

Native son Belinfante wants to represent District 6

Temple Sinai congregant **Josh Belinfante** has been saturated in Georgia and its politics since birth. The great-nephew of Ernest Barrett – longtime chairman of the Cobb County Commission and the man for whom Barrett Parkway is named – got at least one healthy dose a night as a kid.

“Probably my interest in politics has as much to do with dinnertime conversations as anything else,” he laughed. “We would watch the nightly news, and then my parents and I would have discussion about what was said, what was going on and the debates at the state and federal levels.”

Belinfante’s only years outside the metro Atlanta area were those in which he worked to obtain his undergraduate degree at Penn; he returned home to get his juris doctorate from the University of Georgia Law School and today is a top litigation attorney at Robbins.

It was in the years between school and his current vocation that he got his hands-on experience with politics, working first as a clerk to Chief Judge J.L. Edmonson of the 11th Circuit U.S. Court of Appeals, then getting involved with the Committee for Sandy Springs and serving as Legal Counsel to the Georgia House of Representatives Committee on the Judiciary and eventually becoming Executive Counsel to former Governor Sonny Perdue in his immediate past position.

Now, the seat that has opened due to the reapportionment of District 6 has inspired Belinfante to take on an even larger role, one in which he will “see through the noise” and work for effective legislation rather than headlines. He looks forward to working for his friends and neighbors and taking on the reform of Fulton County.

The *AJT* spoke with him shortly after the announcement of his candidacy.

John McCurdy: Regarding your platform, is there one issue that you’re most concerned with?

Josh Belinfante: Anybody that’s running for office right now needs to be focusing on how we bring jobs back to Georgia. Our unemployment rate is unacceptable, it’s higher than the national average, and part of that is because we’re having an underlying shift in our economy.

We’re becoming more of a health/IT/logistics-based economy, which is something we’re frankly going to have to adapt our code for. We’ve done a great job of keeping things prosperous [up to this point], but we have to change.

For one, it means we have to take a look at the tax on energy for manufacturing plants; that’s something that sets us apart, and not in a good way, from our neighboring states. I don’t think it’s a coincidence that the Volkswagen plant went to Chattanooga, where they don’t tax energy inputs. That’s something we could have

and should have had here in Georgia, providing jobs for us.

Close to home, we're a logistics hub – UPS is just outside the district, and the type of logistics services that they and other companies like them provide are really critical. I think we need to focus on what we can do to both market and improve that at the state level. We took a step in the right direction with removing state tax on inventory back in 2010, but I think there's more we can do.

The third thing is, we've got a great bio-healthcare hub with all the jobs that flow out of Georgia Tech, Emory and the CDC. But what we've found is that these companies form and get started here and then go to Massachusetts, California or North Carolina for capital. We've lost several companies because of that, so that's something we really ought to take a look at resolving here in Georgia.

JM: And how about beyond the economy and jobs – what will District 6 be dealing with in public transport, education, other fields that will be hot topics?

JB: I'll start with one in which I spend a lot of my time, which is healthcare. This district has three hospitals, so it's a very healthcare-intensive district. I'm one of the attorneys that's helping the state in the fight against Obamacare, and one of the things we've got to do is be prepared for the worst-case scenario: Either the Supreme Court upholds the law or Republicans lose the White House fight this year and the law stays in effect.

There are things we've got to do at the state level to make sure that two things don't happen. One, we have a crippling Medicaid burden, which translates into lower reimbursements for physicians and hospitals. Two, make sure we have enough physicians and allied health professionals to carry the increased demand that may result from the expansion in Medicaid. Those are things that require a real focus on medical education and on what we can do to attract doctors to Georgia.

On education, clearly the Atlanta Public Schools issue is going to be one important to this district. What I'd like to do is continue to give [Superintendent] Erroll Davis time to work through what he's doing at APS. I think a lot of Davis...[and] what I would not want to do right now is have politics interfere with what he's trying to do on a management level, and instead give him some breathing room.

I'm for whatever provides local communities the greatest "menu" of options, and that includes things we're already doing, like cyber academies. I would fully support a Constitutional amendment for charter schools in the way the previous bill had done; I think the Supreme Court was wrong in its decision [to strike it down], and if we need to address that legislatively, I'm 100 percent for it.

On transportation, obviously TPLOST is going to be a very big issue in this election, and it's an interesting one for this district. There's a lot of concern, particularly in Cobb County right now, with how much of the money is going to Cobb and how much is going to one project, the transit line from the Arts Center up to the Galleria...

[And] if TPLOST fails, we're going to have to come up with another potential solution to alleviate traffic, and if it passes, we have to make sure the folks who are administering it are held accountable for the funds that are being used.

JM: Let's say someone only has time to scan these words; what the one thing you'd want them to know about you as a candidate for State Senate?

JB: I've got the experience to get the job done for the Sixth District, and my door will always be open to any member of my community. That's the beauty of state government; you have a very close relationship with your constituents, and that's one of the reasons I chose early in my career to focus on state government rather than federal.

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