

THE BUZZ

From the staff of the Tampa Bay Times

Timing of Thrasher-FSU deal has major implications in Senate



Steve Bousquet, Times/Herald Tallahassee Bureau

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Now that John Thrasher has submitted his resume and letter of interest for the FSU presidency, the question in a lot of minds is not if the influential state senator will get the job but when.

The answer may have big implications for control of the Senate in 2016 and beyond.

Thrasher is one of 20 senators up for re-election this fall. The week-long qualifying period for legislative candidates (June 16-20) starts in a little more than two weeks. It's doubtful that FSU will have decided on Eric Barron's replacement by then, partly because Thrasher's candidacy is likely to stir more controversy, which could slow the trustees' decision-making process.

If Thrasher is the only Republican who files qualifying papers in strongly -Republican Senate District 6 and he then gets the FSU job, he will have to resign from the Senate. That creates a vacancy in nomination under state election laws, and the Republican Party gets to choose a new nominee for the Senate seat.

Thrasher's district includes all of three counties (Flagler, Putnam and St. Johns) and part of Volusia. By law, the state party chair notifies the county chairs, who then call meetings of the county executive committee to choose a replacement candidate.

Rep. Ronald (Doc) Renuart, R-Ponte Vedra Beach, is interested in the seat, the News Service of Florida reports. Thrasher's Senate district also takes in much of the House district of freshman Rep. Travis Hutson, R-Elkton.

Thrasher's replacement could play a decisive role in the battle for control of the Senate for the 2016-2018 cycle when Sens. Jack Latvala of Clearwater and Joe Negron of Stuart both hope to succeed Sen. Andy Gardiner, the Orlando Republican who will become Senate president in November. Gardiner surely would have a say in the selection of the new Senate candidate.

Negron knows about finding last-minute replacement candidates. He was chosen by GOP leaders to be the replacement candidate for Congress in 2006 after Rep. Mark Foley abruptly resigned following a sex scandal. Foley resigned in September, too late to have his name removed from the ballot, and Negron lost the election to Democrat Tim Mahoney and later won the Senate seat formerly held by Ken Pruitt.



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