

### **Gloves Are Off: Fight For McKeon's Position**

*by Andrew Davis*

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Many are familiar with the Latin motto *E pluribus unum*, which means "out of many, one."

However, the converse of that—"out of one, many"—could certainly describe the situation that has developed in the wake of Democratic State Rep. Larry McKeon's July 31 announcement that he plans to retire from office in January after 42 years of public service. Since McKeon's statement, several names have been bandied about as possible replacements to represent the 13th District on the Nov. 7 ballot—and the stakes are indeed huge, since said replacement will go directly to Springfield. ( There is no Republican opponent on the ballot. )

McKeon, who is currently serving his fifth term as a representative to the Illinois General Assembly, has recommended to the five Democratic ward committeemen ( Patrick O'Connor, Bernard Stone, Eugene Schuler, Tom Sharpe and Michael Volini ) who represent portions of the 13th District that openly gay attorney and community leader Jim Snyder be appointed to replace him on the ballot. "I took a careful look at the needs of the district and recommended Jim Snyder. He can fulfill the needs of this diverse community," McKeon told Windy City Times.

However, other names have been brought up, including Equality Illinois board member Kevin Thompson and Tom O'Donnell, an ally of Schuler. Greg Harris, chief of staff for 48th Ward Ald. Mary Ann Smith, said that he will consider running if there is a deadlock among the committeemen; he will make a final decision this week.

Thompson told Windy City Times that he definitely plans to put his name down as a possible selection. While he sees other candidates as being well-qualified, Thompson said that he "can hit the ground running [ in Springfield ] in a way that would be beneficial to the community." He also cited his extensive experience as a lobbyist and with local government as well as his involvement in area groups, such as his presidency of a housing organization in Andersonville.

Also in the mix is out lesbian Mel Ferrand. Over the weekend, she issued a press release announcing her intention to be a candidate. In the statement, she declared that "[ w ] hile the men seeking this office have impressive credentials, [ she ] offers something more ... a fresh new perspective to Springfield." An elementary school teacher, Ferrand calls herself a lifelong political activist and names several organizations of which she has been a part, including the Ravenswood Community

Council, the Illinois NOW PAC and the Illinois Pro-Choice Alliance.

A primary issue fueling the influx of possible candidates is that Snyder is not a shoo-in for the position, although he has the support of several well-known names, including activist Mike Bauer and Democratic Metropolitan Water Reclamation District candidate Debra Shore. In an e-mail to Windy City Times, Shore listed several reasons for supporting Snyder, saying that “he will be an inclusive, energetic, open-minded, and dedicated representative ready to move the 13th District in a positive direction.”

“If Larry [ McKeon ] and Jim [ Snyder ] wanted that seat so badly, they should have made it happen before he signed on the dotted line,” Rick Garcia of Equality Illinois told Windy City Times, indicating that McKeon should have had his ducks in a row before announcing his departure. “You have to line up the votes. ... No one can complain that there isn’t this grand rush to support [ Snyder ] . No one should criticize anyone for supporting any of the other candidates besides Snyder.”

When asked why he had not sewn things up regarding his seat, McKeon responded that “I respect the process of state law. When there is a vacancy on the office or ballot, the decision rests with the elected committeemen. I’ve had conversations of a personal nature with all five of the committeemen.” ( He declined to discuss what they talked about. ) When Windy City Times mentioned to him the perceived lack of support among the officials, McKeon replied that “well, that’s the position they’re taking [ right now ] . I’ve made a recommendation—and I think it’s a very good recommendation.”

Only one of the four committeemen who can vote—Sharpe—has expressed support for Snyder to the public. Stone, who has no vote because he had no registered Democratic voters in the 50th ward in the last election, told Windy City Times that he would have voted for Snyder and called his inability to vote “frustrating.” Schuler actually has the most voting power—33 percent of the total vote—based on the last election.

Another controversial issue involves what some have termed the “necessity” of having a GLBT candidate replace the openly gay McKeon. ( Snyder, Thompson, Harris and Ferrand are all gay or lesbian; O’Donnell is heterosexual. ) However, Garcia stated to Windy City Times that while it would be “disappointing” if there were no gay replacement, it would hardly be devastating. “We play the hand that is dealt us, and we do well. Some of our strongest gay-rights advocates have not been gay,” he said, citing such individuals as State Rep. Sara Feigenholtz and State Sen. Emil Jones. “We need many and diverse [ pro- ] gay voices in our state capital and, in the 13th District, we have an embarrassment of riches.” When asked about the same issue, Schuler told Windy City Times that, although he understands the concerns of the GLBT community, he “has to weigh everything. It will come down to someone who works hard. We want the best-qualified candidate.”

One event that will hopefully provide some clarity regarding the matter is a public meeting that will involve all candidates who plan to be on the slate. Schuler and

O'Connor have announced that the slate-making meeting for the 13th Representative District of the General Assembly of the State of Illinois will be held on Tuesday, Aug. 29, at 7 p.m. in the Anderson Pavilion at Swedish Covenant Hospital, 2751 W. Winona. All candidates should call Schulter at 773-404-1443 to be placed on the agenda.

The nomination of the committeemen, as well as candidate documents, have to be filed with at the Illinois Board of Elections office in Springfield by Aug. 31.

[ Editor's note: Candidate Mel Ferrand is a freelance writer and photographer who has contributed to Windy City Times. ]