

Nearly Three Dozen Lawyers Apply Online for Isakson's Senate Post

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Thirty-four attorneys are among hundreds of candidates angling for a gubernatorial appointment to replace retiring Republican U.S. Sen. Johnny Isakson next year.

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Prominent among them is Randy Evans, the current ambassador to Luxembourg and former Dentons partner whose client list has included former House Speakers Newt Gingrich and Denny Hastert, and former Georgia Govs. Sonny Perdue and Nathan Deal. Evans has also served as co-chair of the state's Judicial Nominating Commission, the state election board, and the national GOP's 2016 convention rules committee.

Shortly after Evans was confirmed as an ambassador last year, Dentons paid him \$268,581, including a pro rata bonus and a partial return of his capital investment as a partner, according to his 2019 financial disclosure report.

Also notable among the Senate applicants are:

- Former Georgia state Sen. Judson Hill, who lost his 2017 race for the Republican nomination to replace former U.S. Rep. Tom Price;
- State House Rep. Chuck Efration—chairman of the House Non-Civil Judiciary Committee who managed several of Kemp's earlier political campaigns;
- Garland Hunt, former chairman of the state Board of Pardons and Paroles and former Department of Juvenile Justice commissioner; and
- Melvin Hill Jr., the longtime former director of the University of Georgia's Carl Vinson School of Government.

Prominent Republican lawyers missing from the list include Georgia Attorney General Chris Carr, Isakson's

former chief of staff; Rep. Doug Collins, ranking minority member of the House Judiciary Committee; former state Attorney General Sam Olens, now a Dentons partner; and current state Speaker of the House David Ralston.

Two of Kemp's young gun lawyers also haven't surfaced as possible nominees— **Vincent Russo, a partner at The Robbins Firm** who was legal counsel both to Kemp's campaign and inaugural committees and is the state Republican Party's chief deputy general counsel; and David Dove, Kemp's executive counsel who also served as general counsel when Kemp was Georgia secretary of state.

Also missing from the list: **Joshua Belinfante and Ryan Teague**, both attorneys at The Robbins Firm in Atlanta. Belinfante served as executive counsel to former Gov. Sonny Perdue, now the secretary of agriculture, and was on the ad-hoc committee that recommended federal judicial appointments to Perdue and Isakson. Teague served as Perdue's deputy executive counsel and as executive counsel to former Gov. Nathan Deal.

Former deputy White House counsel Stefan Passantino—who's now at Michael Best & Friedrich where he represents the Trump Organization—is also not on the list.

Byung J. "BJay" Pak, Trump's appointee as U.S. attorney for the Northern District of Georgia in Atlanta, told The Atlanta Journal-Constitution last month that he didn't intend to apply.

Kemp announced last month that he was launching a public online application process where individuals could nominate themselves as potential candidates for the post. As of Tuesday, 546 people have applied, said Kemp spokesman Cody Hall. The governor hasn't set a deadline for submissions, and Hall said the application process is still open. He declined to comment on when the governor may choose Isakson's replacement.

Isakson, who was diagnosed with Parkinson's disease in 2013, announced shortly after undergoing an operation for kidney cancer in August that he will leave the Senate at the end of December. Kemp has the authority to appoint a replacement for Isakson until a special election for the post is held in November 2020.