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## Candidate, Under Pressure, Quits Senate Race in Illinois

By STEPHEN KINZER

**C**HICAGO, June 25 - Crippled by accusations about sex clubs and losing support from his own party, Jack Ryan, the Republican Senate candidate in Illinois, pulled out of the race on Friday, leaving Republicans searching for a new face to defend a critical Senate seat.

"It's clear to me that a vigorous debate on the issues most likely could not take place if I remain in the race," Mr. Ryan said in a statement to reporters at his campaign headquarters. "What would take place, rather, is a brutal, scorched-earth campaign - the kind of campaign that has turned off so many voters, the kind of politics I refuse to play."

The candidacy of Mr. Ryan, 44, an investment banker turned teacher in the inner city, imploded when a judge unsealed custody papers that included statements by his former wife, the actress Jeri Ryan, saying he had taken her to sex clubs and asked her to have public sex. Her accusations left Republicans reeling in a race that represents one of the Democrats' top chances to pick up a seat now held by a Republican, Peter G. Fitzgerald, who is not seeking a second term.

The Republican state committee is charged with finding a replacement for Mr. Ryan, who had won a primary against seven contenders. Its task is complicated by the fact that the Democratic candidate, State Senator Barack Obama, has a comfortable lead in the polls and is widely regarded as a rising Democratic star.

Democrats seized the moment to give Mr. Obama a coveted national platform, tapping him to deliver their weekly national radio address on Saturday.

The chairwoman of the Illinois Republican Party, Judy Baar Topinka, said at a news conference after Mr. Ryan withdrew that Republicans would probably take several weeks to settle on a new candidate.

"Obviously, this is a bad week for our party and our state," Ms. Topinka said.

She called Mr. Ryan "a good candidate with a lot of great ideas, but they probably would have been overshadowed by all that's going on."

"With the right kind of campaign," she said, "Illinois is a winnable state. We are running against an opponent in Barack Obama who I don't think represents the mainstream of Illinois or the common sense of Illinoisans."

Mr. Obama voiced sympathy for Mr. Ryan. "I feel for him actually," Mr. Obama told a radio interviewer. "What he's gone through over the last three days, I think, is something you wouldn't wish on anybody."

Perhaps the only two Republicans who would immediately be considered formidable challengers would be former Govs. James R. Thompson and Jim Edgar. Mr. Thompson has a lucrative law practice, and no political experts suggest that he would consider leaving it for the Senate race. Mr. Edgar, recently named to head [President Bush's](#) re-election campaign here, has discouraged speculation that he might run.

The candidate who finished second to Mr. Ryan in the primary, Jim Oberweis, has the private fortune to finance a statewide campaign but alienated some voters with his anti-immigration stance. State Senator Steven J. Rauschenberger of Elgin, who finished third in the primary, is more widely admired by professionals, but was unable to raise considerable sums of money.

A more likely candidate may be Ronald J. Gidwitz, a businessman and philanthropist who is a former chairman of the State Board of Education. Mr. Gidwitz is reportedly interested in running for governor in 2006. If he could run a strong campaign for Senate this year, he might strengthen his position for that race.

Some Republicans have floated the name of United States Attorney Patrick J. Fitzgerald, who is crusading against corruption in Illinois and is heading the Washington investigation into the leak of the name of an undercover operative in the Central Intelligence Agency, Valerie Plame. Mr. Fitzgerald has not indicated that he is considering electoral politics.

"To be nominated by a major party to run for the U. S. Senate is always, always, even under these circumstances, an honor," Chris Robling, a former executive director of the Cook County Republican Party, said. "It's easy to say that no one has a chance at this point. But you just don't know that. So you put your best foot forward. The prospects range from getting a big name with a real chance of winning despite Barack Obama's huge head start down to someone who can get our points across and not be an embarrassment."

As recently as Thursday evening, spokesmen for Mr. Ryan's campaign were insisting that he would stay in the race.

Mr. Ryan had said: "There's no breaking of any laws. There's no breaking of any marriage laws. There's no breaking of the Ten Commandments anywhere."

The lurid nature of his wife's statements, however, were already fodder not just for gossip, but also for cartoonists and television comedians. Mrs. Ryan made the statements in a court battle four years ago over the custody of their son, who is now 9.

A judge ordered them unsealed in response to a suit by The Chicago Tribune and a Chicago television station.

*Jo Napolitano contributed reporting for this article.*