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MOUNT CLEMENS
 October 29, 2014

Local teens lead candidate forum

House and Senate candidates address current youth issues

MOUNT CLEMENS — Candidates vying for seats in the House and Senate this upcoming general election tackled some of the biggest issues and concerns facing teens today during a Meet the Candidates forum Oct. 21.

Held at Mount Clemens High School and hosted by Teen Talking Truth, a youth advocacy group from CARE of Southeastern Michigan and Michigan's Children, the Youth Voices: Changing Public Policy forum was attended by Democrat Steve Bieda, who is seeking re-election onto State Senate for the 9th District; Republican Anthony Forlini, seeking re-election onto the House of Representatives in the 24th District; Forlini's Democratic opponent Philip Kurczewski; Democrat Kenneth Paul Jenkins, who is seeking election as State Senator in the 10th District; Democrat Marilyn Lane, seeking re-election onto the House of Representatives for the 31st District; Republican Peter J. Lucido, who is seeking re-election onto the House of Representatives in the 26th District; and his challenger, Democrat Robert Murphy.

Stefani Barner, CARE's prevention and community programs director, said what set the candidate forum apart from most is that middle school and high school students led the questioning of candidates seeking office.

"As leaders in their community, they embrace this opportunity to talk with legislators and communicate the problems facing children, youth and teens from their own perspective," Barner added. "By educating our elected officials about the topics that matter most to them, our youth are stepping into their roles as future community leaders and showing their peers throughout Macomb County that a single voice really can make a difference."

The students were from school districts across the area, including L'Anse Creuse Public Schools, Utica Community Schools, Grosse Pointe Public Schools, Roseville Community Schools, Fraser Public Schools, Clintondale Community Schools and International Academy of Macomb.

The goal was to draw attention to issues youths grapple with every day.

Those issues included prescription drug use to keep up with academic competitiveness, the popularity of e-cigarettes among minors, the possible legalization of marijuana, the increasing cost of college tuitions, and the loss of funding to arts and sciences programs in Michigan



Photo by Sean Work

Rep. Anthony Forlini, Philip Kurczewski, Rep. Marilyn Lane and Rep. Peter Lucido (Lucido's challenger Robert Murphy is seated to the far right, out of frame) took questions during a Meet the Candidates forum hosted by Teens Talking Truth, a youth advocacy group from CARE of Southeastern Michigan and Michigan's Children, the Youth Voices: Changing Public Policy.



Photo by Sean Work

Sen. Steve Bieda, Kenneth Paul Jenkins and Rep. Anthony Forlini tackled questions during the Teens Talking Truth Candidates Forum at Mount Clemens High School Oct. 21.

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middle schools and high schools.

When asked about the possibility of putting more restrictions on the sale of e-cigarettes, Jenkins said they should be treated the same as tobacco cigarettes: retailers should be prohibited from selling them to anyone younger than 18.

"I think there should be regulations — the same as with tobacco cigarettes," he said.

Amanda Boschman, from Henry Ford II High School, asked the candidates what they think should be done about the rising cost of college.

"It's been going up for a while in Michigan," said Kurczewski. "I think we need to do a better job of monitoring college tuition in Michigan."

Lane said House Bill 408 would address some relief to that issue.

"If passed, it would allow a student who goes for a bachelor's degree at a college in Michigan would get tax credits back to offset your college tuition," she said.

On the topic of legalizing marijuana in Michigan, Bieda said state voters supported medical marijuana, and if the drug should become legal in the future in the state, it's up to the legislatures to enforce regulations and work with schools and the communities to make sure youth are fully educated on the effects.

Roseville High School student Rickey Shakelford asked how the candidates would go about getting more funding back to the schools for arts and sciences programs.

Lucido said a good idea would be to look to the corporations for some relief.

"If they intend to hire the brightest minds in the state, they need to give to that effort (to mold the brightest minds)," he said.

The students also asked about political smoking bans, bullying in schools, and campaign bullying and how those issues should be addressed.

"We're all grownups," said Murphy, who admits to an amicable race against Lucido. "Bullying shouldn't come into play."

The consensus was that parents and school counselors need to talk more with the children to combat bullying, the ramifications of bullying and how to handle bullying.

Pertaining to extending smoking bans, Forini said there's only so much legislators can do.

"At some point, we could be overbearing as a government," said Forini, a nonsmoker. "(Smoking) is a free will. (Smokers) should be able to smoke outside if that's what they want to do."

There are places where people cannot smoke outdoors, including hospitals and some government buildings.

Michigan's Children CEO and President Matt Gillard said Michigan's Children has worked through the nonpartisan Sandbox Party to listen to what candidates are saying and to try to engage more voters to become informed in this election cycle.

"Unfortunately, candidates do not typically address specific issues that matter to children, youth and families while campaigning," he added. "To remedy this, we are conducting a series of forums in different areas of the state, each led by young people asking the important questions they have for candidates for Michigan Legislative districts."

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