



With no incumbent, 10th Congressional district up for grabs

By Mick Zawislak | Daily Herald Staff

Published: 12/20/200 12:02 AM

When Democratic state Rep. Lauren Beth Gash ran for Congress nine years ago, she didn't have to worry about a primary campaign. As one of few state officeholders in the 10th Congressional District, she had no opponent.

On the Republican side, Mark Kirk, then chief of staff for retiring U.S. Rep. John Porter, had to fend off nine other candidates to get to the general election in 2000. He narrowly defeated Gash, then was re-elected four times to cement three decades of continuous Republican control of the Congressional seat.

With Kirk bowing out to run for U.S. Senate, the political doors again are open for both sides. But the landscape has changed, with a stronger and better organized Democratic presence. With no incumbent running, will that make a difference in the district that covers much of eastern Lake and parts of northern and northeastern Cook County?

"We have slowly but surely made tremendous inroads," said Gash, who founded the Tenth Congressional District Democrats, a group that provides training and other services to candidates.

"It's so different than the way it used to be," she said.

Republican observers say the mood of voters has changed since Barack Obama took office.

And though it rarely gets involved in primary elections, the National Republican Congressional Committee has kept in touch with some of the 10th District Republican hopefuls.

"The Washington Democrats aren't doing anything to improve the economy," said Tom Erickson, regional press secretary for the NRCC. "They'll (Democratic candidates) be on the defensive."

A few things about the district remain constant. While there are lower income areas, the district centered on the North Shore remains largely affluent and highly educated. Candidates of either party invariably refer to voters as being discerning and independent.

And with Illinois a key state in the control of Congress, the 10th District will be in the mix.

"I think it's likely to be an expensive, high-profile race that gets national attention," said Kent Redfield, a political science professor at the University of Illinois at Springfield.

Voter mood also has changed since the 2008 Democratic whirlwind led by President Barack Obama.

"It will be interesting to see who's playing offense and who's playing defense," Redfield said.

"It's a very different race," he observed. "You don't have someone with a huge advantage in terms of

name recognition or money. On the other hand, you don't have anybody with a record to defend."

Getting their names known will be the challenge for candidates, he added. And with a short turnover before the Feb. 2 primary, voters can expect a deluge of information after the holidays.

With that, here are brief profiles of the eight candidates:

DEMOCRATS:

Julie Hamos, 60, state representative 18th District, 1998-present, Wilmette:

As of the end of September, Hamos has raised nearly \$550,000 and has a lengthy list of endorsements from labor and women's groups and elected officials.

In the 1970s, she created an advocacy office for low-income families and she touts her abilities in "building coalitions, finding common ground, understanding the problems," involving major issues.

Hamos said she has shown independence in Springfield even when it wasn't popular. "I don't consider myself a politician," she said. "I don't like that word."

Jobs and the economy are priorities. While more jobs are needed, Hamos said she is not sold on the idea of subsidies or tax credits to pay for them and did not favor diverting repaid bail out funds for that purpose.

Much stimulus funding remains in the pipeline for Illinois, including \$100 million for green jobs, she said. Hamos suggests letting that money be invested before gauging its impact.

Hamos, who chairs the Illinois House mass transit committee, said road and other infrastructure improvements will create jobs and provide a foundation for future growth.

Health care and foreign policy are other main issues for Hamos. She helped pass the "Consumer Guide to Health Care" in Illinois, which created a new Web site that provides comparison data on medical centers.

Elliot Richardson, 37, attorney, Highland Park:

Richardson, who has never before run for public office, said he decided to enter the contest after watching a Democrat and Republican debating on television.

"It was like watching two 7-year olds," he said. "All they wanted was to get the last word."

"We need citizen politicians," he said. "We need some folks from outside the political process."

Rebuilding the economy, to include health care reform, job creation, stabilizing the housing market and enacting greater oversight of the financial sector, is his top priority.

Richardson said eliminating capital gains taxes for investments in small and medium sized business would provide a spark.

"Small business needs relief if we're going to create jobs," he said. Outsourcing has hurt employment, Richardson contends, adding he would eliminate corporate loopholes allowing companies to incorporate elsewhere.

He did not favor new stimulus funding but said repaid bail out funds could provide a source to loosen credit. "The problem is small business has been lost in the shuffle. What I would do is find a way to lend to small business."

Recreating a responsible foreign policy and building a green energy economy are other issues of note, he

said.

Dan Seals, 38, business consultant, Wilmette:

Seals has never held public office but is well known throughout the 10th district for his strong showing against Kirk in the last two campaigns. Seals gathered 47 percent of the vote in 2008.

"By now, people know me and they know I was willing to run when it's been hard to do," he said. He raised \$3.5 million in the last run and has a strong volunteer base.

Putting people back to work is his top campaign issue. "There's a tremendous amount of economic pain," Seals said. "All towns are suffering from a rise in unemployment."

He said the stimulus plan could have been weighted more heavily to job creation and the government should provide capital to small business. He said repaid stimulus funds could be reinvested for that purpose.

Seals advocates a separate "watchdog agency" to oversee the economy and said financial instruments like derivatives need to be regulated.

Reducing the costs of health care, education and energy and lowering the national debt are other key issues for Seals.

REPUBLICANS

Elizabeth Coulson, 55, Glenview, physical therapist, state representative 17th District, 1997-present:

Coulson said she was "amazed and gratified" to be asked to run by Kirk but it still was a tough decision.

Having analyzed, taught and practiced health care for many years, she said the subject was too important to pass up.

"The time is now to have another health care policy expert in Congress," she said. "I'm not just being pushed by others."

Coulson is passionate about the economy, saying low taxes, minimum red tape and incentives to keep jobs in the U.S. are key issues.

Expanding access to health care is her other priority but it should be done in increments. "To take over one-sixth of the economy at this time is unconscionable," she said.

Some of those steps would include medical malpractice reform, which she championed in Springfield. In that case, she said she had doctors call downstate Democrats to explain the problems.

She also led efforts to expand KidCare, prescription drug coverage for seniors and the law permitting young adults to remain on their parents' health insurance to age 26.

"You work within the system to make those differences," she said. "I've been effective in Springfield. Why can't I do that in Washington?"

Robert Dold, 40, attorney, owner Rose Pest Solutions, Kenilworth:

Though he hasn't run for public office, Dold has had experience in Washington as investigative counsel for the House Government Reform and Oversight committee during the first Bush administration.

His key campaign issue is creating jobs. "We need a good dose of small business common sense in my estimation," he said. "Small business is not getting the representation, not getting the backing it needs."

He said one way to get money into the hands of business owners would be to cut or impose a moratorium on payroll taxes.

"Give them the capital right now, don't have a stimulus package they can apply for," he said.

Another suggestion is spur innovation by making sure banks are comfortable loaning money. To address that, Dold said he supports making Small Business Administration loan guarantees larger.

Dold said it is imperative to stop out-of-control federal spending. Higher taxes or saddling future generations with increased debt would result if spending is not checked, he contends.

His suggestion is to limit federal spending to 18.5 percent of the gross domestic product.

Arie Friedman, 43, pediatrician, Highland Park:

A helicopter pilot in the Navy, Friedman's service included two deployments during the first Gulf War.

After leaving active duty in 1994 after seven years, he attended medical school eventually opening Premier Pediatrics in Lincolnshire.

Creating jobs through tax cuts is Friedman's top campaign issue.

"We need to cut corporate and capital gains taxes while also giving Americans a one-year payroll tax holiday," he said. "We should try to slash federal spending and eliminate the death tax. Unnecessary regulation should be halted."

Health care reform is another priority for Friedman. Doctors should not be put in the position of being gatekeepers and patients should not have to wonder if their doctor is being pushed to deny them care because of "government manipulation" of reimbursement, according to Friedman.

Incremental changes that would eliminate barriers to large group formation and insurance competition are needed, he said.

Dick Green, 52, economist, Winnetka:

Green is a Harvard-trained economist who founded Briefing.com in 1993. The company provides analysis of the economic and financial markets.

He said curbing government spending is his top issue. "Our deficit is out of control. Spending is out of control," he said. "It's private sector job growth that will get our country back on track."

He cited a projected 10 percent to 12 percent increase in discretionary government spending as a place to start cutting. He favors a zero-based budget and caps on discretionary spending.

Stimulating the economy and creating private sector jobs also are priorities.

"Businesses are thinking, 'I don't know what we'll be looking at in six months,'" he said.

Looking to the government for solutions is wrong, he contends. "You don't spend your way to prosperity," he said. "I don't think the stimulus package worked."

Providing tax credits for new employees or a temporary waiver of payroll taxes for employers would be incentives to hire.

Paul Hamann, 51, electrical engineer/commodities trader, Lake Forest:

Hamann says he would approach issues on a factual rather than emotional basis.

His main campaign plank, and one that differs from any other candidate in either party, is the immediate withdrawal of the U.S. military from Iraq and Afghanistan.

The possible benefits of remaining in those countries don't outweigh the cost, he said.

"I do not want to spend another trillion dollars on the Afghanistan and Iraq wars," he said. Ending the wars would be an "excellent start" in reducing the growing national debt, he contends.

Creating jobs through infrastructure projects is another priority. Such projects would create jobs immediately and represent an investment in the future of the region, he said.

He also advocated increased funding for the National Science Foundation as research is the basis for long-term growth, he said.