

House candidates try to put own stamp on issues

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FORT SMITH -- Candidates for the 3rd District congressional race or their representatives discussed themselves and their issues Thursday in the first of three forums sponsored by the Arkansas Farm Bureau.

The four Republican and three Democratic candidates answered questions from 50 people who attended the forum at Fort Smith's Westark College. The other two forums will be in Harrison on Monday and in Springdale on Thursday.

The candidates are running to replace U.S. Rep. Asa Hutchinson, R-Ark., who resigned his seat to head the Drug Enforcement Administration. The party primary elections are Sept. 25. A special election is scheduled for Nov. 20.

Several of the candidates homed in on issues important to farmers and business operators: water rights, private property rights, environmental regulations and poultry-grower contracts.

They also reiterated stands on other issues, such as international trade, tax reform, Second Amendment rights and education.

State Sen. Gunner DeLay, R-Fort Smith, questioned most favored nation trade status for China. He said the country is developing nuclear weapons that can reach American shores, is hostile to Taiwan and can't keep its word on trade agreements. He also said he had the strongest stance on the Second Amendment right to bear arms of any Republican in the race.

He said he would work to get funding for construction of Interstate 49 south of Fort Smith.

Bill Williams of Bella Vista, a Democrat and owner of a bed-and-breakfast inn, said he opposed drilling for oil in Alaska's Arctic National Wildlife Refuge. He favored, instead, the development of alternative fuels. He also favored opening trade with Cuba and defended the United Nations' authority to prosecute international criminals, even if they are Americans.

Dr. Faye Boozman, director of Arkansas' Department of Health and brother of candidate John Boozman, a Rogers Republican, said his brother understood the pressures government regulations put on farm families and on businesses. He said John Boozman also was committed to adequate funding of health care and for affordable prescription drugs.

State Rep. Shawn Womack, R-Mountain Home, spoke for former State Rep. Jim Hendren, R-Sulphur Springs. He said Hendren believed in private property rights and supported elimination of the capital gains and inheritance taxes. He also pointed to Hendren's record in the state Legislature, in which he supported fetal-protection legislation and a ban on partial birth abortions.

State Rep. Mike Hathorn, D-Huntsville, is a traditional Democrat who would help constituents resolve problems they encounter with the government, said his campaign manager, Dina Wood, who spoke for him.

She said Hathorn understands the law and government regulations and is a Democrat who can win the 3rd District seat.

Brad Cates, a West Fork Republican, said he opposed most favored trade status with China and favored strengthening the military. He also favored a consumption tax that would tax citizens when they spend money, not when they earn it.

He also said the United States was setting a bad example for the world by allowing 3 million people to enter the country illegally while not making it easier for American business and industry to hire foreign workers who could be beneficial to the economy.

State Rep. Jo Carson, D-Fort Smith, said she was concerned about the negative effect the estate tax has on the health of family farms. She also said there may be legal problems with contracts that poultry growers have signed that are hampering their ability to make a profit on their operations.

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