

Candidate unsure of pending election bill

18th District hopeful fears it may become harder to get on ballot

Monday, April 21, 2008

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of GateHouse News Service

**SPRINGFIELD** - One of Ray LaHood's would-be successors in Congress fears that legislation advancing through the Illinois General Assembly is "flying under the radar" and could discourage anyone except Democrats and Republicans from running for political office.

Sheldon Schafer, the Green Party candidate for the 18th Congressional District, said House Bill 5263 would eliminate "for all intents and purposes" the mechanism that will put him on the November general election ballot even though he didn't run in the February primary.

Schafer, of Peoria, noted that his Democratic opponent, Colleen Callahan of Kickapoo, also did not run in the primary election and was slated later as her party's candidate for the Nov. 4 election. Schafer and Callahan are running against Republican Aaron Schock, a Peorian who won his party primary, in the race to replace the retiring LaHood.

Getting rid of the mechanism that allowed Schafer and Callahan to wind up on the general election ballot "may or may not be a good thing, but it deserves some discussion," Schafer said Friday.

Schafer said he thinks the legislation might be targeting the Green Party.

"From our perspective, we (in the Green Party) suspect that it's possibly because of all the success we've had in running candidates in the primary and in slating candidates to provide more open competition in the state," he said.

But the lawmaker who proposed the bill, Rep. Mike Fortner, said that is untrue.

"It had nothing to do with third parties," said Fortner, R-West Chicago. "This doesn't restrict them in any way."

The key part of Fortner's bill requires certain candidates - if they are filling a spot that was vacant in their party's primary - to get signatures on nominating petitions before they can be added to the general election ballot.

The number of signatures would vary, according to the district and the political office, but it would match the number of signatures that an independent candidate would need. That requirement is 5 percent to 8 percent of the total votes in the previous election for that particular office.

By comparison, "established party" candidates running in a partisan primary need fewer signatures - the exact number depending on the office being sought. Established-party candidates for the Illinois House of Representatives, for instance, generally are supposed to collect at least 500 valid signatures.

At present, Democrats, Republicans and Greens all are considered "established parties" in Illinois.

Under existing law, if a party did not have a primary election candidate for a particular office, the party can name its general election candidate within 60 days after the primary. No signatures on nominating petitions are required.

Fortner said adding the signature requirement would be fairer and would help candidates who are getting a late start on a campaign.

"In general, one way of connecting with the people that you want to serve and (one way of) showing that there is a basic level of support for the candidacy is to go out and get signatures," Fortner said.

But Schafer said he thinks the legislation could discourage some potential candidates. The Green Party believes "democracy works better with more voices, with multiple voices," he added.

"It takes resources to go through the primary. You need to get signatures, and then you need to defend the signatures against objections" that they're invalid, he said.

"But there is certainly some rationale ... that any candidate should go through the primary process just for exposure," he added.

As for his position on Fortner's bill, Schafer said: "I think I would be against it because the system seems to be working now to bring more people into the race."

Fortner's bill passed the Illinois House of Representatives, 97-13, on April 8. It awaits consideration in the state Senate. To become law, it still would need approval from the Senate and the governor's signature.

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