

## **COOK COUNTY BOARD John Fritchey: Hoping to change office** ***Exclusive to the online edition of Windy City Times***

*by Meghan Streit*  
01-20-2010

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Rep. John Fritchey has represented the 11th District in the Illinois legislature since 1996.

His top legislative concerns include ethics reform, healthcare and tax policy. Last year, he was defeated by Mike Quigley in the 5th District U.S. Congressional race. He is currently running for the Cook County board seat being vacated by Commissioner Forrest Claypool. If elected, Fritchey says one of his top priorities will be to restore trust and create transparency in county government.

**Windy City Times:** After serving as a state representative for so many years, why have you decided that you want to be a Cook County commissioner?

**John Fritchey:** That is usually the first question: Why would I give up the seniority and influence I have to take this job in Cook County? When I first got to Springfield, nobody was working on the issues I was working on, whether it was campaign finance reform, ethics, or several others. While there is still work to be done in Springfield, I think there are many more men and women down there willing and able to take that job on. By contrast, the county board lost one of its leading reform voices in Mike Quigley and now is losing another in Forrest Claypool. I think now more than ever, there is a need for someone to roll their sleeves up and continue to fight to fix Cook County government. I think my experience in legislature will allow me to hit the ground running in the county building.

**WCT:** What are some of the things you've been able to accomplish in the state legislature that you are most proud of? And how do you plan to continue working on the issues that are most important to you as a Cook County commissioner?

**JF:** I think my tenure in Springfield will be marked by some productive leadership in the areas of ethics, protecting women's right to choose, equal rights and environmental protection. All of these are issues that are relevant and of significant importance at the county level as well. Because of my past efforts, I can come in with, not only with a knowledge of what the issues are, but how to take them on.

**WCT:** If you're elected to the Cook County board, what would be your first order of business?

**JF:** Much of what takes place at the county board focuses around the budget and what emanates from it. I want to work on two different fronts. One is to give the public a better understanding of what is in budget and how it affects them, and two is to work within budget confines to advance policy issues I think are important. I think public cynicism of county government can be reduced if they start to have a confidence level that the government is working efficiently, transparently and for them. Right now, I think that confidence level is non-existent.

**WCT:** With only one vote, how do you think you'll be able to accomplish some of those goals?

**JF:** I'd like to think I've made a significant difference in the Illinois legislature as one out of 177. From that standpoint, I can make an even bigger impact just being one out of 17. I'm not worried about my ability to get issues onto the public radar screen. I think the experience and ability of having to work with diverse interests around the state really gives me a good jumping-off point to work with my fellow county commissioners. The issues that divide Cook County pale in comparison to the issues that separate regions of the State of Illinois. I think my ability to work with all sides in order to accomplish your goals is something I've been able to do in the past and will make a big difference.

**WCT:** What do you think are solutions to improve the Cook County healthcare system?

**JF:** I think the independent board has already proven itself to be a laudable idea, and while it may need to be fine tuned, it's one that we should not walk away from at this juncture. I think from a county governance standpoint, what you're looking for isn't medical breakthroughs, but how to most efficiently use the dollars we have to best serve communities in need of those services. Like anything else, it's a matter of getting the best bang for our buck. That doesn't come through padding payrolls, that comes through remembering what the mission of the health

services are.

WCT: What do you want gay and lesbian voters to know about your track record? And what role do you believe the Cook County board can and should play in advancing equality for the LGBT community?

JF: I am proud of my flawless record with respect to LGBT issues throughout my career. I was proud to work with the late Rep McKeon, both as district mates and colleagues, and my work on the Human Rights Act, every time it was introduced and until it was passed. I have consistently been, not just a vote, but a vocal advocate of issues of importance to the LGBT community. I'm not a candidate running for office for the first time. I am not asking anybody to trust what I am going to do, I'm suggesting to them that they look at the record of what I've done, and if they do that, I'm pretty sure they're going to like what they see.

WCT: Do you support the legalization of gay marriage? Why or why not?

JF: I think it's a different question at the county level, as opposed to the state level. I think this is something we need to take on at the state level. Right now, I am one of sponsors of Rep. Harris' bill and I think what we need to do is move forward in steps, and continue to push that along. I don't look at this as a Cook County or a State of Illinois issue, I look at it as a national issue. But I think as we continue to keep a goal in mind and continue to raise awareness on this issue, we continue to make progress.

WCT: What do you think is one of the biggest mistakes the Cook County board has made in recent years? And if you were a commissioner at the time, what would you have done differently to change the outcome?

JF: I think the biggest mistake is what is perceived as a sense of arrogance almost. The county board needs to realize that they are responsible to the people they represent, and their job will be much easier to accomplish with the public supporting them in their efforts. You need greater transparency and accountability at the county board. Let people understand what is going on and why.

If you can't make those arguments for what you are trying to do, then maybe you shouldn't be doing it. I think there needs to be greater outreach and understanding. For many years, people had no idea of what the county board did. Perhaps the biggest legacy that Congressman Quigley and Commissioner Claypool will leave is their ability to increase public awareness of the activities of county government and how it affects people and their pocketbooks. There may not be a lot of people in the 12th District who have significant interaction with Stroger Hospital or the Sheriff's Office or the State's Attorney's Office, yet they are still affected by whether those branches of county government are operating efficiently.

WCT: You've been in headlines because of your candid use of social media. Is that one of your strategies to create the transparency you'd like to see in county government?

JF: Whether it's been my e-mail newsletters or my blog or my Facebook page, there is no question I've used all of those to open lines of communication between me and the people I represent. I've always operated under the style of "what you see is what you get." If you send an e-mail to me, it comes right to me, not to staff. What you see on my Facebook page is, for better or worse, very obviously written by me. That is just part of who I am. While I am comfortable in a pinstripe suit, I am much more of a t-shirt and jeans guy. That is just kind of my style and I think people appreciate that they can look at me as one of your neighbors or friends, as opposed to just somebody that they think about on Election Day.