

Two challenge local incumbents

Staff reports

The Manhattan area got its first legislative contests of the 2008 campaign Friday when challengers declared for both the 22nd District Senate and 66th District House seats.

Rusty Wilson, a Manhattan businessman and owner of several dining-drinking establishments, confirmed Saturday that he will file for the 22nd District Senate seat against incumbent Roger Reitz Monday. Wilson, a Democrat making his first bid for elective office, reserved comment on the reasons for his decision to run beyond saying that "Manhattan and Junction City need better representation, and I will be fighting aggressively to win this seat."

Reitz was elected to the Senate in 2004 after serving in the Kansas House. He filed for re-election earlier this year.

On Friday, Dee McKee declared for the Republican nomination to the 66th District House seat presently held by Democrat Sydney Carlin.

A two-term incumbent, Carlin has already filed for re-election to the district, which largely embraces the northeastern portion of the city. With Tuesday's noon filing deadline looming, Democratic 67th District Rep. Tom Hawk, has not yet drawn an opponent.

McKee is a veteran of both the legislative and educational processes whose family is involved with local businesses. A 2006 doctoral graduate of Kansas State University, she worked from 2000 to 2004 as director of special education for USD 383 before leaving to take a job as principal of a school in Wichita. The family maintained its residence in Manhattan, however.

In announcing her candidacy, McKee emphasized her experience in legislative issues related to education, and also her connections with the majority party. "I have been all my life involved in Kansas issues," she said. "I have always wanted to run; this is the time when it is appropriate."

A former Ford County commissioner whose family still owns a farm in that area, McKee and her husband of 38 years, C.H. McKee, are the parents of three children. A son, Aaron, is owner with his wife of Purplewave Auction of Manhattan. A daughter, Meridith Sparenberg, manages the Houlihans restaurant here. A second daughter, Megan LoPresti, is owner with her husband of a Purplewave Auction in Las Vegas.

McKee said she would be "a very big advocate for economic development, and cited her "much better understanding of school finance and special education funding" issues. A commissioner in Ford County from 1986 to 1990, she said she had carried two bills that became law, one changing the governance of special education, and the other permitting the use of a quarter cent sales tax for local highway improvements.