

# Rogers Park VOTER

Voters Organized for Truthful Election Results

Dear Rogers Park Voter,

January 19<sup>th</sup> was a blisteringly cold day. Nevertheless, the candidates and 45 voters attended the 7th District State Senate Candidates Forum hosted by **Rogers Park VOTER** at United Church of Rogers Park. Three articles on the event that were published by print news media are copied below.

Candidates **Suzanne Elder** and **Heather Steans** are on the Democratic Party ballot in the Tuesday, Feb. 5 Primary Election. No candidates for this post are running on the Green Party or Republican Party ballots. Rogers Park VOTER, as a nonpartisan organization, does not make endorsements . . . however, we do encourage you to vote!

For info on Rogers Park VOTER check our web site at <http://rogersparkvoter.org/>

## News-Star

### Democrats spar at 7th District State Senate forum

January 23, 2008

By LORRAINE SWANSON Staff Writer

Democratic candidates for the uber local 7th District State Senate race squared off in a forum sponsored by Rogers Park VOTER (Voters Organized for Truthful Election Results) last Saturday afternoon at the United Church of Rogers Park.

Differentiating herself from her opponent as an "independent" Democrat, Suzanne Elder, an Uptown resident and health policy analyst for the Institute of Policy Research at the University of Chicago, pointed to her background as a grass roots activist in drafting an act passed by the Illinois House ensuring the educational access rights of children with diabetes and other chronic illnesses.



Suzanne Elder, left, answers questions from the audience while opponent Heather Steans (background) takes notes during a 7th District State Senate race forum at the United Church of Rogers Park on Saturday. The Democratic candidates are vying to fill the seat vacated by State Sen. Carol Ronen. (Suzanne Tennant/Staff Photographer)

Heather Steans, of Edgewater, brings a professional background in government, finance, economic development and educational reform, including stints managing state agency budgets in Illinois and Wisconsin, and as a strategic planner for Chicago Public Schools.

Both are running for the 7th District seat vacated by State Sen. Carol Ronen, who announced her resignation mid-term last fall. Ronen's resignation took effect Jan. 7. Ward committeemen from the 46th, 47th, 48th and 49th wards have 30 days to appoint someone to fill the rest of Ronen's term for the district that includes East Rogers Park, Edgewater, Ravenswood and Uptown.

Conceivably, the appointee could be the winner of the 7th Senate District Democratic primary.

Fielding questions from the audience, each candidate was asked what she would do as a freshman senator "in the face of House Speaker Mike Madigan's lockdown."

Steans said she would build stronger coalitions of the "rank and file" to apply pressure in Springfield for rule reform.

"We need to be going for real rule reform. (Even) if a bill has practically unanimity and support (among state senators) it doesn't get called," Steans said. "When you have that kind of majority you should be able to get a bill called even if the leadership doesn't support it."

Elder referred to the last state Senate session as a "debacle" and said that she would have supported House Bill 146 to amend the way bills are called to both floors of the Illinois General Assembly.

"I think the personality entrenchments have been super-fueled by the pay-to-play politics," Elder said. "The only way to undo what's going on in Springfield is from the outside in. We start by electing one responsive and responsible legislator and then another and another, who will not do business as usual."

Both candidates said they would support House Bill 1 that would make companies and individuals who do contracted work with the state ineligible to make campaign contributions to elected officials.

"(HB 1) is such a no-brainer, yet it sits (in the rules committee) because special interest groups will lose out on the gravy train ride that they've had for years and years," Elder said.

Steans said she voluntarily limited the size of her campaign contributions to comply with federal campaign guidelines.

"We do need to end pay-to-play politics. Once you put limits (on campaign donations) we can move toward public financing of campaigns," Steans said. "I also believe that we need lobbyist reforms. Lobbyists would have to record not just what they're giving, but also their activities, the same that's required from the federal government and the city of Chicago."

Later asked about the campaign contributions totaling over \$750,000 to national, state and local elected officials given individually by Steans' husband, Leo Smith, or in both their names, Steans called the figure "overblown." (The actual figure donated between 1998 and 2006 is \$758,613 according to the Illinois Board of Elections' campaign disclosure statements.)

"I've reconciled that by putting caps on donations to my own campaign," Steans said.

Both candidates advocated for Tax Increment Financing (TIF) reform, including itemizing the amount to TIF districts on property tax bills, and amending the Illinois statute regulating TIFs to tighten the definition of blight.

Elder concluded by saying it was time to break the "50-year pattern" in the 7th Senate District of "handing down the elected office to pre-decided heirs."

"I think you want someone to fight with you," Elder said. If you think, like I do, that top-down politics are wrong, or as Al Gore says, 'that dominance of the wealth of contributors are undermining democracy,' then we're in this fight together. This is our state and we need to take it back."

Steans called the opportunity to be considered as a representative to the 7th Senate District "humbling."

"My commitment is to bring to this the willingness to always listen and learn and to be fully accessible to constituents and residents in the 7th District," Steans said. "I believe this district deserves a progressive and effective leader."

<http://www.pioneerlocal.com/newsstar/news/752780,SN-SenateForum-012308-s1.article>



Wednesday, January 23, 2008

## Candidates for 7th District state senate partake in forum on issues

**Melissa Benson**

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"Young people don't feel empowered; they don't feel like they count," said Suzanne Elder, a Progressive Democratic candidate for the Illinois state Senate. Voters in Illinois' 7th District, representing the East Rogers Park and Edgewater communities, got the opportunity to pose questions and express their concerns to candidates Elder and Heather Steans (D) during a Candidate Forum on Saturday.

Both candidates stated that they hope to inspire more voters to participate in the election by ensuring them that they will be accessible to the constituents if elected. Despite cold weather, an auditorium full of voters turned out to ask questions.

The event was moderated by Christine Wellman, president of Rogers Park VOTER, an organization that aims to get local voters more involved in the election process and hold elected officials accountable. The group sponsored the event, which was held in the auditorium of the United Church of Rogers Park.

Both candidates agreed on issues such as the necessity for campaign finance reform and the need for increased funding for public schools. "The state is not doing what it should to fund schools," Steans said. "I don't think education should be based on [a student's] address."

Question topics varied, including the problems of Lake Michigan's water quality, gay marriage rights and funding for the arts in Rogers Park. Attendees also expressed concern about corruption in Illinois politics and its effects on many elections, and Steans and Elder agreed that Illinois has a serious political problem.

"It's appalling that we are one of the most corrupt states," Steans said. Steans stressed that she put voluntary limits on her campaign based on federal standards, even though Illinois does not require it.

Steans also emphasized her many endorsements from local officials such as Illinois Attorney General Lisa Madigan and Illinois State Treasurer Alexi Giannoulias and from organizations such as Planned Parenthood.

Elder has worked as a small business owner and a health policy analyst at the University of Chicago. After her daughter was diagnosed with type 1 diabetes, Elder began working as a political activist, pushing legislation for the rights of children with disabilities.

"The most important thing is judgment and how we approach constituents," Elder said. "I am committed to promoting strong grass-roots involvement [in the election]."

Steans managed the budgets of state agencies in Wisconsin and worked as a strategic planner for the superintendent of Chicago Public Schools. She said she chose to run because she "leads [her] life based on social justice values" that she intends to bring to the office. Steans also said there is a need for "more independent, strong leaders" in the Senate.

<http://media.www.loyolaphoenix.com/media/storage/paper673/news/2008/01/23/News/Candidates.For.7th.District.State.Senate.Partake.In.Forum.On.Issues-3163450.shtml?reffeature=htmlmailedition>

## Elder, Steans discuss gay marriage in Rogers Park

Wed, 01/23/2008

By Matt Simonette Staff writer



Gay marriage was just one of the issues touched on last week when the two candidates vying to fill the seat being vacated by Illinois state Sen. Carol Ronen (D-Chicago) met with community members in Rogers Park.

At the forum, held Jan. 19 at Rogers Park Community Church, Heather Steans and Suzanne Elder each explained the depth of their commitment to marriage equality for gay and lesbian Illinoisans.

In a previous forum Elder had reportedly questioned how seriously her opponent took the issue, noting that Steans' website only said Steans supported civil unions.

But Steans, who has been endorsed by Rep. Greg Harris, said at the weekend forum, "I 100-percent support same-sex marriage," and went on to praise the current efforts, led by Harris, to institute civil unions in the state.

"This is a key issue in our district and something I plan entirely to focus and help on," Steans said.

Elder said that marriage equality, not civil unions, should be where activists set their sights.

"The conversation has now degraded to where we are going to satisfy ourselves with a compromise," she said. "Can we imagine, just for a minute, if we started out the battle for civil rights by starting out with a compromise?"

She added, "I'm a strong proponent of marriage equality, and while I understand the practicality of civil unions legislation, it does not provide the same level of humanity (and) the same level of dignity."

After the forum, Steans further clarified her views on marriage equality, saying, "I fully support that. I just think that civil unions are the first step." She added that her website was going to be fixed to better represent those views.

Elder also said after the forum that too much energy is being concentrated on civil unions and not enough on the final goal of marriage.

"My starting point is marriage equality," she said. "I see this as less about the (logistics of) the legislation and more about where it lives in the minds and hearts of the people in this district."

Questions at the forum touched upon other issues of importance to community members, including neighborhood TIFs, campaign finance and school reform.

The candidates were essentially in agreement on some issues, such as when Elder and Steans were asked about healthcare for the uninsured.

Elder said that in the long run healthcare expansion was best done at the federal level. But if that was not forthcoming, she agreed with the governor's idea that coverage should be implemented by the state.

"I don't agree with his strong-armed tactics to get it," she said. "Elbowing one's way through an issue in that fashion only erodes the support that you need later...in implementing universal healthcare coverage, for which I am an absolute proponent."

Steans agreed that, with 2 million uninsured Illinoisans, the state would have to step in if the federal government did not. She added, "We also need to make sure that, at the same time, we provide quality health care that moves from back-end treatment to prevention."

She further praised community health centers as a means to administer preventative treatment, and suggested that they be expanded to offer more specialized services.

Near the end of the forum, Steans was asked how she could claim to be independent given her numerous endorsements from elected officials.

She answered, “There’s no entrenchment here. ...My independence comes from my ability to stand up and be beholden to no one—not the governor, not the mayor, not the speaker of the House, not the Senate president.”

Elder replied that Steans had gotten those endorsements even before the people in the district knew there was a race.

“I am not endorsed by the elected officials,” she added. “...I’m the grassroots candidate. ...I do not have the machine backing. I have no machine help.”

Steans and Elder face each other in the Feb. 5 Democratic primary.

<http://www.chicagofreepress.com/node/1145>

# Rogers Park VOTER

## Voters Organized for Truthful Election Results

Our mission is to foster an environment that results in the fair and honest election of public officials who are accountable to the constituents they serve and who demonstrate a commitment to transparent and open government.

For more info on Rogers Park VOTER check our web site at <http://rogersparkvoter.org/>