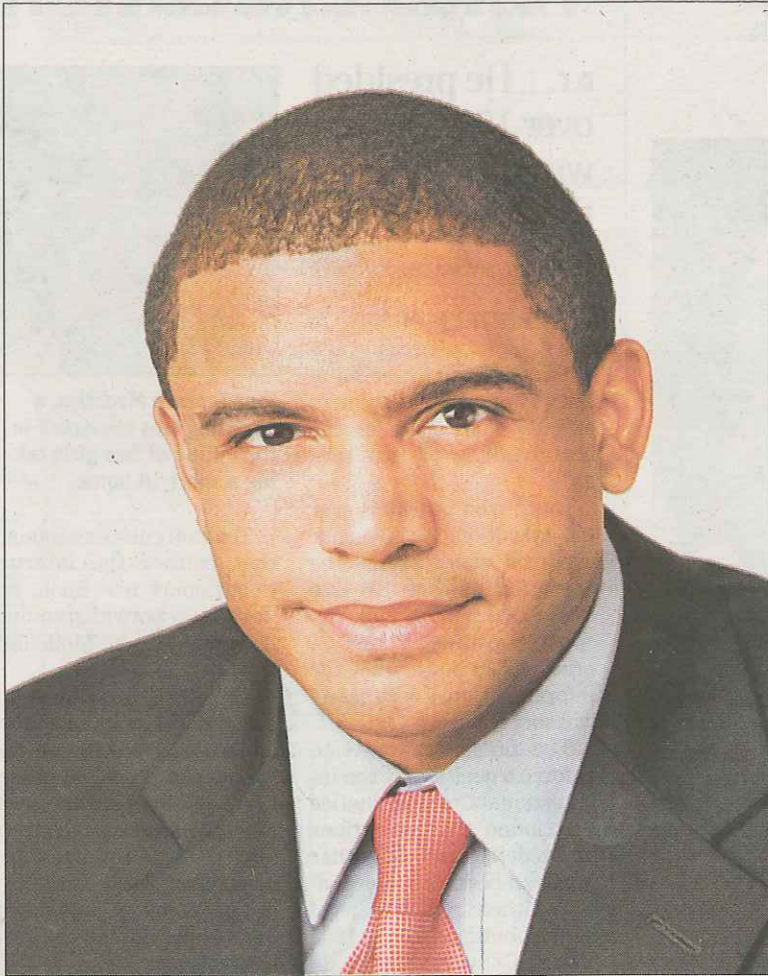


OTHER THOUGHTS

Gun control may give Burns a 2nd chance



Will Burns is one of several Democratic challengers facing state Rep. Elga L. Jeffries in the Feb. 5 Illinois primary.



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Back in the day when Frank Sinatra crooned, "The Second Time Around," he wasn't talking about politics. These days, Will Burns is humming a political tune and hoping that 2008 will be "A Very Good Year."

In 2004, Burns, a protege of Barack Obama, stumbled in a 2004 bid for the 13th District Senate seat that Obama vacated when he left Chicago for the U.S. Senate.

Then Kwame Raoul snatched the seat right out from under him. The former attorney for Chicago City Colleges was appointed to the plum slot with a big boost from Toni Preckwinkle and Leslie Hairston, the aldermen and committeemen of the 4th and 5th wards.

Now Burns, 34, is champing at the bit to get back in the game.

Burns' resume is a policy wonk's dream: B.A. and M.A. from the University of Chicago, a stint as senior adviser to state Senate President Emil Jones, and turns on the

boards of do-good causes like the Blue Gargoyle Youth Service Center and the Mikva Challenge.

He is one of several people who is taking on state Rep. Elga L. Jeffries in the Feb. 5 Illinois primary. Kenny Johnson, an ally of U.S. Rep. Jesse Jackson Jr., and attorney Paul Chadha are also running.

Jeffries, 61, represents the 26th District, which runs south along the lakefront from downtown to

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South Shore. She was the longtime assistant to state Rep. Lovana "Lou" Jones, who died in office in May 2006. A slew of veteran South Side pols backed Jeffries for the interim appointment to Jones' spot.

Lately some politicians have soured on her. Like Kwame Raoul. Over a recent afternoon tea, Raoul told me he is pushing Burns, his former nemesis. Why?

"Over the course of the year, I had the opportunity to watch Elga," said Raoul.

"And?" I asked.

"Nice lady," Raoul paused, then added: "Over her head. She couldn't articulate anything on the [House] floor."

"The killer," he added, was House

Bill 758. The measure would close a loophole in Illinois' gun restrictions by requiring that anyone who buys a handgun from a private seller submit to a background check.

Last April the bill failed, two votes short of the 60 needed for passage. Jeffries voted against it, even though she co-sponsored it.

It reminds me of that infamous John Kerry moment, when he exclaimed, "I actually did vote for it . . . before I voted against it."

Jeffries says the vote was "mistaken." She was distracted by a phone call she took during the vote and pledges to support the bill the next time it comes up for a vote. In response to critics, she said, "They should speak to the voters in my district. I have been visible and I have kept in touch. . . . I think I have been very effective, for my first term."

Burns is making gun control his signature campaign issue. "It's a no-brainer," he said. "I've lived in Woodlawn. I've lived in Washington Park. I live in Kenwood now, and gun violence is a serious problem in our community."

Indeed. Every black politician in America should follow his lead. Last school year, 34 children were gunned down in Chicago. It is unconscionable that a black lawmaker would retreat from stricter gun laws. Guns are killing our kids. It's about time someone took on the People of the Gun.