

## LOCAL NEWS

### Candidate pool narrows for Fulton spot

By RYAN LEE

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The field of candidates to replace Mike Kenn as chair of the Fulton County Commission currently stands at five, and does not include several gay-friendly politicians who previously expressed interest in running.

Mitzi Bickers, Milton Farris, **Karen Handel**, Lee Morris and Karen Webster Parks have filed papers with the Fulton County Department of Registration & Elections indicating they want a spot on the Nov. 4 ballot.

The filing deadline is Aug. 27 for the special election to fill the chair position, left vacant after Kenn resigned earlier this month to head the Georgians for Better Transportation lobby group.

Kenn faced strong criticism from gay political groups during his tenure for flip-flopping on a promise to support domestic partner benefits for county workers. His resignation set off an initial deluge of gay-friendly politicians who expressed interest in the post, but several of the most prominent later decided not to enter the race.

Among those who ruled out running are Democrats Dean Chronopoulos, who came within four percentage points of defeating Kenn last November, and state Sen. Vincent Fort (D-Atlanta), author of the state's hate crimes law.

Current Fulton County Commissioner Tom Lowe, a Republican who cast a crucial vote in the Commission's recent approval of domestic partner benefits for county employees, also will not run.

The benefits proposal was co-sponsored by Commissioner Robb Pitts, a Democrat and former Atlanta City Council president. Pitts said this week he has not made a final decision about running, but is strongly leaning toward jumping into the race.

#### Field of five?

In **Handel's** first run for political office, she nearly pulled off a major upset over Pitts for the at-large commission seat he currently holds.

In December, **Handel** was tapped by Gov. Sonny Perdue to serve as his deputy chief of staff, a position that granted her access and exposure to powerful Republicans within the state.

"There is broad consensus [among Republicans] for my candidacy," said **Handel**, who has received endorsements from Kenn and Perdue.

Georgia Log Cabin Republicans is endorsing **Handel**, something the gay GOP group did in last November's race.

"We will be continuing our support for Karen **Handel**," said Marc Yeager, the group's president. "She demonstrated in her last run that she was supportive of domestic partner benefits, and she's supported same-sex adoptions on the basis of the best interest of the child."

**Handel** also received an endorsement from the bipartisan gay rights group Georgia Equality during the Republican primary in 2002, according to Allen Thornell, the group's executive director.

In the candidate survey Georgia Equality distributed last year, **Handel** indicated support establishing a domestic partner benefits policy, but opposed creating a domestic partner registry, citing privacy concerns, Thornell said.

"I've had strong support within the gay and lesbian community," **Handel** said. "I'd like to not put people in boxes and categories because at the end of the day we're all citizens."

"We may not always be able to agree, but there will always, always be an open door and a seat at the table," **Handel** said."

The four other current candidates could not be reached for comment by press time. The Republicans include Farris, a former Fulton County Commissioner, and Morris, a former Atlanta City Council member.

The Democrats are Parks, who held the at-large spot currently occupied by Pitts before deciding not to seek re-election last fall, and Bickers, who resigned Monday from the District 2 seat on the Atlanta School Board.