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McCall pushes candidacy

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Trying to erase doubts about his commitment to run for governor, state Controller Carl McCall hit the campaign trail yesterday — an early launch for an election 49 weeks away.

The two-day swing began at New York University, where he laid out the planks of his campaign by blasting Gov. Pataki's handling of education and the upstate economy.



Carl McCall

The subject wasn't surprising. McCall's timing was.

Most office seekers wait until well after the new year to rev up their campaigns.

But McCall, 66, is trying to raise his profile and answer lingering questions of whether he has the stomach for a long, grinding race. By contrast, similar questions are not raised about his Democratic rival, former U.S. Housing Secretary Andrew Cuomo, who doesn't plan to give such speeches until next year.

"If you doubt my commitment to this cause," McCall said, "you do not know me."

His aides distributed a fact sheet which states that since April, McCall has done public events in 41 counties. It also listed 48 Democratic events he attended.

McCall charged that "the Pataki administration has allowed a huge educational canyon to form . . . that traps children at the bottom of educational and economic opportunity." He vowed that after his first term, 75% of the students will pass the standardized English and math tests.

In citing the upstate economy, McCall borrowed from the winning rac-
es of Democratic Sens. Hillary Clinton and Chuck Schumer. "Where are New York's Microsofts, Dells, Oracles?" he asked. McCall made no mention of trying to become only the second black governor elected in U.S. history, and New York's first. Douglas Wilder was the nation's first. He was Virginia governor from 1989 to 1993.

Dozens of Democratic supporters, from state Attorney General Eliot Spitzer to Manhattan Borough President Virginia Fields, attended McCall's speech, part of a strategy of casting him as the party's institutional choice.

By contrast, Cuomo, 43, is casting himself as an insurgent with new ideas for a new generation, a strategy reinforced by Assemblyman Sam Hoyt of Buffalo, who spoke on behalf of the Cuomo campaign. Hoyt said he saw no "fresh ideas" in McCall's speech. He called Cuomo "not part of the status quo."

Cuomo did not directly attack McCall last night, but was dismissive of his speech. Asked if McCall is part of the problem, Cuomo said, "He has been the controller for the State of New York for eight years." But he then added, "It's not for me to say."

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