



Girl, I Guess:

A Special Edition Guide to the IL-7 State Senate and IL-14 State House Appointments

Table of Contents/TL;DR

- [Who Are We?](#)
- [What Are We Doing Here?](#)
- [The Process](#)
- [The Appointments](#)
 - [IL Senate District 7:](#) **State Representative Kelly Cassidy** or **Mike Simmons**
 - [IL House District 14:](#) (PENDING)
- [Committeepeople Info](#)

Who Are We?

In the spirit of your grouchy coworker who was supposed to have the day off but got called in to cover someone else's shift anyway, Girl, I Guess is BACK!! 2021 was supposed to be my year off of elections before the 2022 Midterm Congressional Cycle, since I don't usually cover the suburban municipal elections (shout out to Evanston For Black Lives, who is putting together a voter guide inspired by Girl, I Guess!!). But Chicago has to, well, be itself, and the political scourge of appointments has found its way to my neck of the woods. While appointments are normally conducted in the classic Smoke Filled Backroom Deal style, the 7th State Senate District is doing it differently this time around, and here I am to cover it!

[Stephanie Skora](#) is a grouchy trans dyke, and an anarchist with a political science degree. She is one half of the podcast [TacoBagel](#), the Associate Executive Director at [Brave Space Alliance](#), a member of the Coordinating Committee for Jewish Voice for Peace - Chicago, and a founding organizer of the [Trans Liberation Collective](#).

Girl, I Guess is Jewish, queer, nerdy and dedicated to helping members of our community navigate a confusing electoral process. For the sake of this particular appointment, this special edition of the Guide is intended to help increase understanding of the appointment process, and to let constituents in my State Senate and State House district know who wants to represent them!

Putting together this voter guide is an act of love, but it is a lot of work! If you'd like to support Girl, I Guess, my PayPal link can be found [here](#)! If you don't have PayPal, but still want to donate, you can support by donating through my Venmo account, @StephanieSkora, or my CashApp, \$StephanieSkora.

**This guide does not represent the political views of my organizations or employer!! Brave Space Alliance is a 501c3 organization, and does not contribute to, or have anything to do with, the writing of this document, or any endorsements, opinions, or content herein!*

What Are We Doing Here?

Dear reader, this is an excellent question. For Chicagoans, odd-numbered years following Presidential elections are usually where we get to take a breath, hate the people that we've elected to most public offices for the past 3 years, and kick our feet up while the suburbs sort their shit out individually. For folks wondering why there isn't a 2021 Girl, I Guess Suburban Edition, it's because there are 133 non-Chicago municipalities in Cook County, many of which hold their elections in 2021, and I write voter guides, not Homeric tomes. I'm a muckraker, Jim, not a Doctor of Suburbology.

Yet 2021 decided to make me work anyway when the 7th District State Senator, Heather Steans [resigned abruptly](#) on January 19th, in a decision that was evidently so unexpected that the Democratic Committeepeople in her own district didn't know she was going to quit until the day she broke the news. Talk about drama. And the Girl, I Guess faithful know that around these parts, we love political drama. I also live in the 7th State Senate District, and when folks in my neighborhood asked me to get involved and cover the process, I agreed. Are there other appointments happening right now in Chicago? Yes, there are. Can I be bothered to cover them right now? No, I cannot, because I'd like to actually attempt to recharge my batteries before the mammoth 2022 election, in which Illinois will be voting on every major State office, most major Cook County offices, and the *entire* General Assembly. Thanks, redistricting. Anywho.

In this Special Edition of Girl, I Guess, I'll be profiling each individual nominee for the State Senate (and, if necessary, the State House) appointment that I can get adequate information about. I'll also be making a **First Choice** and a **Second Choice** endorsement for each seat, similar to the green/yellow/red system that Girl, I Guess has used in the past for the Chicago Municipal Elections. First Choice nominees will have their names highlighted in green, and Second Choice nominees will have their names highlighted in yellow. I'd be completely happy with the nomination of my First Choice candidate, and would look forward to holding them

accountable to the progressive standards expected by their constituents. In the case of the appointment of a Second Choice nominee, I'd have some concerns, and some reservations of varying size, but I would only complain a standard amount, as befitting my culture.

While there won't be a special election in which constituents can vote directly, voters *do* directly elect the Committeepeople, so we can, and should, call the fuck out of them and pester them to conduct their deliberations publicly. To the Committee's credit, on a February 2nd State Senate Candidate Forum hosted by the Progressive Northside Coalition and moderated by Local Grouch and Shrugger of Candidates, me, 48th Ward Alderman and Appointment Committee Chairman Harry Osterman said that all voting Committeepeople would cast their votes publicly, something which is *not* mandated by Illinois law... which I'll get to in a minute.

Through calling our Committeepeople and reminding them that their offices are elected, too, we as voters can attempt to enforce our will on the process, and, if all else fails... anyone appointed will have to run for re-election in a year, when there will be additional coverage in the regularly-scheduled Girl, I Guess Primary Guide, coming in February of 2022!

The Process:

Appointments are a nasty, and tricky business in Illinois, where they're actually mandated by the State Constitution. Yes, that's right, that means no special elections for General Assembly seats (which have the perk of allowing people to, you know, vote, but have the downside of being expensive, and giving an advantage to the more connected candidate) unless a State Senator resigns with more than 28 months left in their term.

Even worse, these appointments usually take place entirely behind closed doors, because of multiple carve-outs in Illinois law designed to protect the grossness of the appointment process. You'd think that elected Committeepeople appointing someone to fill a seat that's elected by voters would be subject to things like the Open Meetings Act? Not in Illinois! There's actually a specific exemption in the [Illinois Open Meetings Act](#) for this process. The specific law is on the books as 5 ILCS 120/2 Sec. 2(c)(2), for those interested.

"But Steph", you might say, "didn't we just re-elect Heather Steans back in November, and aren't the terms of State Senators in Illinois supposed to be *four* years? What gives??"

Well, dear reader, that's an astute question, with an extremely Illinois answer.

Instead of doing mundane things like elections in ways that were consistent, accessible, and make sense to everyone, the Illinois Constitution requires the entire General Assembly to be voted on in the election immediately following census-based redistricting, which takes place every 10 years (happening now, in a legislature near you!). The last redistricting process took place in 2011, and the entire General Assembly was elected anew in 2012. Illinois, not being a state that lets things like math get in the way of a good time for voters, addresses the issue of 4

not evenly dividing into 10 by splitting the terms of the 59 State Senators into two four-year terms, and one two-year term. The State Senators are then divided into three different groups, which stagger their order of those terms:

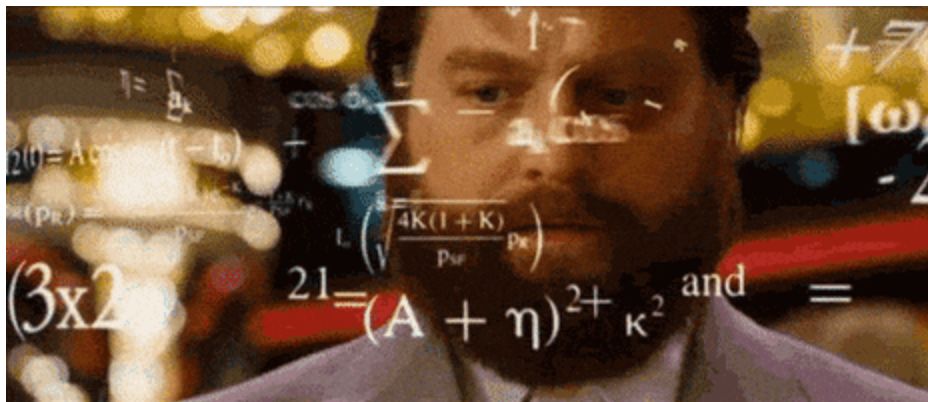
Group 1: four-year term, four-year term, two-year term

Group 2: four-year term, two-year term, four-year term

Group 3: two-year term, four-year term, four-year term

Fun, isn't it? Heather Steans belonged to Group 1, so she resigned just after starting her two-year term.

In Cook County, when a legislator resigns during their term (or is removed for some other sort of chicanery), the elected Committeepeople of their party (Democrats, because lol Cook County) get together, form a Committee (hence the name of their office), and cast their votes on a nominee for an appointment to the vacant seat. Each Democratic Committeepeople has a weighted vote, whose value is calculated based on the proportion of the total Democratic votes in the last election coming from their Ward (or in the case of Evanston, their municipality). The total vote evaluated, and therefore the proportional percentages, are based on the office being appointed. In the case of the 7th State Senate District, there were 90,009 votes cast for Democrats within the district in 2020, so the proportional vote for each Committeepeople will be based on local shares of that total. If you feel like this right now:



Don't worry, the process is pretty intentionally confusing.

The 7th Senate District encompasses much of the Far North Side, including the entire 40th, 48th and 49th Wards, large parts of the 46th and 47th Wards, and liiiiittle pieces of the 33rd, 39th, and 50th Wards, and a tiny section of Evanston, which notably includes a cemetery (insert your election fraud joke of choice here). Which means that although the Democratic vote total in, for example, the 33rd Ward, might be very high, only a few blocks of that Ward are included in the Senate District, so 33rd Ward Committeepeople Iris Martinez has a very small proportion of the 7th District's total votes.

Here's where things get even thornier: so-called handoffs (resignation, then appointment of a close ally to the vacated seat) have been a mainstay of Northside politics in Chicago for decades. In the State Senate in particular, this is a problem that's decades-long. The last open election for the 7th District seat was held in 1977, when Richard Nixon was still President. Yikes. Steans herself rose to power as the result of a mid-term resignation that prompted a hasty special election, in which she significantly outspent her opponent and cruised to victory. Not the best look.

Now, for more details about this appointment process in particular.

There is one definite, and one probable appointment taking place in the 7th Senate District. The appointment to fill Steans's seat is guaranteed, and should incumbent 14th District State Representative Kelly Cassidy be appointed to the State Senate as widely expected, there will be another appointment to fill her seat in the State House.

As mentioned above, the appointments are conducted by the Democratic Committeeperson from each Ward, and Evanston, due to a tiny sliver of the suburb that's included in both districts. For the purposes of these appointments, 49th Ward Committeeperson and 14th District State Representative Kelly Cassidy has chosen to give up her votes, and assign them to 49th Ward Alderwoman Maria Hadden, who will serve as a proxy. This is a high-integrity move by Cassidy, who could just as easily have followed the less-than-proud Chicago tradition of voting for herself in the appointment process.

The real players in the State Senate appointment are 48th Ward Alderman, and avowed Catholic Dad Harry Osterman, former 40th Ward aldermanic hopeful-turned-Committeeperson Maggie O'Keefe, and Hadden, serving as Cassidy's proxy. Should Osterman and O'Keefe split their votes, Sean Tenner and Paul Rosenfeld, representing the 46th and 47th Wards respectively, will come into the picture as potential kingmakers.

There hasn't been an official announcement of what the process will be should Cassidy be appointed to the State Senate, but she has stated publicly, and to me personally, that she won't use her commanding share of the votes to single-handedly choose a replacement State Representative.

As shown in this nifty table and [calculator](#) developed by Indivisible IL-9's Leni Manaa-Hoppenworth, a nominee securing the votes of just Osterman and O'Keefe will secure the State Senate appointment.

Ward / Township	Committeeman	Vote	%
Ward 33	Iris Martinez	244	.27
Ward 39	Ram Villivalam	668	.74
Ward 40	Maggie O'Keefe	20,867	23.18
Ward 46	Sean Tenner	9,276	10.31
Ward 47	Paul Rosenfeld	13,021	14.47
Ward 48	Harry Osterman	24,352	27.06
Ward 49	Kelly Cassidy	19,790	21.99
Ward 50	Debra Silverstein	361	.40
Evanston Township	Eamon Kelly	1,430	1.59

Total number of votes	90,009
-----------------------	--------

Required number of votes for appointment	45,005
--	--------

~~MATH~~

The Appointments:

IL Senate District 7

As mentioned above, the 7th Senate District encompasses much of the Far North Side, including the entire 40th, 48th and 49th Wards, large parts of the 46th and 47th Wards, and liliiiiittle pieces of the 33rd, 39th, and 50th Wards, and a tiny section of Evanston. The district is extremely diverse, with demographics closely mirroring the State, and the country as a whole, and has a large population of refugees, immigrants, and queer and trans people.

Since there is no ballot, and therefore no formal order of candidates, I'm listing the nominees in my order of preference.

Job Description:

To finish the remaining 2 years of Heather Steans's term, and, if re-elected in 2022 by the voters, not resign in the middle of their term and make us do this whole goddamn thing again. Seriously. If you resign mid-term, and make me write another Special Edition to Girl, I Guess to follow the process, I will actively resent you.

The Nominees:

State Representative Kelly Cassidy (D-14)

Mike Simmons

Justin Koziatek

Joseph Alfe

Joseph Struck
Angela Giles

The Dish:

There are a lot of ways in which this is easy, and also some where it is hard. This district contains some of the most progressive parts of Chicago, and deserves a legislator with the chops to make it in the State Senate, and the politics to accurately reflect their constituents. In other words; can someone beat out Kelly Cassidy's qualifications by making a case that they're suited to the district. It's also awkward for me to get publicly accessible information about these nominees to link in the Guide, because a large portion of my information comes from their nomination application, and I'm obviously not going to doxx folks by linking those here.

Kelly Cassidy

Regular readers of Girl, I Guess, will know that I'm a fan of **Kelly Cassidy**. Such a fan that I made her one of my inaugural Golden Shrug-ees in 2020, as recognition of her 10 years as one of the most progressive legislators in Springfield. That being said, I'm generally not a big fan of the appointment process, and this would be Cassidy's third appointment to an elected role (she was appointed to the State House in 2011, and appointed as Democratic Committeeperson in 2019). If Steans had simply served out her term, declined to run again, and Cassidy had run for the then-open seat, it's hard for me to imagine not endorsing her. She's not perfect, but she's pretty damn good, and she's shown up for marginalized communities time and time again. In an interesting note, she'd also be the first openly gay person in the Illinois State Senate (former State Senator [Penny Severns](#) was closeted during her time in the legislature).

Those wanting to read more about Kelly Cassidy can check out my [Golden Shrug endorsement](#) from the 2020 General Election. A final Kelly Cassidy tidbit: in 2012, former State Rep Joe Lyons introduced a heinous anti-abortion bill that would have required individuals seeking an abortion in Illinois to undergo an ultrasound. In response, [Cassidy added an amendment](#) to the bill that would have required anyone seeking erectile dysfunction medication to watch a video about treatments for priapism (also known as Your Erection Lasted Longer Than Four Hours, or Dick-Swell-itis). The amendment didn't pass on the House floor, but neither did Lyons's bill. Cassidy later [passed legislation](#) enshrining abortion access in Illinois state law. Gotta love lesbians.

In light of her experience, her outstanding progressive record, no small amount of homosexual sass, and the fact that I believe her when she's said that she didn't know in advance that Heather Steans was going to resign, I'm endorsing **Kelly Cassidy** for the appointment to the 7th District State Senate seat. She'll have to run for the seat again in 2022, and I hope she gets re-elected, so the neighborhood can keep one of the most progressive legislators that we've got in Springfield.

Mike Simmons

Another interesting nominee for the 7th District appointment is Mike Simmons. Mike is a gay Black man, born and raised in the District, and sporting deep connections in the community. His family was among the first Black families to move to Lincoln Park in the 1980s and his parents both owned small businesses in the area. I gotta say, I like Mike. He's got the feel of someone who can, and probably will, go far in Illinois politics. He also seems like a genuine guy, both in his public appearances, and in the candidate interview I conducted with him. Unfortunately, like a lot of people who sound really cool when they're vying for public office, he's got some baggage.

Policy-wise, despite extensive experience on the state and federal levels, Simmons suffers from being light on specifics in his stances outlined in the [Progressive Hot Take questionnaire](#), his public appearances, and our conversations. For a first-time candidate for an appointment, normally this is something that I'd let slide, but given that Simmons is an experienced policy worker, I expect some more concrete proposals. However, that's not the biggest concern that I have. All of the available written and spoken material about Simmons shows a man with a diverse background and community ties trying to bring a new set of perspectives to his State Senate district. His resume, on the other hand, shows a 16-year career in politics at the Federal, State, County, and City levels, with plennnnnty of insider baseball connections. Simmons has worked for, in order, then-Senator Barack Obama, Dick Durbin, Cook County Commissioner Bridget Gainer, Former Mayor Rahm Emmanuel (~~spending five years as a member of the Chouli-In-Chief's Senior Staff, including~~ a two-year stint as his Policy Director during Rahm's school closing binge), and most recently, the Obama Foundation. That's a lot of Old Perspectives for someone positioning himself as the Bringer of New Perspectives, and he's passed up several opportunities to criticize Rahm in public, which concerns me greatly.

That being said, whatever he experienced in Rahm's office fucked with Simmons badly enough to prompt a 9-month sabbatical through West Africa and the Balkans, about which he's currently writing a book. He's clearly qualified, and Simmons also shares the distinction with Kelly Cassidy that, if appointed, he would be the first openly gay member of the Illinois State Senate, and only the second Black gay man to serve in the General Assembly in either chamber (incumbent Rep. Lamont Robinson being the first). But going up against Kelly, I'm forced to weigh her extensive legislative experience, and proven track record of progressive policy and commitments, against what amounts to promises from a guy who's got 5 years working for Rahm on his resume. I want to trust Mike Simmons, and on a lot of levels, I do... but we've got a Lori Lightfoot-sized reminder that identity and promises alone do not a good elected official make. Mike doesn't strike me as Lori 2.0, though, and if he runs for something else in the future, I hope he chooses to elaborate more on these connections, and if he does, I hope I get to vote for him. In a world where Kelly Cassidy doesn't get the State Senate appointment, I'd like to see it go to Mike Simmons.

*** **CORRECTION** ***

I previously stated that Mike Simmons worked in City Hall for Chicago's Emptiest Suit Rahm Emmanuel for a period of five years. This is incorrect; while Simmons did work for Rahm as a Policy Director for two years (May 2011 - October 2013), his remaining three years in City Government were as a Deputy Commissioner in the Department of Planning and Development, a civil-service oriented position outside Rahm's circle of influence.

Justin Koziatek

Currently the District Director for Cook County Commissioner Kevin Morrison, Justin Koziatek has been working in Illinois Democratic politics for several years, as a member of campaigns, and as a volunteer. It's also heartening to see a *third* gay candidate (50% of the field!!) gunning for the State Senate appointment. When put under some scrutiny, Koziatek's political experience, and choices of campaigns to volunteer on, shows some good, and some bad. In addition to working for Commissioner Kevin Morrison (whose extensive work on behalf of trans people in Cook County is something that Girl, I Guess wholeheartedly approves of... his personal support for Wrong Kind of Nerd Pete Buttigieg notwithstanding), Koziatek has pitched in on the campaigns of 47th Ward Alderman Matt Martin, and Congresswoman, 2020 Golden Shrug-ee, and Dairy Douchebag Defeater Lauren Underwood (yay!!), Congresspeople Marie Newman and Sean Casten (meh!!), failed two-time Congressional candidate "Boring" Betsy Dirksen-Londrigan (boo!!), and Mayor and Incumbent Police Gremlin Lori Lightfoot (bigger boo!!).

Koziatek is setting himself apart from the other nominees in this process by promising to serve as a two-year placeholder, should he be appointed to the State Senate. I give him points for this, as serving as a placeholder is a principled move, that stands in stark objection to the unsavory aspects of the resignation-appointment-handoff process. However, during a redistricting year, when a placeholder could be vulnerable to the 7th District being carved up by neighboring legislators, it's also a challenging position to take. Personally, I like Koziatek. He's doing good work in the County, and his head, and heart, are clearly in the right place. In a nominee field populated by Kelly Cassidy and Mike Simmons, however, he's being outmatched by Simmons's story and community connections, and Cassidy's tenure and experience. I can't give Justin Koziatek my nod for this appointment, but I hope to see more from him in the future.

Joseph Alfe

Joseph Alfe is an interesting case; he's a suburbanite who moved to the 7th District with his wife and *five children* (oy gevalt) to pursue his dreams of going to law school and becoming a lawyer, and he certainly succeeded, earning a JD and an LLM (Master of Laws degree, which... cool) from The John Marshall Law School, and an *additional* LLM from Pepperdine. His work history is peppered with gross things, including working for finance and real estate types, which throws up a red flag for any candidate in Girl, I Guess. However, the biggest of those flags comes with

his most recent employment, at the Vrdolyak Law Group. For those unfamiliar, this is the law firm founded by Ghost of Racism Past and 1980s Chicago White Supremacist Supervillain Ed Vrdolyak, who is infamous for opposing Former Mayor Harold Washington during the Council Wars of the 1980s. Alfe claims he's doing civil rights work, representing victims of police brutality at the firm working for Ed Jr., which is a claim that I'm not even going to bother verifying, because the idea of the Vrdolyaks doing civil rights work makes me want to vomit.

Alfe talks a big game about addressing injustice, and representing the district, but with his resume, and only 7 years in Chicago to back him up, I can't really give him the thorough looks I gave Cassidy, Simmons, and Koziatek. Also, he's not gay! Alfe's time would be better spent trying to teach at a law school, or going for a third master's degree.

Joseph Struck

Is a nominee for the 7th District State Senate appointment. He sells insurance! He's also a Board member of Heart of Lincoln Square, a neighborhood organization for that area. That's basically all I can tell you about the guy.

Angela Giles

Well... it's nice to see a Black woman in the running for this appointment. I just really wish that Angela Giles didn't have one of the most horrific employment histories that I've seen from someone trying to cast themselves as a progressive. Giles's resume details an extensive career in upper-level positions finance, development, and banking (all industries that qualify as Big Yikes fields of employment), but the most damning is her current job with Chicago scourge and environmental terrorist developer, HILCO. If you aren't familiar, HILCO is a horrid group that, with the permission of Noted Hater of Chicagoans Who Don't Give Her Money Lori Lightfoot, [dust-bombed the Little Village neighborhood in the middle of a pandemic](#). Little Village said Hell No to HILCO, and I'm saying Hell No to Giles for working there.

IL House District 14

PENDING!! This section will be updated if, as everyone suspects, State Rep. Kelly Cassidy secures the appointment to the 7th District State Senate seat.

Committeepeople Info

For interested voters who want to make a difference in the appointment process, and appointment reform in general by harassing their elected Committeepeople into committing to

open, public deliberation for all future appointments, and open, public votes for each Committeeperson involved in an appointment in the future, I'm linking [this handy dandy list](#), compiled by the Cook County Democratic Party, which contains the contact information for every Ward and Township Committeeperson in Cook County. Have fun storming the castle!