

WINDY CITY TIMES

City races officially under way

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by Andrew Davis

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If Chicago voters suffer from "election fatigue" by the end of February, it would be perfectly understandable. After just taking part in the Nov. 2 midterm elections, city residents will have a say in changing the political landscape in fewer than three months (Feb. 22, 2011).

Of course, it all starts with the mayoral race, where 20 would-be successors to Mayor Richard Daley have thrown their hats into the ring, according to the unofficial candidate list at ChicagoElections.com.

The prohibitive favorite at this point seems to be former White House Chief of Staff Rahm Emanuel, not only because of name recognition but also because of his substantial war chest. However, he is currently fighting an additional battle in the courts. Election attorney Burt Odelson filed court papers Nov. 26, claiming that Emanuel is not eligible to run for mayor because the latter does not meet residency rules. (Fourteen others have also filed similar claims.) A candidate must be a resident for at least a year prior to running; however, the municipal code includes exceptions, including for those people who leaves temporarily "on business of the United States." (An intriguing side note is that Rob Halpin, the tenant of the house Emanuel owns at 4228 N. Hermitage, has also filed papers to run for mayor.) The residency issue aside, Emanuel seems to be a polarizing figure within the LGBT community.

Carol Moseley Braun is another candidate with name recognition. She has been a U.S. Senator as well as an ambassador (to New Zealand), and has been inducted as a friend of the community in the Chicago Gay and Lesbian Hall of Fame. However, her career has occasionally been dotted with controversy, such as alleged campaign-finance violations, although those charges were never proven.

Longtime U.S. Rep. Danny Davis is also in the race, having garnered the support of a coalition of African-American leaders. He ran against Daley in 1991, losing by a substantial margin. In an interview with Windy City Times that took place in January, Davis said, "I think that people who are same-sex partners should be able to have the same rights and privileges as everybody else."

Current City Clerk and former state Sen. Miguel del Valle is another candidate; he is popular and is pro-LGBT. When he ran for city clerk in 2007, del Valle responded to a question regarding same-sex marriage by saying, "I have always supported domestic partners. I believe there should be legal rights there for everyone, and I think gay marriage is a personal choice that should be respected, and it should be between the individuals and their church, and government should respect the rights of individuals to marry."

Gery Chico, a former Daley chief of staff, recently unveiled his LGBT platform, calling for the passage of the civil-unions bill being considered by the Illinois General Assembly as well as the repeal of "Don't Ask, Don't Tell." He has a history of advocating for the LGBT community, expressing his support for marriage equality for several years.

A couple of controversial ministers are in the mix as well as the Rev. Wilfredo De Jesus and the Rev. James Meeks aim to become the new mayor of Chicago. De Jesus leads the New Life Covenant Church, located in Humboldt Park. He ran as an alderman last year, angering many in the LGBT community. New Life is part of the Assemblies of God, a Pentecostal fellowship that considers homosexuality a sin. In Chicago, many LGBT activists know him as the pastor who put the brakes last year on a planned Pride Campus, a school that designers hoped would act as a model school, providing a safe and affirming environment for LGBT and questioning youth and their allies.

Meeks (who is also a state senator) is also known for having an anti-gay past, having actively campaigned to defeat Senate Bill 3186, which amended the Illinois Human Rights Act to include sexual orientation and gender identity. However, he has reached out to the LGBT community, speaking with Equality Illinois' Rick Garcia and a few other civic leaders in October.

Two other candidates are perennial challenger Bill "Dock" Walls and now-former U.S. Sen. Roland Burris. Burris, of course, has been the source of controversy regarding the Senate seat—so much so that his seat was up for grabs early, with Republican Mark Kirk winning it Nov. 2.

However, the mayoral contest is certainly not the only source of intrigue, as the city council will have a new look as well. At least eight aldermen are stepping down, including 43rd Ward Alderman Vi Daley, 46th Ward Alderman Helen Shiller and 48th Ward Alderman Mary Ann Smith. (Others include Ed Smith of the 28th Ward, Patrick Levar of the 45th Ward and Virginia Rugai of the 19th Ward. Toni Preckwinkle (4th) has been elected Cook County board president and Tom Allen (38th) is now a judge.)

Several LGBT individuals have stepped up in an attempt to add more diversity to the city council. (Currently, 44th Ward Alderman Tom Tunney is the only out gay alderman; he faces former Lakeview Citizens Council President David Winner.) James Cappleman, who lost to Shiller four years ago; lesbian attorney Emily Stewart; and Don Nowotny, a superintendent with Streets and Sanitation, are among battling in the 46th Ward.

Marilyn Morales, a lesbian activist, had planned on running for city clerk but fell a few thousand signatures short of qualifying for the ballot despite an intense grassroots effort.