

Political forum draws sparks, little fire

Candidates cite experience; judge, board races heat up

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(Updated: Saturday, October 25, 2008 1:25 PM CDT)

DESOTO COUNTY — Candidates ranging from those running for Congress to a local school board race touted their qualifications at a forum hosted by the Northwest Mississippi Association of Realtors Friday.

The tone of the forum was civil and polite, except for the occasional barb. At one point, County Court Judge candidate Celeste Wilson asked Emily Turner, wife of opponent Jack Turner, to stop filming while she was speaking.

Both Turner and Wilson cited their differing experiences in the court system as the reasons for voters to choose them to preside over juvenile court matters.

"For the children of DeSoto County, our race is the most important race on the ballot," Turner, father of a 3-year-old daughter, said.

Turner, a Southaven attorney, advocated working with faith-based organizations and churches to help enact what he called "restorative justice." Under that system of justice, offenders work to repay victims for their crimes.

He chastised the American Civil Liberties Union for "chasing God out of the public square."

Wilson, assistant district attorney and a wife and mother, said she, too, wanted to work with local law enforcement to make sure the streets of DeSoto County were safe from juvenile crime.

"I have seen some trends in the area," Wilson said. "Gangs are a major problem in DeSoto County. When I was growing up, gangs were never a problem."

Wilson said she has acted as a prosecutor in making sure those who prey on children are put behind bars.

"The job I do is very intense, and I believe as county court judge, I will have a unique perspective of what's going on in the community," Wilson said.

First Congressional District candidate Greg Davis cited his conservative values before the group of 75, and urged voters to show up at the polls Nov. 4.

"We're down to 11 days," Davis said, adding that his campaign is nearing the home stretch after a grueling election process that pitted him against Democrat Travis Childers in a special election and a run-off.

"It does get tiring, and it does get exhausting," Davis added. "We know there has been a big push by the other side. Now the decision is up to us."

Davis said many candidates for statewide and federal office have "run away from their conservative values," in order to appeal to a wider constituency.

"I'm proud to stand for pro-life and pro-gun issues," Davis said. "Regardless of what the polls say, I support John McCain and Sarah Palin. I'm proud to be a Republican, but I'm more proud to be a Christian."

Davis said it's important to the future of the country that Democrats don't win a landslide in Congress so there will be checks and balances between the executive and legislative branch.

Davis also announced that he planned to open up a roaming congressional office if elected, "so people don't have to travel an hour and a half to meet with their congressman."

Mississippi Supreme Court candidates Ann Lamar and David Chandler, each running for separate seats on the state's high court, said they sought to interpret the law rather than try and "legislate from the bench."

"It's our job to interpret the laws, not write the laws — and apply the law to specific facts of the case," Chandler said.

In the District 5 School Board race, Robert L. Flinn, cited his longtime teaching experience as a reason voters should vote for him.

Incumbent school board member Janet Osborne said she took pride in the achievements of the school district, such as the efforts to lower the teacher turnover rate and build new schools.

"When we make a decision on the school board, we make one for all the county," Osborne said. "Our heart is for all the children."

Representatives of U.S. Sen. Thad Cochran and Sen. Roger Wicker also spoke Friday in addition to DeSoto County Election Commission candidates.

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