



## Congressional candidates criticized for 'carpetbagging'

By Russell Lissau | Daily Herald Staff

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On his campaign Web site, Republican congressional candidate Joe Walsh talks about growing up in the suburban 8th House District and being a Barrington-area native.

The detailed biography on the site doesn't mention he actually lives in Winnetka, in the neighboring 10th District.

Walsh isn't the only 8th District hopeful from the GOP who doesn't live in the district. Neither does Maria Rodriguez, whose Long Grove home is just outside the boundary.

Under U.S. law, congressional candidates do not need to live within the district they wish to serve. In fact, the 8th District's current representative, Democrat Melissa Bean of Barrington, lives in the 10th.

But the practice often draws criticism. Among those calling attention to Walsh's and Rodriguez's residency is fellow Republican candidate Chris Geissler of Barrington.

When Geissler announced his candidacy back in October, he accused two of the other GOP candidates of misleading voters and "compromising the public trust" by not revealing their home districts. He didn't identify them by name, but only Walsh and Rodriguez fit the bill.

"I feel strongly about it," Geissler recently told the Daily Herald. "For someone to come in (from outside the district) and say they understand the issues and can represent the district, they're a little removed."

Walsh actually agrees with Geissler, calling the lack of a residency requirement for House candidates "ridiculous." It's why he said he and his wife are looking for a place to live in the 8th District.

"I would never vote for someone who didn't live in the district," Walsh said. "I just wouldn't."

And yet, Walsh is running in the 8th, which means he won't be able to vote for himself in the Feb. 2 primary.

"There is irony (in that)," he said.

Rodriguez, who lives in the 10th District, brushed off the criticism. The district border is at her property line, she said, and she doubts voters would like her more if she lived across the street.

"I don't think it's an issue," Rodriguez said.

Six Republicans are running for the party's nomination in the 8th District. In addition to Geissler, Rodriguez and Walsh, the others are Dirk Beveridge of Barrington, John Dawson of Barrington and Greg Jacobs of Mundelein.

One of them will face off against Bean, who is seeking a fourth term, and Green Party candidate Bill Scheurer of Lindenhurst, in November's general election.

A Bean spokesman declined to comment on her residency, which has been criticized by political foes through the years.

Residency has been an issue in other suburban races, too.

Democrat Dan Seals of Wilmette, now in his third campaign for the 10th District seat held by Republican Mark Kirk, has been called a carpetbagger because he doesn't live in that district.

Seals is one of three Democrats who'll face off in the Feb. 2 primary for the post. Both of the others - Elliot Richardson of Highland Park and state Rep. Julie Hamos of Wilmette - live in the 10th District.

When she announced her campaign last summer, however, Hamos lived outside the district in Evanston. She moved in shortly afterward.

"I wanted to show the district my commitment to the race and my commitment to the district itself," Hamos said. "It's more than symbolic. It's the level of commitment the voters are looking for."

Hoffman Estates resident Tammy Duckworth faced criticism about her residency in 2006 when she ran for Congress in the 6th District despite not living there. Duckworth lost to Republican Peter Roskam and later was appointed to top state and federal Veterans Affairs posts.

One of the most noteworthy cases in recent Illinois history arose in 2004 when Maryland Republican Alan Keyes was brought to Illinois by the party to run for the U.S. Senate against then-state Sen. Barack Obama. Keyes lost overwhelmingly, paving the way for Obama's eventual rise to the Oval Office.

The Founding Fathers probably didn't make residency a Constitutional requirement for federal office because mobility was limited in the 18th century, said Kent Redfield, a political science professor at the University of Illinois at Springfield.

District residency may have been taken for granted, he said. "People generally lived, worked and died in the same general area," Redfield said.

Residency requirements often were added to state constitutions in the 20th century as mobility became more common, Redfield said. Amending the U.S. Constitution to add such a clause for federal officials would be "fairly cumbersome," he said.

Regardless, a candidate's residency is important to voters, Redfield said. Candidates who "parachute" into a district to run for office are at a huge disadvantage, he said.

"Candidates are always vulnerable to (accusations) that they're not in touch with the district," Redfield said. "It's an effective political strategy. The case almost makes itself."

In Illinois' 8th District, Geissler applauded Rodriguez's and Walsh's desire to run but questioned why they're not seeking the 10th District post.

"It feels a little disingenuous," Geissler said.

Walsh, a self-described conservative who opposes abortion and supports gun-ownership rights, said he ruled out running in the 10th District because candidates like him "get hammered" in the independent but often left-leaning 10th District.

Walsh felt his views were a better fit for the 8th District, which was staunchly Republican until Bean won in 2004 and still supports many Republican candidates at lower levels of government.

He said his ties to the Barrington area were a factor, too. His parents still live there, as do many friends.

"I have a connection to this district," Walsh said. "This district is home to me."

Rodriguez said living across the street from the 8th District is much different from living across the county from it, as Walsh does. As Long Grove's mayor, she said she's worked for the people of the district and has worked closely with their elected leaders.

Even though she lives there, she said she's not as familiar with the specific issues of the 10th District.

"When I think of the 10th District and the issues there, I think of the lakefront," she said. "It's a different makeup."

Plus, when the boundaries are redrawn in two years based on the 2010 census, she could wind up living in the 8th District without changing addresses, Rodriguez said.

"But there really is no way to tell," she said.