CANDIDATES — The six top contenders in Saturday’s primary for Louisiana governor are from left: top, E.L. “Buddy” Roemer; middle, Henry, Louis Lambert, James Fitzmorris; bottom, Dave Treen, Paul Hardy and Edgar Mouton. (AP Laserphoto)

IN TAKING MONEY

Political Leader
Saw Nothing Wrong

LAKE CHARLES, La. (AP) — A black political leader has testified he saw nothing wrong in 1978 with Claude Leach, who was then a candidate for Congress, giving him $1,000 to buy votes.

“People haven’t been getting paid since I’ve been voting,” said an exhausted Fisher, his office and his law partner, Assistant District Attorney Edwin Cabra, miles away in Leesville.

Fisher said Leach reminded him of “the old days” when paying off voters was common. “He was my first political hero,” he said.

Leach won that election, edging Republican Jimmy Wilson of Vivian by 266 votes.

Fisher, a self-acknowledged expert in setting up vote-buying projects, was one of the final prosecution witnesses Thursday in the 10-day trial.

The government contends Leach and Cabra bought votes in a predominantly black area of Leesville known as “the Crossings,” an area the prosecution says was a center of commercial voters.

Prosecutors are expected to rest their case today.

On election day, Fisher said, the steady drain of $5 votes exhausted his cash and he telephoned Cabra.

“Mr. Cabra said to come by his office to pick up more money,” Fisher said, but when he got there, Cabra told him “everything was taken care of. Mr. Mac had got it and was gone.”

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He referred to then-Mayor Ralph McRae who testified earlier that Leach and Cabra were reluctant to give Fisher more cash and asked him to take it down to the “pay house” where voters were handed $5 each.

Fisher said he had trouble lining up drivers, or “haulers,” for Leach in the September primary election because another vote-buying operation was in town and offering more money.

It was operated by Vernon Parish Police Jury President William C. Hilton on behalf of Charles “Buddy” Roemer III of Shreveport, Fisher said.

Roemer, the son of state Commissioner of Administration Charles Roemer II, ran third in the open primary — behind Leach and Wilson, who moved on into the Nov. 7 general election.

In Shreveport, Roemer said he never heard of any vote-buying on his behalf.

“We put no vote buying money in Leesville or anywhere else,” he said. “It just didn’t happen. I would say this, the proof of the pudding is in the record — we got very few votes in Vernon Parish, if we were buying votes we did a lousy job of it.”

Hilton was listed by the government as an unindicted co-conspirator.

Fisher said that when he pledged guilty to reduced charges he didn’t think he had done anything wrong.

“It’s so common, I didn’t think nothing was to it,” he said.

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