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Bernard Schoenburg: City woman aiming high in first bid for public office

Photos



Bernard Schoenburg

THE STATE JOURNAL-REGISTER

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A Springfield woman with an impressive resume is circulating petitions to run for the Democratic nomination to take on U.S. Rep. AARON SCHOCK, R-Peoria.

DEIRDRE "DK" HIRNER, 55, served as deputy chief of staff to then-Gov. BOB HOLDEN of Missouri in 2001. She also was policy director for late Missouri Gov. MEL CARNAHAN, who was running for U.S. Senate when he died in a plane crash in 2000.

Hirner, who has lived in Springfield on and off for about eight years, is executive director of the Illinois Environmental Regulatory Group, which helps businesses work with the Illinois Environmental Protection Agency.

She recently told Democratic precinct committeemen of her plans to run for the Sangamon County Board. It sounded from that speech as if she could have given Republican incumbent JEN DILLMAN of District 23 quite a run for her money.

However, within days of talking about the county board race, Hirner started collecting signatures to make a run in the 18th Congressional District.

"I just think it's important that we have a good race," she said in a somewhat tortured telephone conversation this week – Hirner said she was concentrating on gathering signatures and did not yet want to say too much about the

contest. "It's something that I've wanted to do for a very long time ... to be a public servant."

Hirner actually lives in the 19th Congressional District, which is represented by U.S. Rep. JOHN Shimkus, R-Collinsville. Her home is not far from the boundary of Schock's 18th, and by law, a person can live anywhere in the state and run for Congress from any of the state's U.S. House districts. But her address still could create a political problem — the out-of-district candidate wanting to represent "us." That's not insurmountable, but it is something.

A native of Hannibal, Mo., Hirner has bachelor's and master's degrees from the University of Missouri in Columbia, a doctorate in land use planning from Texas Tech University, and a law degree she got just this January from St. Louis University.

Hirner was married in March to Chuck Giger, a retired Navy aviator who in 2007 campaigned for a time to run in the Democratic U.S. House primary in the 18th. Giger ended up withdrawing to make way for former NBA coach and commentator Dick Versace.

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Versace, as it turned out, later withdrew as well, and Democrats named Colleen Callahan of Kickapoo to run against Schock. Schock won with just under 59 percent of the vote.

Another Democrat also in the running. CARL RAY of Washington, near Peoria, is an Air Force veteran of the Gulf War and works in capital planning for Caterpillar Inc. He has been on the campaign trail for months.

Schock, as the youngest member of Congress, has done the rounds of media appearances during his first term, getting national attention in the process. His quarterly congressional finance report shows that he raised more than \$160,000 in the three months ending Sept. 30. After spending more than \$241,000 in the same period, he still had \$106,000 in the bank.

Ray, who is also new to the candidate thing, raised less than \$2,500 in the three-month period and had \$241 in the bank as of the end of September. Ray has a good story to tell, but that kind of money total could lead Democrats to look elsewhere.

Hare fundraising

U.S. Rep. PHIL HARE, D-Rock Island, raised \$172,099 during the third quarter of 2009, and as of Sept. 30 had just under \$643,000 on hand in his campaign account. Almost half the third-quarter funding came from individuals.

"The fact that so many ordinary citizens contributed to Congressman Hare's campaign in a non-election year and during a severe recession is truly remarkable," said MAGGIE DEPOORTER, political director of the Hare campaign, in a statement.

BOBBY SCHILLING of Colona, a restaurant owner and GOP candidate for Hare's 17th Congressional District seat, said Hare has received many individual contributions from people outside the district, including lawyers.

Schilling said several days ago that he raised about \$10,000 in the third quarter and had taken in about that much since the beginning of October. He said he is building a grass-roots campaign that has more than 800 volunteers in Rock Island County.

"We are just now this next quarter focusing on fund-raising," Schilling said.

New job for Jaeger

BETHANY JAEGER, who has been Statehouse bureau chief for Illinois Issues magazine since early 2006, is leaving that job to become a management consultant for Kerber, Eck & Braeckel in Springfield.

Jaeger, 29, of Chatham, is an Algonquin native who has a master's degree in public affairs reporting from the University of Illinois Springfield. She interned with Illinois Issues as part of her master's program in 2004.

She also has worked as managing editor of The Chronicle in Hoopston and as a health reporter for the Decatur Herald & Review.

"I love Illinois Issues," she said. "I think it plays a really important role in this changing time in media. But this opportunity kind of fell in my lap, and I'm really intrigued because I'll get to use my brain in a different way and it will be refreshing to get someone from point A to point B."

The magazine is a unit of the Center for State Policy and Leadership at the University of Illinois Springfield.

"Bethany has been our first multimedia reporter, taking photographs and shooting video as well as writing for the print magazine and our online blog," said DANA HEUPEL, executive editor of the magazine. "She's done a fantastic job, and we wish her only the best."

Jaeger will also see her income improve. She's been paid \$32,000 annually at the magazine.

Heupel said he hopes the position will be filled soon.

Bernard Schoenburg is political columnist for The State Journal-Register. He can be reached at 788-1540 or bernard.schoenburg@sj-r.com. Comments (0)

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