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Gingrich's daughter makes bid for senate seat

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Jackie Gingrich Cushman, a one-time resident of Carrollton and daughter of former U.S. House Speaker Newt Gingrich, has applied to succeed U.S. Sen. Johnny Isakson.

The 74-year-old senator announced his retirement at the end of August after being re-elected to a third term in 2016. His resignation will be effective Dec. 31.

More than 500 candidates have applied to succeed Isakson, including U.S. Rep. Doug Collins, former U.S. Health Secretary Tom Price and former state Rep. Melvin Everson.

Georgia Gov. Brian Kemp will select Isakson's successor as an interim senator to fill out the remaining two years of his term starting on Jan. 1. A special election will fill the seat in 2020 and another election will take place in 2022 for a full six-year Senate term, Cushman said.

Cushman said her recent book, "Our Broken America: Why Both Sides Need to Stop Ranting and Start Listening," inspired her to apply for the Senate seat.

"I started this book about a year ago and it came out last month, which was not planned," she said. "In it, I really go through why we're going through a divide right now and why there is political polarization."

Cushman said she was "surprised" by the social polarization she discovered upon doing research for the book and added she wants to figure out ways for Georgians to work together.

"For example, 55% of Republicans and 64% of Democrats say they have few or no friends on the other side of the aisle," Cushman said. "That's shocking, quite frankly. People look at their party as part of who they are as a person. They look at their party as a personal identifier, and I think that's part of the problem today."

Being a good steward of the environment with the nonprofit Trust for Public Land organization is an issue for Cushman, and she said she wants people to have more access to the land around the Chattahoochee River.

She has served on the Georgia Advisory Council for the Trust for Public Land and is the co-chair of the organization's Chattahoochee River Visioning Task Force.

"That's really important to me because we need to be good stewards of the environment because I believe that's what we were called to do," Cushman said. "Studies now show that we are better off physically and mentally outdoors."

Cushman is also the treasurer of the Georgia Early Education Alliance for Ready Students, a nonprofit organization that ensures children who move into kindergarten are ready to learn.

"We work very closely with Georgia Early Education to make sure the childcare centers are quality-minded so that parents know the quality of the childcare center where their child is," Cushman said. "We do a lot of information about what's important for children. I have two children who are now 20 and 18, but I spent a lot of time when they were young reading to them and interacting with them."

She is also involved with the Our House homeless shelter in Atlanta for newborn babies and their families. This organization focuses on education and training in addition to job placement for the parents.

“There needs to be a self-sufficient family for every child,” Cushman said. “The goal is to have a long-term solution to these problems, not a quick fix.”

She said a “huge issue” for her is financial illiteracy with people not understanding how government budgets operate.

“That’s where I think we have a huge issue politically is understanding how budgets work for a government problem,” Cushman said. “It’s also partially financial illiteracy that we currently have in our nation. That’s another big area I’m interested in.”

Governments in Carroll and Douglas counties are gearing for the 2020 census, and Cushman said the outcome of the nation’s headcount will determine how much funding these governments will get. She said the census could also lead to redistricting in the state.

“My father served the 6th district of Congress south of Atlanta, west to Alabama and all the way to Griffin,” Cushman said. “This was up until after the 1990 census, and after they redid the 1992 district, that district was cut up into small pieces. He moved out to northern Atlanta, which by chance, had the same number (of constituents). There are lots of ramifications just for the census and the state legislature in who is working to redraw those lines.”

As a financial analyst, she said Gov. Kemp has been planning ahead to have financial reserves in place for the potential recession that may be coming next year. She said she would not speculate on when or how it would impact Georgia.

In rural areas, she said there is a lot of opportunity for economic development to help people stay where they are and have a better quality of life.

“One of the interesting things I found in my research for ‘Our Broken America’ is that while people are moving to the urban areas, they don’t want to live there,” Cushman said. “We would actually prefer not to live there. As there is this economic opportunity in the more rural areas, there are people not only staying but leaving urban areas to have a better quality of life. I think that is something huge that will benefit Georgia in the long term.”