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Shanker to seek Renzi's Congress seat

[Paul Giblin](#), Tribune

Tempe attorney Howard Shanker has announced his intention to succeed Rick Renzi in the U.S. House, a seat generally considered centered in Flagstaff.

Shanker clearly is a frequent visitor to Arizona's 1st Congressional District, but he's not exactly a resident of the district he hopes to represent in Congress.

His campaign material states that he makes his home in Flagstaff, but he acknowledged in an interview with the Tribune that his primary residence is in Ahwatukee Foothills in the 5th Congressional District.

Shanker considers his Flagstaff house a second home.

The Democrat is among a quickly growing list of possible candidates who see opportunity in the 1st Congressional District.

Sedona civil rights attorney Ellen Simon announced Thursday that she is joining the race. Simon, a Democrat, ran unsuccessfully against Renzi last year.

"My goal is to help restore honesty and integrity to the U.S. Congress," she said on her Web site. "I don't think that job can get done by a candidate who puts partisanship or political calculation above being honest with the voters."

Her top issues: ending the war in Iraq, improving health care and protecting the environment.

Renzi is under federal investigation for public corruption. He also has asked to be dropped from the Republican Party's campaign program to protect vulnerable incumbents, a clear sign that he does not intend to seek re-election.

Shanker announced last week he intends to run in the 2008 election — and in a potential special election if Renzi resigns or is removed from office before his term ends.

Shanker said this week he lives in the Ahwatukee Foothills house about four days a week. His children also live in the Ahwatukee Foothills home and he lists it as his primary residence for tax purposes.

Arizona's 1st Congressional District, which is the 10th largest geographic district in the country, is a mostly rural district that stretches from Page to Florence to Safford, a region that's bigger than Illinois.

Ahwatukee Foothills, though, is within the 5th district, an urban district represented by Democrat Harry Mitchell.

Shanker's residency is a political concern rather than a legal concern for Shanker, said David Berman, senior research fellow at Arizona State University's Morrison Institute for Public Policy.

"If you look at the Constitution, all it says you have to do is be a resident of the state for seven years. You don't have to be resident of the district, technically," he said. "But the chances of winning are pretty slim if you're not a resident of the district."

Residency has been a constant issue in the 1st Congressional District.

Renzi's past opponents have noted that Renzi's immediate family, and apparently Renzi himself, primarily live in Virginia.

"He does live in Virginia. At least I live in Arizona. I've been here for 15 years," Shanker said.

Shanker touched on the matter of his residency in a news release announcing his candidacy. It states: “Shanker, a long-time resident of Arizona, who makes his home in Flagstaff, is one of the founding members of The Shanker Law Firm that has offices in both Flagstaff and Tempe.”

The Tempe office also is in the 5th district. Shanker opened his Flagstaff office more than a year ago.

“All of my work is in District 1,” Shanker said. “And this is not personal-injury work. I have been intrically involved in important issues in District 1 for a decade,” he said.

Among his cases:

He represented several American Indian tribes, the Sierra Club and the Center for Biological Diversity in a successful lawsuit to prevent Arizona Snowbowl ski resort from using reclaimed waste water to create artificial snow.

He represented the Sierra Club and the Center for Biological Diversity in a case that stopped the federal government from completing a land exchange that would have allowed large-scale commercial development along the southern edge of Grand Canyon National Park.

He represented a citizens group in halting a land exchange that would have created a shooting range adjacent to Bellemont, outside of Flagstaff.

Shanker keeps a sleeping bag in the trunk of his car because he travels so often, he said. His itinerary this week includes Tuba City, Phoenix, Flagstaff and Window Rock.

He identified these top campaign issues: seeking a diplomatic end to the war in Iraq, supporting renewable energy sources and protecting services to veterans.