

Community leaders fight for Champion's seat

Written by Lydia Schwartz, Contributing Writer
Monday, 07 May 2012 14:44



State Sen. Linda Higgins (DFL-59) recently announced she would not be running for reelection in the legislature, but will be pursuing a spot on the Hennepin County Board of Commissioners.

(Pictured) State Rep. Bobby Joe Champion (DFL-59B) is hoping to win her seat in the senate, leaving his spot in the State House up for grabs. Many candidates are ready to fill Champion's seat at the Minnesota State Capitol.

Here is a look at those seeking the 59B House Seat.

Ian Alexander

A universal priority for all of the candidates is economic development. Ian Alexander, a family law attorney, said he is especially concerned about the economy environment on West Broadway and the inability of Minnesota's government to create an environment for economic growth. He believes economic development starts at home and all businesses are part of a larger enterprise of the state and in communities. Alexander said, "It is important to not just talk to urban legislators. Economic development is all about capital, and it's the same here as it is in a small town."

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Alexander said he recognizes the strength and resilience of the Northside. He moved into the Folwell Neighborhood on 36th Avenue North and Emerson Avenue North in 2007. The May 22 tornado completely destroyed Alexander's home. However, he said his commitment to the neighborhood was left intact and he found that he remained irresistibly drawn to the resilience, compassion, and community of his neighbors. Alexander recently purchased and resides in a once foreclosed property across from North Community High School.

Alexander believes his background as an attorney and in public policy and government would serve him well in representing District 59B. He earned a Bachelor of Arts in Political Science from the Catholic University of America, in Washington D.C. While working as a strategic consultant, Alexander earned his master's degree at the Humphrey School of Public Affairs, and later a law degree from the University of Minnesota Law School.

Alexander said his work in the community began in November of 2009 when he established a law firm to serve residents' needs in the areas of family law, traffic disputes, and estate planning. The firm also serves as a contractor with the Complaint Investigation Unit of the Minneapolis Department of Civil Rights. Working as a family law attorney and on pro bono (without pay) works in North Minneapolis, he says that he has probably seen almost every type of legal case. "I actually used to be Republican," Alexander said. "But I left the party because I saw that they weren't advocating for the things I was seeing everyday as an attorney."

Working with his neighbors in removing problem properties from his block, Alexander began collaborative efforts with the city to condemn the homes of non-responsive landlords. He is a board member of the Folwell Neighborhood Assoc. and active with the Sexual Violence Center, a nonprofit that works with community systems such as hospitals, law enforcement agencies, courts, schools, and other social services organizations to assist assault victims and prevent sexual violence.

Terra Cole

While all of the candidates emphasized the importance of education, Terra Cole is especially passionate about the subject. She has been a resident of North Minneapolis, most of the time in

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Near North, for more than 23 years. Cole said her vision for the community is one of economic growth, neighborhood stabilization, and improvements in public education.

Cole graduated from North High in 1996. She attended Carleton College in Northfield, Minn. and later graduated from Dillard University in New Orleans. Cole earned a Master of Urban and Regional Planning degree from the Humphrey School of Public Affairs. She was actively involved at the University of Minnesota Urban Research and Outreach Engagement Center in North Minneapolis. Cole also worked on the creation of a new public elementary school opening this fall, the Pierre Bottineau French Immersion School.

Cole said she has served on numerous boards and committees within the region, including the Hawthorne Area Community Council, the City of Minneapolis Redistricting Committee, the Minnesota Metro Area Chapter of the National Forum of Black Public Administrators, the Bike-Walk Advisory Board for Transit for Livable Communities, the City of Minneapolis Empowerment Zone, and served as chair for the Governance Board.

Spending the last several years as a planning analyst for the Hennepin County Department of Research, Planning & Development, Cole co-led the Hennepin County's Census 2010 Outreach and Promotion campaign to ensure ethnic minorities were accurately counted. She said census work is vitally important because the undercount of North Minneapolis means fewer dollars for the area.

As representative of House District 59B, Cole says she would begin by attracting more businesses to the area and opening the avenues of home ownership in the district. "These two go hand-in-hand," said Cole. "You stabilize neighborhoods with residents and business owners who have a vested stake in the community. There's pride in ownership."

Cole said she is proud to be a product of the North Side.

"I love North Minneapolis. I love to volunteer and engage the community. I've had every opportunity to live in other areas, but I chose to firmly establish my roots in the community that has offered me so much," said Cole.

Of the candidates, Cole argues that she has the deepest roots in North Minneapolis. She said it

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is vitally important to be connected with young people in area, and to have connections in government for ideal community development.

“The entire district needs someone to galvanize the community,” Cole said. “As community members, we have the power to stop being reactionary to our problems, and actually create a table where everyone has a place,” said Cole.

Raymond Dehn

Architect Raymond Dehn believes his perspective would be unique in government because he would be able to look at the issues with a systematic approach.

Dehn spent much of his early life in Brooklyn Park next to the Crystal Airport. He attended Robbinsdale Cooper High School and went on to pursue undergraduate and graduate degrees in architecture at the University of Minnesota.

Dehn said he is excited about the light-rail transportation developments that will benefit the North Side. In recent years, Dehn has co-facilitated the Northside Transportation Network focusing on the proposed Bottineau Light Rail Transit line. Dehn said his active engagement in the community has taken many forms, working with his neighborhood block club, volunteering with the DFL in Senate District 58, participating in his neighborhood association, and working on the Minneapolis Neighborhood Revitalization Program Action Plan.

Dehn also serves on the City of Minneapolis Capital Long Range Improvement Committee and with the Minneapolis City Council, which is engaged in downtown capital projects. He said job creation in the district, where unemployment remains at 20 percent, is one of his biggest priorities. Another major concern of Dehn's is making equitable education funding.

“We as a community need to unite,” Dehn said, the only non-minority seeking the seat. “I believe that I have more initiatives that can move us forward. I've developed solid relationships both with leaders in the community and at the Capitol so I can truly hit the ground running.”

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In 2002, Dehn joined Sen. Paul Wellstone's third campaign for Senate and learned firsthand what grassroots politics and organizing is about, working to engage all people in the process of politics and government. He says he is running for the State of Minnesota House of Representatives today as a continuation of Wellstone's commitment to putting people before politics. Dehn has also volunteered with many local, state, and national campaigns. He continues to reach out and actively engage those who feel disenfranchised by the political process.

Nancy Pomplun

While also concerned about economic development, transit issues, and education, health care reform takes precedence for Asian-American activist Nancy Pomplun. She said she has been an organizer advocating for issues like poverty for a long time.

"I will be a strong representative and a strong voice for the community at the Capitol," said Pomplun.

Pomplun is a homeowner in the Harrison neighborhood.

Born in South Korea, Pomplun grew up in Neenah, Wis. From 2004 to 2006, she worked with the Hawthorne Community Council Business Committee to assess residential job opportunities along the Mississippi River in North and Northeast Minneapolis.

Pomplun moved to Minneapolis in 1993 to attend the University of Minnesota, where she earned a Bachelor of Arts in Women's Studies in 1997, and a Master of Public Health in Community Health Education.

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Pomplun works with the Health Equity Working Committee, which aims to increase the accountability of the State of Minnesota to eliminate health disparities across departments and systems that impact a person's ability to achieve optimal health.

Pomplun is Chair-Elect of the Community Health Advisory Community, which provides support to the University of Minnesota Center for Health Equity, the Program in Health Disparities Research, the Minnesota Center for Cancer Collaborations and the Clinical Translational Sciences Institute.

As a Community University Health Care Center board member, Pomplun said she seeks to increase her understanding of the impacts and opportunities of health care reform for low-income communities and promote safe and inclusive services for everyone inclusive of all gender identities, cultures, and language.

Pomplun also works with the Asian Economic Development Association. With the association, Pomplun said she focuses on building leadership among our disenfranchised Asian communities at the grassroots level.

The DFL primary is set for Aug. 14.