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## Democrats taking applications for Ill. lt. gov.

By KAREN HAWKINS  
Associated Press Writer

Illinois' Democratic voters picked a pawnbroker as their candidate for lieutenant governor, and that didn't exactly end well. So perhaps they won't mind if the next candidate doesn't have a job. Or is still in school. Or isn't actually a Democrat.

At least that's what some applicants for the No. 2 spot on the Democratic ticket seem to be hoping. The Democratic Party of Illinois received nearly 50 applications for the slot Tuesday, the first day it began accepting them on its Web site. Applicants included a former senior adviser to ex-Gov. Rod Blagojevich and an out-of-work technician who answered the question "Why are you a Democrat?" with "Who said I was?"

Democrats are looking for a replacement for Chicago pawnbroker Scott Lee Cohen, who left the race less than a week after winning the primary election amid allegations that he abused his ex-wife and held a knife to the throat of an ex-girlfriend who was later arrested for prostitution. Cohen has denied the allegations, and charges stemming from his arrest were dropped when the girlfriend didn't show up in court.

Cohen's exit left Gov. Pat Quinn without a running mate and gave members of the state central committee a unique opportunity to pick a candidate. Committee members - two from each of the state's 19 congressional districts - will decide which of the applicants will address them at a later meeting. Party officials haven't set a schedule for the selection process, said Steve Brown, a spokesman for Illinois House Speaker Michael Madigan, who is chairman of the state Democratic party.

Brown said committee members are hoping everyone interested in the position will apply online, including the five Democrats who lost to Cohen in the primary. None of them applied on the first day, creating a field made up almost entirely of political newcomers. The few noteworthy exceptions include the former mayors of several Chicago suburbs and Bob Arya, a longtime journalist who left the industry to work for Blagojevich in 2006, only to leave in 2008 because of what he described as the former governor's ineptitude.

A handful of the hopefuls identified themselves as Republicans or independents on the five-question application form, and several said they're currently unemployed. A surprising number are educators, lawyers and people younger than 30. Almost all are from the Chicago area.

Given their lack of political experience, applicants were creative in describing what strengths they would add to the Democratic ticket. One suburban Chicago man listed his "Jamaican wife and three kids" among his strengths, while a self-professed independent listed his "ability to create an organization of farmers, hunters and wizards that will zoom with innovative solutions."

Wizards?

Many made clear that their lack of political backing and connections should be seen as a benefit, and one young man listed among his endorsements "My wife and my upstairs neighbor."

Cohen was also a political novice, as is the Republican candidate, Jason Plummer, a 27-year-old southern Illinois businessman. It was Cohen's fiery departure that helped to thrust what is typically a low-profile race into the spotlight. Lieutenant governors have few statutory responsibilities, and Quinn was the first lieutenant governor in more than 30 years to ascend to the governor's office. One former lieutenant governor got so bored with the job that he resigned. And Madigan has even pressed for the position to be abolished altogether.

The Democrats' approach to the candidate selection process is unprecedented in Illinois, according to political analysts. The closest the state has come in recent history is in 2004, when Republican Senate candidate Jack Ryan left the race and the party's central committee replaced him with Alan Keyes, a conservative who didn't live in Illinois at the time, said Kent Redfield, professor emeritus of political science at the University of Illinois at Springfield. Keyes went on to lose to President Barack Obama.

Unlike the situation with Keyes, Democrats will have to choose an Illinois resident as their candidate. And with the online applications, Democrats are making their selection process much more transparent, Redfield said.

"Strange things can happen when small groups get together," Redfield said of the central committee.

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