

2006 George Polk Award Winner

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Burns triumphs in 26th race

by Kate Hawley and
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Will Burns won the hotly contested Feb. 5 Democratic primary in the 26th congressional district, edging out incumbent Elga Jeffries and fellow challengers Kenny Johnson, Phillip Jackson and Paul Chadha.

Burns, a former aide to Illinois Senate President Emil Jones (D-14), had racked up endorsements from Mayor Richard M. Daley, Ald. Toni Preckwinkle (4th) and the Chicago Tribune.

Shortly after the polls closed Feb. 5, Burns arrived at The Gage, a dimly lit, mahogany-paneled restaurant at 24 S. Michigan Ave., where a room decked out with balloons and streamers had been reserved for his supporters.

The assembled group of about 50 burst into applause when Burns entered, and several people hugged him and slapped him on the back.

"It's very exciting," said Burns of his win. "Everybody ran a great campaign. I am overwhelmed and honored and humbled by the support of the Democrats in the 26th District."

In the next several months, Burns said he plans to "build unity" with the candidates who ran against him in the primary.

Kenny Johnson said he hopes he can help Will Burns in the general election in a Feb. 5 interview shortly before delivering his speech to supporters.

"We came up a little short," Johnson said. Johnson's campaign was about 5,000 votes behind Burns with 81 percent of precincts reporting when he admitted defeat.

Johnson said he was upbeat at the beginning of the night and thought he had won it.

By the end of the night, Johnson's campaign did close the gap by a considerable margin, but still fell about 1,500 votes short of Burns.

"I'm not as down as you might think, believe me," Johnson said in his speech. "Everything happens for a rea-



Will Burns on election night, after learning of his victory in the 26th House of Representatives district's Democratic primary.

Fritz Kimbrough

son."

He thanked his wife and children and his supporters for inspiring him to run.

"I wouldn't say Kenny Johnson has lost anything," said Congressman Jesse Jackson Jr. (D-2), who endorsed Johnson in the primary. "If anything, he's won our respect."

Johnson said he was proud of how he ran his campaign and had no regrets.

"I would rather lose right than win wrong," he said.

Johnson could not say whether he would seek public office in the future.

Perhaps the biggest shock of the night came to the incumbent.

"I feel good," Jefferies said early in the evening Feb. 5.

"The thing with me, when you know you've done your

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best, it gives you a good feeling.”

Jefferies expressed confidence that high voter turnout, a full docket of challengers and a strong record in the state legislature would buoy her to victory.

Jefferies refused an interview after poll results indicated she had come in fourth in the polls. Through a spokesman she said she is a public servant and will continue to serve the public until her term is up a year from now.

At The Gage, Burns' supporters praised his grasp of policy and leadership savvy. Alan Thomas, of Hyde Park, said he'd become a Burns supporter just three days before, when

he heard Burns speak. “What I saw was an honesty,” he said. “He’s the first candidate in a long while who has a vision beyond the usual political speak.”

Elizabeth Evans campaigned for Burns with her children, Benjamin and Natalie Glick, 9 and 7. “We wanted to go campaigning, so we did!” said Elizabeth Glick.

“What were our important issues?” her mother prompted.

“No handguns and no smoking inside,” she answered. “Making sure everyone goes to school in a safe school.”

Burns faces Republican Sylvester “Junebug” Hendricks in the general election.

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