

118th candidates meet voters

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Candidates for the 118th District debate the topics at the... (Christian Abraham/Staff photographer)

MILFORD -- House Speaker James Amann, who has represented the western end of the city in the General Assembly for 18 years, will be a tough act to follow, the three candidates vying to succeed him agreed Wednesday night.

But Democrat Barbara Lambert, Republican Nanci Seltzer and Independent Party candidate Rocco Frank promised the audience in the VFW Hall that they are ready to make their own mark in Hartford.

"I'm a Republican; everything I do will be different than Jim Amann," Seltzer said. "He's been part of a super-majority. I will be the voice of the people and a pain in the butt to the super-majority."

Former VFW Post Commander Greg Smith moderated the forum, which used written questions submitted by the audience and discouraged direct debate. Instead, each candidate had a turn to answer every question.

Lambert, fielding a question on how she'd handle the state's looming \$1 billion deficit, promised to handle taxpayer money as if it was her own.

"I'm known as an old Yankee. I save everything; I'm cheap," the alderwoman said to the cheers of her supporters.

The three candidates for the 118th District seat in the General Assembly agreed that the Education Cost Sharing formula shortchanges Milford, but that it is unlikely to be effectively modified. Instead, Lambert advocated a takeover by the state of special education costs, a move that she said would lower local property taxes by 3 mills.

Seltzer, who works as an occupational therapy assistant in the Greenwich and Darien public schools, noted that Greenwich receives 9 percent of its local education costs through the ECS, while Hartford gets 98 percent and Milford 11 percent. "I don't think Milford is that close to Greenwich financially," the Republican said. "That is so wrong."

All three agreed that while the HUSKY health insurance plan for children is valuable, its costs can be managed better.

"Let the private sector do what the private sector does best," Frank said. "I don't think the state should be in the insurance business."

A question on how to control energy costs drew three different responses.

Seltzer said using the research done by state universities could help, as would more efficient recycling. Lambert said several alternative energy companies located in Milford are already working on solutions, including a fuel cell that could power the city's waste water treatment plants by using the methane produced.

Frank advocated taking electric utilities out of the equation. "Why do we need United Illuminating? They are merely brokers, buying power in Canada, sending it over a public grid and marking it up. UI has been given a guaranteed right to make a profit. You turn off the lights, your bill goes up. They used high oil prices as a reason for a rate increase. Well, oil has gone down, have you gotten a discount or a rebate?"

Frank and Seltzer said that they'd support a law requiring motorcyclists to wear helmets. "I'm a rider myself," Frank said. "But think about it: you need a seatbelt to ride in a car but you don't need a helmet to ride a motorcycle?"