

From left are the nominees to fill a vacant Senate seat in Legislative District 2, Shawnna Bolick, Josh Barnett, and Paul Carver.

Former lawmaker, former congressional candidate, party chair vie for LD2 seat

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Legislative District 2 Republicans nominated three people on Monday night as potential replacements for former Sen. Steve Kaiser, R-Phoenix.

Former lawmaker Shawnna Bolick, failed congressional candidate Josh Barnett, and LD2 Republican party chair Paul Carver is the nominee slate the Maricopa County Board of Supervisors will now choose from.

Kaiser attended the meeting and explained his resignation. He did not make any endorsements, but he nominated Carver

Kaiser resigned from the Senate on June 22, and the committeemen are required to meet within five days to select three nominees.

Kaiser said he is leaving the Legislature to put his family first, but also said he will still work on public policy.

“I kind of fell out of love being a politician. I did not enjoy being a politician, and I really wanted to put my family first again,” Kaiser said. “The reason I’m resigning is to protect the seat and protect the party.” With Kaiser resigning now it gives another Republican

from his district time to establish themself as an incumbent before a tight 2024 general election.

Six people were nominated at the beginning of the meeting: Debra Nolen, Linda Brickman, Carver, Barnett, Bolick and Ari Bradshaw. Rep. Justin Wilmeth, R-Phoenix, was nominated to replace Kaiser, but as a current representative, he declined the nomination.

After the first round of voting, only Bolick and Barnett had more than 50% plus one vote and advanced. There was a second round of voting for the third nominee between Carver, Bradshaw and Brickman. Because Nolen had the lowest votes after the first round, she was dropped.

Brickman dropped out after the second round of voting, and Carver had the most votes in the last round over Bradshaw.

Kaiser said more than a week ago that he thought Carver might be nominated, and Kaiser was the first person to nominate anyone (Carver). “I don’t believe anybody should ever seek after leadership,” Carver said on Tuesday, June 20. He added at the time that if he were to be nominated, he would accept, and he did.

Between in person and proxy voters, 121 PCs cast their ballots for the candidates.

The board of supervisors will select one person to take Kaiser’s seat. The Legislature won’t reconvene until July 31, so the board has at least a month to make that determination and still avoid a vacancy at the Senate in their last floor meetings.

PCs were disgruntled that the board of supervisors gets to make the final decision on their representation. Kaiser said he agrees it should be the PCs alone who decide on the appointment, but noted the in the past, the board got to make that decision unilaterally.

Kaiser spent the last two sessions trying to increase Arizona’s housing supply through a series of ambitious bills, which were blocked at every turn. He hasn’t given up on pushing zoning deregulation and other housing measures however, and said he’ll continue to work on that through a nonprofit he’s started.

However, housing isn't something the three nominees look at the same way. Bolick declined to comment after the meeting, but Barnett and Carver both expressed reservations about Kaiser's proposals.

"There were a lot of good points in Steve's bill," Carver said. "You need to take a closer look at what the community wants."

Barnett said he's talked to neighbors who don't want trailer parks popping up near their $500,000 homes.

Bolick served in the last Legislative session, then ran for Secretary of State. She lost to fellow former lawmaker Mark Finchem in the Republican primary in August. "I'm the only candidate who can hit the ground running," Bolick said. She reminded the audience that she hosted a hearing on election problems with former Senate President Karen Fann that former House Speaker Rusty Bowers wouldn't, that she has a plan for fixing Arizona's elections and that she's been an advocate of school vouchers.

Carver didn't say whether Arizona's elections are fair, but he did say that the electorate has "lost faith" in the election system. If Carver is selected by the board of supervisors, he will have to resign as chair, but not until then.

Barnett said he'll represent the people and be a "staunch fighter for election integrity." He also pledged to get the "secrecy" out of the Legislature. Barnett also said he has the support of Sens. Wendy Rogers, R-Flagstaff, and Anthony Kern, R-Glendale.

The ballots were tabulated through a hand count. In their nomination speeches, most of the candidates said they want to tackle election issues in some way by mandating paper ballots (which are the only ballots Arizona currently has), banning machines in elections, and requiring people to vote in person on election day.

LD2 is highly politically competitive, only leaning slightly Republican.

Kaiser narrowly won his election against Democrat Jeanne Casteen in 2022. Kaiser got 51.8% of the votes and Casteen received 48.2%.

Rep. Judy Schwiebert, D-Phoenix, already filed a statement of interest to run in LD 2 in 2024 and is the first Democrat to do so.

Barnett also filed a statement of interest to run in 2024. He lost to incumbent Congressman David Schweikert, R-AZ, in the Congressional District 1 primary last year.

The Maricopa Board of Supervisors hasn't announced yet when they'll select Kaiser's replacement to the Senate.