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The state Senate District 23 Republican primary pits a long-time political fixture against two challengers

Jake Knotts

After serving in the S.C. House, the incumbent is seeking his second full term representing a wide swath of central Lexington County.

Professional, political background: Knotts has been in public life 40 years, starting as a Columbia police officer, then an investigator with the 5th Circuit Solicitor's Office. In 1994, he won a seat in the S.C. House. Knotts moved to the Senate in 2002 to fill an unexpired term.

Campaign issues: The fuel for this race pits Knotts against Gov. Mark Sanford and forces that favor tuition tax credits and the strengthening of the governor's office.

Katrina Shealy

The former chairwoman of the Lexington County Republican Party largely is aligned with Sanford's agenda but said she is not "a puppet."

Professional, political background: Shealy has worked in the insurance business since high school. She is a Lloyds of London underwriter. She began her GOP political life as a campaign volunteer and worked her way up the party organization. In 2002, she lost a primary for an S.C. House seat.

Campaign issues: Shealy offers herself as the better anti-Knotts candidate. She says she will represent a changing, more sophisticated Lexington County.

Mike Sturkie

The businessman from South Congaree said he will advance a business agenda and be less adversarial than Knotts.

Professional, political background: Sturkie owns land-grading, recycling and landfill companies. He fought the county -- and won -- over who regulates construction-debris dumps -- cities or counties. His first political campaign was for a seat on County Council in 2003, a race he lost.

Campaign issues: Sturkie says his experience in business will make him a better advocate for improving roads, and water and sewer service. He opposes deporting illegal immigrants until the nation's border can be secured and wants to raise teacher pay.

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