

## Updated 8/22: Harmon mentioned for State Senate president

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Oak Park's State Senator is vying to ascend to the chamber's top position.

Following an announcement by Emil Jones Aug. 18 that he would retire from the State Senate President position, the joke around Springfield was that, of the 37 Democrats in the Senate, 36 were jockeying to become Jones' replacement.

The short-list is closer to six or seven, and one of those is Don Harmon, D-39th, of Oak Park.

Harmon said he has not officially announced his candidacy, but acknowledged he is considering a run.

"I have been named," he said. "I'm talking to my colleagues. I'm seeking their advice and guidance."

One colleague he has spoken with is district neighbor Kimberly Lightford, D-4th, of Maywood.

She downplayed Harmon's chances, given the possibility of other senators also seeking the chamber's top post, like John J. Cullerton, D-6th, and Rickey Hendon, D-5th, both of Chicago, and Jeff Schoenberg, D-9th, of Evanston.

"I would say that (Harmon) has an opportunity, but I would acknowledge all the other candidates have more seniority, more experience, different wisdom and knowledge to bring to the table," Lightford said. "I think they see him as a compromise candidate, not as a front-runner."

Lightford said she hasn't decided whom to support, but said she wants to make sure they back education finance reform, one of the Senate Education Committee chairwoman's key issues.

But she has another factor in making her decision: "I've got concerns about my future," Lightford said.

"I've been there 10 years in September," she said. "I'm in the top 10 now (as far as seniority goes). I have a passion to remain chairman of the education committee and I'd like to be put on the leadership team.

"Of course, I would like to see myself as an assistant Democrat leader."

Part of the State Senate President's powers includes naming committee chairs, as well as leading the process to appoint party leaders and whips.

Lightford said she's been approached by four colleagues seeking to replace Jones, but refused to discuss what promises had been made concerning her potential appointments.

"I can tell you that (Harmon) didn't give me the best answer, I can tell you that much," she said.

Chris Mooney, political science professor at University of Illinois at Springfield, said Lightford's concern is part of the Senate's back-door wrangling to replace Jones.

Leadership positions, which consist of a majority leader, five assistant majority leaders, a caucus chair and three whips, can be used as leverage to twist the arms of fellow senators, he said.

"Those positions are good because they're prestigious and there's power associated with them, but they also pay more money," Mooney said.

The 37 Democratic senators will caucus to discuss Jones' replacement. Historically, the caucus coalesces to unanimously support its pick in the State Senate, where a candidate needs at least 30 votes to be named president.

The Senate's selection would be made in January, when the next session begins.

