

Congressional candidates square off

By ROBERT LEE LONG/Community Editor

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NESBIT - Five of the seven candidates running for 1st District U.S. Representative squared off in a forum sponsored by the Northwest Mississippi Association of Realtors Wednesday.

Each candidate touted conservative values and the need to reform the nation's health care system, including two Democrat candidates who spoke. The event drew about 100 spectators.

Southaven Mayor Greg Davis, who spoke first, said during his tenure in office at least 10,000 new jobs have been created and Southaven has doubled in population and geography. He spoke to what he said are his fiscally conservative principles.



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"Take a look at our record and what we've done, and then make a selection when you go (to vote)," Davis said.

Davis said Southaven made a \$40 million investment in the city's water and sewer system without a rate increase.

The Southaven mayor, now in his 11th year, said Southaven City Hall's operating expenses are totally funded through rental fees provided by other tenants.

"Even though we are the fifth largest city in the state, the mayor's office has two employees, myself and an assistant."

Davis also spoke about the fact the war in Iraq had been complicated by politicians in Washington.

"Take the politics off the battlefield," Davis said.

Davis said that government policy wonks did not need to get involved in the health care issue.

"Let doctors be doctors," Davis said. "Let those who are trained to do their job, do their job."

Davis said one of his guiding principles in public service is how his actions and those of others in public service affect the lives of his three daughters and other children like them.

"In Southaven, we've made sure we spend our funds on things that best affect families and their

homes," Davis said.

Davis said he is always candid with voters about where he stands on issues.

"Maybe, sometimes I'm too straightforward but you will know where I stand," Davis said. "You're always going to get an honest straightforward answer."

Democratic candidate Travis Childers spoke next. The longtime Prentiss County Chancery Clerk is a self-described "hardworking man" who put himself through school after losing his father at age 16.

"I became a man at an early age," Childers said. "We were always a family of modest means. It's not a disgrace to be poor. It's a disgrace to stay in those circumstances."

Childers said he understands issues affecting working people, including the high cost of health care.

"Keep the government out of healthcare, but there has to be something better when working class Mississippians have no health insurance."

Childers said it's also time that U.S. troops leave Iraq.

"It's unfortunate we are still over there," Childers said. "We need to get out of Iraq. We can't just jerk them out and put them on a plane. My plan is to get us out of Iraq with a 12 to 18-month plan."

Childers also cited the fact the U.S. national debt was at \$7 trillion and climbing and linked part of that debt to the war in Iraq.

"We need to be spending our money in America," Childers said. "We need to be ending the mortgage crisis. We need to be getting North Mississippians access to health care."

Dr. Randy Russell, an Oxford ophthalmologist who also practices in Southaven, said he has spent his personal and professional life as a social conservative in the mold of former U.S. President Ronald Reagan.

Russell touted his efforts to stop lawsuit abuse and took credit for promoting tort reform.

"This is a pro-business state because we reformed the civil justice system," Russell said. "Toyota would not be here without civil justice reform," he said referring to the \$1 billion Toyota manufacturing plant under construction near Tupelo. "We need to keep North Mississippi as a place to invest. We need to fight for North Mississippi."

Russell said he and his family have sheltered 93 foster children on their rural Lafayette County farm over a 24-year period.

"We're supposed to protect those who can't protect themselves," Russell said. "I'm a Ronald Reagan conservative. We need full-blown conservatives." He decried the failure of America to protect its borders.

"A country that doesn't defend its borders is no country at all," Russell quoted Reagan as saying. Russell called for lowering the capital gains tax, making the Bush tax cuts permanent and abolishing the death tax.

Candidate Glenn McCullough spoke of his leadership qualities. The former Tennessee Valley Authority chairman and state director for the Appalachian Regional Commission highlighted his years of experience in the public and private sector.

"This is not a time to send a rookie," McCullough said, adding that he has been through the thorough confirmation process of the U.S. Senate and has worked with the nation's congressional leaders as well as the executive branch to formulate public policy.

McCullough said Tupelo held the line on taxes while he was mayor. During his tenure, Tupelo was named an All-American city in 1999, one of only 10 in the nation.

McCullough said while he was at TVA, he helped operate the nation's largest public utility like a successful business.

During that time, McCullough said commercial utility rates went down, aiding the area's business climate.

McCullough said he doesn't believe in amnesty for illegal aliens and would favor allocating four percent of the gross domestic product to support the nation's military.

"We've got to secure our borders," McCullough said.

Democrat Marshall Coleman, a businessman from Calhoun City, spoke in favor of federal programs like the Rural Incentives Act and farm subsidies to promote agriculture.

He said the federal minimum wage needed to be raised. "People who work should be able to eat," Coleman said. "People need inspiration. We have to rely on one another. I genuinely care about each and every one of you. I'm going to take you to Washington with me."

If no candidate receives a majority or 50 percent of the vote plus one in next Tuesday's primary, a run-off will be scheduled for April 1. Each of the candidates plan to qualify for a special election slated for April 22. If no candidate receives a majority in that election, a run-off will be slated for May 13.

Robert Lee Long can be contacted at rlong@desototimes.com or at (662) 429-NEWS, Ext. 252.