

NewsRoom

1/12/05 Chi. Daily Herald 7
2005 WLNR 25663854

Daily Herald (Arlington Heights, IL)
Copyright © 2005 Paddock Publications

January 12, 2005

GOP looks for new leader to right ship 5 men vying for top Illinois post.

Eric Krol Daily Herald Political Writer

Help wanted: Once-dominant political party seeks new leader to mend philosophical rifts, move organization past cloud of scandal and restore its former power and glory. Position is unpaid and requires dealing with many personalities, some of them of the high-maintenance variety.

Six Republicans, many of them with suburban roots, formally answered the Illinois Republican Party's call for a new state chairman. On Tuesday, however, Cook County Republican Chairman Gary Skoien of Inverness dropped out of the running. The 50-year-old businessman with ties to former Govs. Jim Edgar and Jim Thompson said he didn't have time to add another post to his family, business and Cook County duties.

"I really got into this because I'm not that happy with the list of candidates," said Skoien, who declined to throw his support behind anyone else. "I would like them to go back and conduct a search like an executive board would do."

Skoien also said given last year's debacle involving Jack Ryan's abortive run for U.S. Senate, he was surprised at the lack of vetting of candidates by the state GOP, saying no one had inquired about his business or personal background.

The remaining five candidates will get a chance to make their pitch Saturday in Springfield to the GOP state central committee, 19 Republican leaders from throughout the state who'll make the selection.

The panel is almost certain to pick a successor so that he or she can accompany Chairman Judy Baar Topinka to President Bush's Jan. 20 inaugural festivities. Topinka, whose resignation takes effect Jan. 31, presided over the GOP at the Bush administration's request after the Democrats' near-sweep of the statewide election in November 2002.

The Daily Herald contacted the five applicants, and here's a look at them and their prospects:

Andy McKenna

Bio: 48, of Chicago. President of Schwarz Paper Co.; lost bid for party nomination to U.S. Senate in 2004 primary.

What's the biggest problem facing the Illinois GOP right now? Addressing the concerns of party faithful. "Those concerns include a desire for a party that is unified, a party that is well-funded, a party that speaks to our shared values and a party that is focused on grassroots organizing and winning elections."

How would you rebuild the Illinois GOP? "Raise money. Assemble a great team. Invest in grass roots. Earn the confidence of voters."

Analysis: Perceived as a front-runner due to early backing of the state GOP finance committee, a signal to Republicans who put a strong emphasis on political fund-raising that McKenna's the choice. His long involvement in civic affairs means his Rolodex is deep when it comes to dialing for dollars.

Stephen P. McGlynn

Bio: 42, of Belleville. Attorney; co-chairman of Illinois Republican Party, on GOP state central committee since 1998.

What's the biggest problem facing the Illinois GOP right now? "The scandal of George Ryan and its torpedoing of our candidates in 2002, coupled with Jack Ryan's flame-out, has rocked the confidence of the party. Lack of confidence has fostered division and devastated the esprit de corps of our party faithful. We are right on the issues important to Illinoisans and have the right people to win in 2006."

How would you rebuild the Illinois GOP? "To 'rebuild' the party, we need to focus on our greatest strength: We champion what most Illinoisans believe. As a party of the people, instead of a party of 'the connected,' we win. We need to put together a slate of positive, forward-thinking Republicans, who are comfortable and proud to champion our core principles and beliefs. If we do, we reunite our party, restore our confidence and energize millions of Illinoisans who are over-taxed, over-regulated and unappreciated."

Analysis: Along with McKenna, considered one of the front-runners. A tempered conservative, he's on the committee making the selection and is focusing his pitch more on standing up for Republican principles than raising money. Lives outside Chicago area, making spokesman part of job more difficult.

Jim Nalepa

Bio: 48, of Hinsdale. Owns executive search firm; ran for Congress and lost in 1994, 1996; former South Barrington trustee.

What's the biggest problem facing the Illinois GOP right now? "Our first and most important challenge is the need to restore the integrity of the party. The George Ryan scandal and other recent missteps have disheartened our party base and disenfranchised the electorate."

How would you rebuild the Illinois GOP? "We need to start from the ground up. It is important to reach out to the party faithful and the electorate by 'word and deed' showing them that we are reforming, that the party will not tolerate corruption and that our party will place the citizens of Illinois and their best interests above all else."

Analysis: Has some support on the committee and could be a fresh face, but unclear how he outflanks other front-runners.

Jim Oberweis

Bio: 58, of Aurora. Chairman of Oberweis Asset Management and Oberweis Dairy; ran and lost for party nomination to U.S. Senate in 2002, 2004 primaries.

What's the biggest problem facing the Illinois GOP right now? "I believe we have to end the culture of corruption that infests both the Republican and Democratic parties. As Republicans, we have the chance to take care of our own side, but the Democrats will be dealing with it for years to come."

How would you rebuild the Illinois GOP? "I think we have to focus on our candidates who have an outstanding record of integrity and service rather than candidates who are involved for economic or financial reasons."

Analysis: The GOP needs to expand its base by reaching out to minority groups like Latinos, and Oberweis' over-the-top anti-illegal immigration TV ads last year didn't help. If he's picked as chairman, he likely wouldn't run for governor.

John Cox

Bio: 49, of Chicago. Attorney, accountant with real estate and investment businesses; since 2000, has run and lost for Congress, U.S. Senate and Cook County recorder of deeds.

What's the biggest problem facing the Illinois GOP right now? "I think in some ways, it's a crisis of confidence and a leftover stain of corruption from the disclosures and the convictions in the George Ryan debacle. The Republican Party has strong principles that have been a success everywhere in the country except Illinois, because we've had a few 'leaders' who try to use government to make money. The most important thing is to remedy that."

How would you rebuild the Illinois GOP? "We not only have to have a strong message that we've made a clean break from the past, but we also then have to have an organizing plan that gets that message out. I'm making it a goal of 30,000 volunteers statewide to bring that message to every neighborhood, to emphasize the key principles of the Republican Party: solving problems with smaller, more effective, honest government."

Analysis: Perceived as a perennial candidate and doesn't appear to have much support from the committee.

---- Index References ----

Company: REPUBLICAN; PADDOCK PUBLICATIONS INC /DAILY HERALD; OBERWEIS ASSET MANAGEMENT; US SENATE; SCHWARZ PAPER CO

News Subject: (U.S. Congressional Campaigns (1US07); Government (1GO80); Public Affairs (1PU31); Political Parties (1PO73))

Region: (North America (1NO39); Americas (1AM92); Illinois (1IL01); USA (1US73))

Language: EN

Other Indexing: (CONGRESS; DAILY HERALD; DEMOCRATIC; DEMOCRATS; GOP; GOP STATE; GOVS; ILLINOIS; ILLINOIS GOP; ILLINOIS REPUBLICAN PARTY; OBERWEIS ASSET MANAGEMENT; REPUBLICAN; REPUBLICAN PARTY; REPUBLICANS; ROLODEX; SCHWARZ PAPER CO; STATE GOP; US SENATE) (Analysis; Andy McKenna; Assemble; Attorney; Bio; Bush; Earn; Gary Skoien; Illinoisans; Jack Ryan; Jim Edgar; Jim Nalepa; Jim Oberweis; Jim Thompson; John Cox; Judy Baar Topinka; McKenna; Oberweis; Oberweis Dairy; Raise; Ryan; Skoien; Stephen P. McGlynn; Topinka)

Keywords: (General interest); (News, opinion and commentary)

Word Count: 1394

End of Document

© 2019 Thomson Reuters. No claim to original U.S. Government Works.

NewsRoom