elected to the Columbia City Council.

McCaskill

Auditor challenges Holden in primary

Continued from A1

"My experience has been that tough primaries seldom help the winner," veteran Sen. Wayne Goode, D-Pasadena Hills, observed recently.

Holden emphasized his status as the incumbent Monday. He held two news conferences in St. Louis to draw attention to a federal grant to help unemployed autoworkers and a new panel to help locate abducted children. When asked about McCaskill's candidacy, he said, "I look forward to her supporting me after the primary."

"I wish she wasn't running, but that's a decision she made," said Holden, 54. "I'm not worried about the campaign. I'm worried about being a good governor for the state of Missouri. I'm going to continue to focus on my record."

Holden has about \$2.3 million on hand for the campaign, compared with \$1.3 million for McCaskill. Her treasury includes about \$250,000 in personal loans she made to her campaign.

McCaskill's long-anticipated announcement that she would seek to be the state's first woman governor was made during a cross-state road trip with her family from Kansas City to St. Louis. She will travel by plane today to six more cities.

McCaskill, 50, showed how her platform will contrast with Holden's on the key issue of the state's fiscal troubles. Holden in the past has suggested softening state budget cuts by raising taxes on casinos, smokers and some businesses.

She said no tax increase should be sought until the state thoroughly reviews the way it awards more than \$200 million in income tax credits and about 115 sales tax exemptions.

"It is inappropriate to ask taxpayers for more money until we can show them we are being accountable for the money we have now," she said.

As auditor the last six years, McCaskill has focused on "performance audits" that go beyond whether numbers add up and look at whether a program is working properly.

For example, she found that a state child abuse hot line was ignoring calls that warranted investigation; that Medicaid failed to limit use of a widely abused painkiller; that a state program regulating "puppy mills" was ineffective; and that state agencies were spending millions of dollars on food for nontraveling employees.

Besides emphasizing accountability, she said she would stress her record of getting things done. She pointed to her stint as Jackson County prosecutor, where she helped set up a drug court and put prosecutors in neighborhoods to help clamp down on gangs.

A lawyer known for her candor, McCaskill said Monday that a few party officials had tried to talk her out of running for governor, warning that the race was impossible to win. But she wasn't discouraged.

"I have heard that my entire career," she said, "and every single time, I have proved them wrong."

At her campaign stop in St. Louis, McCaskill said she didn't plan to attack Holden — but then went on to compare him to California Gov. Gray Davis, who

is being forced from office in a few weeks after losing a recall election Oct. 7.

Like Davis, she said, Holden is "a governor that had quit connecting with the people he represented. I believe very strongly that most Missourians have lost confidence in his leadership."

McCaskill said it was Davis' recall that helped her make the final decision to challenge Holden.

An independent group that is campaigning on McCaskill's behalf, called Citizens Supporting McCaskill for Governor, says on its Web site that next year's Democratic primary is the state's way to "recall" Holden. Coordinator Gary Wells was on hand for McCaskill's St. Louis event, held by the pool outside the Chase Park Plaza hotel.

McCaskill said she was hoping that she wouldn't have to put any more of her family's money into the contest but that she was prepared to do so, if necessary. But she emphasized that she believed that she would garner more support in the coming months, especially from small donors.

McCaskill was born in Rolla and reared in Lebanon and Columbia. Her father, William, McCaskill, served as a state insurance commissioner, and her mother, Betty McCaskill, was the first woman elected to the Columbia City Council.

Last year, McCaskill married developer Joseph A. Shepard, 57. He builds apartment buildings for the elderly and low-income people; runs a family shoe business in Michigan; and owns an in-home health services company and a physical, speech and occupational therapy business.

The couple live in Ladue. She has three children, ages 15, 14 and 11; he has four adult children.

Handwritten notes: #82167, 17 #