



Interview with Jay Paul Deratany

By Windy City Media Group

Jay Paul Deratany: Rage Against the Machine

Cook County Board of Review candidate Jay Paul Deratany, like many other aspiring politicians, is running on an idea of change—hoping to unseat incumbent review board commissioner Joseph Berrios. In a recent interview with Windy City Times, Deratany—who is openly gay—talked about why he felt Berrios (who Deratany says is part of Chicago's political machine) is corrupt, and discussed his own qualifications and legal battles.

WCT: (Windy City Times) What exactly does a Board of Review commissioner do?

JPD: (Jay Paul Deratany) A commissioner on the Board of Review has two roles, and they're both quasi-judicial. One is being the last legal hurdle, for most people, in determining their property taxes. It can also be a platform for lobbying for tax policy improvements. But in the judicial role, a taxpayer gets assessed a value and the taxpayer may say that's not fair; we make the decision if the assessment is fair, based on the evidence.

WCT: Do you feel that Berrios is doing anything right?

JPD: [Pauses.] The only thing I've seen recently—and [more] after I've challenged him—is that he's going out to the wards and lecturing people on how to fill out their tax forms. But it's too little, too late. It's inefficient—it doesn't hit all the wards and the online system is a mess. Years ago, he should've spent less time lobbying on behalf of the gambling and other industries and should have spent more time in the neighborhoods doing what's right—helping the elderly and disabled, and helping people fill out tax forms.

At worst, it's evidence of corruption. At best, it's an inherently way of acting in a quasi-judicial manner.

WCT: Why do you think you're qualified?

JPD: I have 20 years of practice as a lawyer. The position is as a judge but, when you go out in the community, you have to act as an advocate. You can help people: tell them how to get their evidence together so they can bring it before the Board of Review.

I've also served as an arbitrator, which means I've decided cases. I have adjudicated cases, both for the Circuit Court of Cook County (on cases less than \$50,000) and in private adjudications.

Also, I know I'm honest. I'm going to give best, and I'm not part of the Stroger-Berrios machine.

WCT: Could you talk a little bit more about your feelings about [Cook County Board President] Todd Stroger?

JPD: Look what Stroger has been doing—he's been an embarrassment to the job. He's taken spoils for himself while cutting the pay and benefits for LPNs and people who are taking care of our sick and elderly. The chairman of the Democratic Party in Chicago is Berrios, and he certainly had a hand in helping Stroger into power.

WCT: You mentioned Forrest Claypool. You have some heavy hitters backing you—you have

Claypool, Mike Quigley and Jan Schakowsky. What do you think they see in you?

JPD: Reform, hopefully. I think there's a new movement to bring about reform. If I get elected, I'm sure I won't agree with everything any individual says, but it's about forming a new bloc of people that are committed to end corruption; end patronage; making a more transparent system that's more accessible to voters; and [creating] a more open society.

WCT: What do you know about the other two commissioners on the board?

JPD: I know Larry Rogers was recently elected, and that Brendan Houlihan was [also] recently elected. But I know very little about them, truthfully.

WCT: Do you think the possibility exists—because you know very little about them—that there will be no progress because it could be, in essence, one person against two?

JPD: No, because I have a loud mouth and a strong personality, and I will demand reform. If I see anything corrupt going on, I will stand strongly for my beliefs. Is it possible for there to be 2-1 votes? Certainly, but a divided board would not look good. But, from what I understand, we're starting to see more reform in the other two.

WCT: Do you expect being openly gay to help or hinder you in this election?

JPD: I think it's a double-edged sword. I've heard that some of my opponent's supporters have taken a picture of me with my arm around a guy—and I hug a lot of people—and have taken it around to try to embarrass me. There'll be people who have prejudice, and who won't vote for me because of my sexual orientation. I'll just have to fight the good fight.

One thing that I think is important about being an individual who is running for office who is gay is that we get the best-qualified people. Someday I'd like to break down these walls that exist based on everything from being gay to being African-American. Maybe, with more people who are gay and competent, we can have an openly gay governor or openly gay president.

WCT: A cursory search through [a Web site] revealed a couple legal malpractice cases against you. Would you care to comment on those?

JPD: In 20 years of practice, I have a 95 percent favorability rating with my clients; every once in a while, you get a disgruntled client. I know one lady who had a broken arm and I got her \$40,000, and she decided later she didn't like it so she filed a claim against me. All the claims against me have been dismissed.

WCT: You ran for judge in 2003, correct?

JPD: I started the process of running. There were four openly gay candidates, and I thought it was best if I withdrew my candidacy and supported Sherry Pethers, a lesbian, who eventually won. Given that I had a large case coming in and knowing all the work I'd have to put in, I stopped my candidacy and supported someone who I thought was well-qualified.

WCT: Ultimately, what do you want people to know about you?

JPD: That I'm running for office to bring a sense of honesty, integrity and justice to a position that has not had honesty, integrity and justice. I want people, at the end of my term, to be proud of my job and of their county government.

See www.JayPaulforCook.org

[Editor's note: Windy City Times contacted Berrios for an interview but at print had not yet received a responded.]

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