

## **SENATE ELECTIONS 2002: Quiet 5th has definite issues**

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### **Body**

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Compared to some Gwinnett contests, the race for the GOP nomination in state **Senate** District **5** has been placid.

None of the three candidates has aired ads, leveled charges of dirty tricks or spent more than \$10,000. None has held **elected** office, so they have no voting records to debate and little name recognition.

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Still, the candidates --- gas station-convenience store owner Jimmy Herchek of Lawrenceville, mortgage lending company president Gregory Howard of Duluth and special education teacher Phyllis Ransom of Norcross --- are staking out distinct territory as Tuesday's primary approaches.

The district runs along I-85 from the DeKalb County line to Ga. 316, taking in parts of Norcross, Lilburn, Duluth and Lawrenceville. The winner of the Republican primary will face state Rep. Mary Squires (D-Norcross) in November.

Ransom, 59, said the campaign has been "professional and respectable." All the candidates agree on the need to **elect** a conservative instead of Squires.

Herchek, 48, who has stood on the side of the road displaying campaign signs to motorists, has come out strongly against illegal immigrants from Mexico. The district has 37,581 Hispanic residents --- or more than any other **Senate** district in Georgia.

"Gwinnett County is the No. 1 destination in Georgia for illegal immigrants, and it's putting a huge strain on the schools," said Herchek, who believes deportations would slow the tide. "When teachers start complaining they're not able to teach because of all the kids who can't speak English, you know it's a problem."

Illegal immigration also has led to "the rise of gangs in Gwinnett County," Herchek said. He opposes **issuing** driver's licenses to illegal immigrants, as some have suggested.

Howard, 39, said Herchek's calls for strict enforcement "sound great and tough, but I don't think we have the wherewithal to hunt people down and deport them."

Howard draws some of his ideas from his experience as president of the Southern Financial Network, a mortgage lender that operates in six states. He said he's seen the need for licensing of builders and subcontractors. Licensing would offer home buyers some protection from scam artists, he said.

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"Even your hairdresser has to have a license," he said. "Your mortgage broker, your real estate broker, but not your builder. For 78 percent of the country, this is the greatest investment of your life."

Ransom, who teaches special education to pre-kindergartners at Lawrenceville Elementary, said returning local control to schools is her top priority. Gov. Roy Barnes' education reform has added layers of bureaucracy without creating the desired accountability, she said.

"Sometimes I think you waste time reinventing instead of consulting the people, the teachers and educators who could solve this with a more streamlined approach," she said.

Ransom also wants to adjust the state's school funding formula, giving more consideration to fast-growing counties such as Gwinnett.

She and Howard are stressing various revitalization strategies for the district.

Herchek is pushing for tougher anti-corruption laws in government.

All want to prevent Squires from becoming the first Democratic state senator from Gwinnett in more than a decade. But whoever wins will face a steep challenge.

Squires is a two-term member of the House of Representatives, and the **Senate** district was drawn for her by Democratic leaders.

The district is considered 54 percent Democratic.

## Classification

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**Subject:** US REPUBLICAN PARTY (90%); ELECTORAL DISTRICTS (90%); PRIMARY **ELECTIONS** (90%); LEGISLATIVE BODIES (90%); US STATE GOVERNMENT (90%); IMMIGRATION (89%); ILLEGAL IMMIGRANTS (89%); PRIMARY & SECONDARY SCHOOL TEACHERS (89%); EDUCATIONAL INSTITUTION EMPLOYEES (89%); US STATE IMMIGRATION LAW (78%); PRIMARY SCHOOLS (78%); CAMPAIGNS & **ELECTIONS** (78%); COUNTIES (77%); SPECIAL EDUCATION (76%); EDUCATION REFORM (75%); DEPORTATION (71%); DRIVERS LICENSES (71%); HISPANIC AMERICANS (71%); PUBLIC SCHOOLS (70%); LICENSES & PERMITS (62%); SUBCONTRACTING (50%)

**Company:** SOUTHERN FINANCIAL NETWORK INC (52%); SOUTHERN FINANCIAL NETWORK INC (52%)

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