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Monday, September 25, 2006

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9/21/2006 7:29:30 PM

Candidates address issues at legislative forum

Will Klusener Staff Writer

Candidates in two local legislative races met during a forum at Meadowlark Hills Retirement Community this morning.

State Rep. Sydney Carlin, a Democrat, is being challenged for her 66th District seat by Republican Bob Strawn. State Rep. Tom Hawk, also a Democrat, is being challenged for his 67th District seat by Dick Miller.

The candidates discussed their views on a variety of topics, including the availability of health care, the Taxpayers' Bill of Rights, and pension plans for public and private employees. They then then took questions from the audience.

Hawk said the Medicare Plan B system needs to be fixed, and said businesses need to help improve employee benefits. He criticized the Taxpayer's Bill of Rights, saying it would damage growth opportunities in communities like Manhattan by hindering representatives' abilities to pass legislation that meets the needs of their constituents.

Hawk also said government needs to help retired persons and make sure that corporations don't raid employees retirement benefit accounts.

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Miller said he favors a system in which everyone is covered by some sort of health care, and said funding for all social benefits need to be balanced. Miller also opposed a Taxpayer's Bill of Rights, believing there



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Rep. Sydney Carlin takes her turn answering a health care question this morning during a candidate forum at Meadowlark Hills Retirement Community. Joining Carlin at the table were candidates Bob Strawn, Dick Miller and Rep. Tom Hawk. Staff photo by David Mayes

should not be a constitutional amendment to control taxes. But he said the Legislature should exercise more restraint with regard to taxation.

Carlin said she favors looking at a healthcare system similar to the Massachusetts system, in which everyone in the state must pay a fee and enroll. Carlin said a taxpayer's bill of rights would erode the government's tax base, and predicted that schools and institutions of higher education would take a huge hit. She said that taking care of society's frailest citizens is a major concern.

Strawn said health care savings accounts (HSA's) and buying pools are good options. Strawn also opposed the taxpayer's bill of rights, but called for property tax reform of some sort. Strawn said good pension plans need to be available to public employees so the state can attract top employee prospects.

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