


Senate candidates outline the issues

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Senate candidate Marty Mulcahey answers submitted questions from the audience at a candidates luncheon put on by the Freeport Area Chamber of Commerce Political Action Committee on Sept. 30, 2008, at 4 Seasons.

Freeport, Ill. — Senate candidates Tim Bivins and Marty Mulcahey outlined their legislative priorities and discussed a number of key state and regional issues on Sept. 30, 2008, at a luncheon organized by the Freeport Area Chamber of Commerce Political Action Committee.

Republican State Sen. Bivins, R-Dixon, and Mulcahey, the Democratic candidate, will compete for State Senator of the 45th District in the upcoming November election. The luncheon gave both candidates a chance to briefly introduce themselves and answer a variety of questions that were submitted by chamber members.

After candidates each gave a five-minute opening statement, they answered a series of 10 questions proposed by chamber members. Candidates had two minutes to respond to each submitted question. The event took place at the 4 Seasons Banquet Facility in Freeport.

One question asked each candidate to outline his three legislative priorities for the post-election session of the General Assembly. Mulcahey said his priorities will be jobs/economic development, education, and ethics reform in government. Bivins said his priorities will include improving the state's budget process, Medicaid reform, and approving a holiday sales tax initiative.

The U.S. Highway 20 expansion project needs to move forward again, Mulcahey said. The state, he said, should also look at funding a project to activate a fiber optic cable in this region and create a port district at the former Savanna Army Depot that could be used for a renewable energy pilot facility.

Also, ethics in Illinois languishes "in shambles," and serious measures need to be taken to help end pay-to-play politics in Springfield, Mulcahey said.

"We need to change the way we do business in Illinois," Mulcahey said.

Bivins said the state needs to improve its budgeting process by giving legislators more time to review the budget. The process should also be more open and transparent, he said.

"The budget process needs addressing, it needs fixing," Bivins said.

Bivins also called for major Medicaid reform in Illinois, since this state tops all other states in its frequency of late Medicaid payments to providers.

Mega-Dairy

The candidates also tackled the controversial issue of the mega-dairy proposed for the Warren/Nora area. Both candidates said they studied the issue thoroughly, but had differing views on the project.

Mulcahey said he does not support the mega-dairy because he has environmental concerns that outweigh the potential benefits of the dairy farm project.

Bivins said he does not oppose the mega-dairy as long as it does not harm this area's environment. Concerns have risen about the farm, which has slowed the process down, he said. This slowing of the process has had a positive effect in that there will now be more inspections made on the facility during construction, and there will also be a methane digester installed at the farm, Bivins said.

Education Funding

State funding for education also came up at the luncheon. Mulcahey said Illinois needs to find a dedicated funding stream for education and create a fund specifically for that purpose.

A mild increase in the state income tax coupled with a reduction in property taxes as it relates to education may be one possible way to generate funding for education, as long as monitored safeguards ensure this money is strictly used for that purpose, he said.

“Education is certainly a key issue in my campaign,” Mulcahey said.

Bivins said issues like education and health care cannot be addressed until the state gets a handle on the budget. At several points during the luncheon, Bivins emphasized how poorly the state government is functioning with Gov. Rod Blagojevich at the helm.

“What we are lacking in Springfield is leadership,” Bivins said. “Reward and retribution is not leadership.”

Health Care Costs

Another question asked the candidates how they would help small businesses survive in the current economy, considering the high cost of health care. Bivins said the state needs to get off the backs of businesses and establish tax breaks instead of more taxes.

The current tax environment in Illinois deters business through inhospitable policies and is driving many businesses out of the state, Bivins said.

“There are too many regulations, too many taxes,” Bivins said. “Government needs to partner with business, not make it more difficult.”

Mulcahey said he and his wife currently own a small business — a dance studio in Dubuque, Iowa — and that he understands the challenges of owning a business.

He said major reform must come on a national and global level to ensure that people have access to affordable health care. However, Mulcahey warned that Illinois instituting such a system on its own could be problematic. Statewide access to affordable health care in the absence of a national health care program could make Illinois a “welfare magnet,” drawing in people from outside Illinois who are seeking benefits, Mulcahey said.

“Small business owners are the backbone of our rural economy,” Mulcahey said.

Other issues addressed on Sept. 30, 2008, included transportation funding, renewable energy, budget cuts impacting mental health services, and more.