

8 House candidates joust at forum

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Eight candidates jockeying for two Tempe/south Scottsdale seats in the state House of Representatives struggled to stand out at a Wednesday night forum.

The four Democrats and four Republican candidates debated key election issues, such as immigration and education.

Most answers fell along party lines.

Some of the most memorable moments were the District 17 candidates' responses to written questions from the audience.

One audience member asked the contenders if they would support a bill that requires parental consent before a minor could obtain an abortion.

Three of the Democrats - former Kearny Councilman Rhett Wilson, political researcher Angie Crouse and business owner David Schapira - said that they supported a woman's right to choose abortion.

Sen. Ed Ableser D-Tempe, who is seeking a House seat, said he once was on the "wrong side" of the issue in supporting parental consent. Ableser said he has since had a change of view after talking with a girl who claimed to have been raped by her father.

All four Republican candidates supported parental consent rules.

"It's extremely important for parents to know what's going on in their children's lives," said incumbent Rep. Laura Knaperek, R-Tempe, who has four daughters.

Girls need permission to pierce their ears or get a tattoo, so they should get a parent's OK for an abortion, agreed Scottsdale pharmacist Dan Gransinger.

"The government should never take the place of a parent," said former Tempe school administrator Dale Despain.

Another query probed the candidates' stands on the ballot initiative that would raise the minimum wage to \$6.75 per hour.

Since Arizona has no state minimum wage, Arizona follows the federal minimum of \$5.15 per hour.

All Republican candidates opposed a raised wage, arguing that the move could devastate small business that would be forced to pay workers more.

Republican candidate Chris DeRose, a Realtor who said that he worked in two minimum wage jobs in the past, argued that raising the minimum wage would make Arizona less competitive with neighboring states.

The Democrats, many who pointed to personal experiences with minimum wage, backed the proposed pay boost.

"The market is leaving people behind," said Wilson, a coordinator for Arizona State University's W.P. Carey School of Business.

Raising minimum wage is "a moral issue" said Crouse, the political researcher, who said that she's worked as a waitress.

Candidate Schapira used his father, a construction company owner who was in the audience, as an example. Schapira said that his father would love to pay workers more but couldn't because all of his competitors pay minimum wage.

That led to a swipe from DeRose, who compared Schapira to a young John F. Kennedy whose family was so wealthy that Kennedy knew little about the Great Depression until his father "laid off 10 workers." Later in the debate, Schapira shot back, "You can compare me to Jack Kennedy any time. I don't mind."

The forum was sponsored by the Citizens Clean Elections Commission and the *Arizona Capitol Times*.

The primary election for the state House of Representatives is Sept. 12, with two Democratic nominees and two Republican nominees squaring off in November for the two spots.