

PRIMARY '90

Candidates list their priorities

Michael lists education as his top priority

"Education has to be the biggest priority," says candidate Clarence Michael, who is expressing concern about state funding for education.

According to Michael, funding for education was supposed to be 50 percent from the local level and 50 percent from the state level. However, he says that recently the state is not paying its full 50 percent.

"Basically, when Casey got in (to office) the state paid about 42 percent. As a school board member I said 'let's keep it there'. This year it might drop to 39 percent funding," says Michael.

He says that the drop in state funding will now have to be made at the local level. He added that the state is mandating programs but is not providing funding for these programs. Michael feels that something should be done.

Michael cited the coming requirement that local districts take over special education programs, which he says will cost more. He said that Dallas will do so next year.

"If the state was funding like it should, then we wouldn't have to worry about getting those dollars," said Michael. "What is our state legislator and what is our state senator saying about this? I haven't heard anything from our local representatives on how they are going to address this issue on the state level," he added.

Michael said that these things should be answered.

Because of lack of funding, Michael says that another issue in his campaign is taxes and how unfair they currently are.

The Dallas School Board President says that tax reform must be looked into. "The property tax is unfair," he says. "It hits the elderly and those least likely to pay." Michel says the alternative may be raising taxes, even though that is an unpopular topic.

Michael says that getting money for the state comes in a

"trickle down effect." He says that the state should get money from the federal government, some from the "peace dividend" and some from cuts in waste.

On the state level, Michael says the state has to "bite the bullet" and figure out what is fair. He indicated that an increase in the income tax may be the answer, rather than a reliance on property taxes. "I think tax reform has to enter into this," he said. "I don't mind paying taxes as long as they are fair."

Michael feels that reassessment of property is long overdue, and that tax burdens are inequitable as a result. "It's a political timebomb," he said. "The state government has to play a role in that."

Michael also says that drug abuse is an issue that has to be addressed by the state. He says that taking money from drugs can help the state. "I would like to take some of the money from drugs and use it to buy some soccer fields and recreational lands." He advocates getting people and communities involved in activities that occupy young people in positive ways, citing Little League as an example.

"Boot camps" for first-time drug offenders are an effective way to deal with the problem, Michael says. He would favor putting closed military facilities to this use.

Michael also is in favor of putting in the 911 emergency number for the area. "I think a lot of people are buying into that," he said. He feels that the system should be installed statewide and funded by charges to telephone bills.

He also stresses that child abuse laws should be tightened and salaries for child advocates should be raised. "I see a real turnover in these people," Michael said. "I think we need to get some good people in there, because if we lose this generation we're all going to suffer."

Phillips advocates tough treatment for drug criminals

Tougher drug legislation is a one major issue that candidate Jim Phillips would like to see handled.

Phillips is a staunch supporter of legislation that will eliminate drug paraphernalia and will stiffen sentences against drug dealers.

"On the drug paraphernalia," says Phillips, "I support legislation that will completely outlaw these type products." Phillips says that many drug related items can be purchased legally in the 120th district. He says that drug paraphernalia items use disclaimers to become legal. However, he supports the total ban of these items.

Phillips also believes that education and counseling will help in the battle against drugs. But he says that stronger sentences against convicted drug dealers is a key step in controlling the problem.

"I favor the death penalty if a drug dealer kills a law enforcement officer or if it can be proven that one of his deals has resulted in the death of a person. I feel he deserves the same fate," said Phillips.

As far as what happens after a drug dealer is convicted, Phillips says that prison camps have proven to be effective.

"Regular jail facilities are very costly," said Phillips. "But camps, where you could set it up like an army barracks are more practical situations for first time offender," he added.

He says that prison camps have been successful in other states where the prisoners are put in a boot-camp situation. "It

would be run just like an army camp, where they would be doing things," explained Phillips. "The return rate is much less than a normal prison because these people don't want to go back to a place where they have to work," he said.

Phillips' campaign also concentrates on a number of other issues. Another big concern of the candidate is personal property tax. Phillips said that the tax should be abolished at the state level, where he says some of the problems are started.

Phillips has also supported recycling in most areas. As a Luzerne county commissioner, Phillips has been instrumental in working on coordinating a recycling program. However, he says that in some areas it will not be feasible to recycle. "I can see certain points where you can mandate recycling but it will not happen," says Phillips. "I don't see where it would be practical for some (smaller) areas to have to recycle," he added.

He also supports property tax and rent rebates for more senior citizens as well as the raising of the monetary limit which would make senior citizens eligible for the PACE program.

Phillips has also gone on record as supporting the right of law abiding citizens to own firearms.

If elected, Phillips says he will be a full-time state legislator, like he is a full-time county commissioner now. "Since my campaign has started, I have put more time in the courthouse than other two commissioners combined," said Phillips.

Mundy wants greater emphasis on education

For Democratic candidate Phyllis Mundy there are two major issues that the state government must concentrate on. "The environment and education are the issues of the 90's," Mundy said recently.

"The environment is in a sorry state," she said. "We've let things go too long and we've studied things too long," she added.

Mundy says that Pennsylvania is an industrial state and things must be done in Harrisburg to help protect the environment. "Some of the other states are not as industrialized and national controls wouldn't affect them as much," said Mundy. "The environment is something that needs immediate attention."

Mundy also says that the education issue can help with other issues of society. "There are so many things we need to educate people about," she said. Mundy feels that educating people about the problems with the environment, drug abuse, and about responsible sexual practices can help curve these kinds of problems.

However, she says that there are problems in the education system. "I think one area, where our area is at fault, is the hiring of teachers. I think too many teachers are hired by who they know and not what they know," said Mundy.

"Unfortunately, all the nepotism laws that have been passed in the state legislature, are wonderful, but they don't affect school boards that much, and I think they should," added the candidate.

Mundy says that the education system defeats itself when it hires a relative over a more qualified teacher. "I think it was a wise thing to raise the minimum salary for teachers. I

think it will help attract better people into the profession. But by the same token, if you have a list of applicants and you don't hire the most qualified, the best teacher on that list you're defeating their minimum salary," she said.

There are other areas of education that also concern Mundy. She feels that starting earlier to educate poor underprivileged children will help to keep them off of the welfare rolls. She also says that mainstreaming students is not always beneficial.

"Mainstreaming is a way to cut taxes," said Mundy. "I don't believe you should have a variety of different ability groups in some classrooms. It is a nightmare for the teachers and kids at both ends of the spectrum lose." Mundy says that mainstreaming works in some subjects but not in all subjects.

As far as the funding of education, Mundy says feels that some money may have to be spent. "I think we can't afford not to do what is necessary," she said. "whether that means throwing more dollars at it, I don't know."

The candidate says that there is money out there, thanks in part to Governor Robert Casey. "Governor Casey has been able to hold the budget without raising taxes and I believe he will continue to do that," said Mundy.

She says that the way to achieve the goals, in terms of priorities is to, "...expand the economy, cut waste, collect the taxes that are already out there and go after the priorities where the money needs to be put."

Mundy, of Kingston, is running unopposed for the democratic nomination.

Vernon cites strong economy as base of growth

Anne Vernon says she firmly believes that the people are looking for a change, that they want a leader with integrity and trust. She believes that she is that leader and intends to win the election.

If she is successful in winning the office, Anne Vernon has a list of priorities she intends to undertake.

First, she plans to work at continuing to bring industry and jobs into the area. "We lose a lot of jobs every year; every community does. We have to replace these positions or go down hill," Vernon said.

She would also like to see people educated in vocational and technical schools, high schools and colleges in the type of work needed by the companies moving into the area. "We need to have a cooperative effort with our schools," Vernon feels the area lacks semi-skilled workers in some fields.

"I know that all the social services are in the world aren't going to do a whole lot of good if the people don't have jobs and have a good feeling about them. I will bring to the legislative process a vast understanding of the social problems that we have and a good understanding of what will and won't work in drug and alcohol treatment, abuse and neglect, and child welfare treatment.

Vernon says the state's lack of funding for mandated social services is one of the biggest problems faced today. "Mandates are always coming

down but not the money. You simply cannot get good workers."

"We need a broader tax base," to finance services, Vernon believes, though she backs off from advocating tax increases. Vernon says she believes some of the funding shortage is a result of cutbacks at the federal level, which eventually find their way to the local area.

"Some local areas are better off than others. In our local area we are better of because in the initial funding there was a lot of money so our allocation each year is higher than some.

Vernon does not believe the Back Mountain is suitable for more industry unless the local water problem is solved and transportation becomes more updated. "I think Route 309 is already ten years obsolete," she said.

"I would support whatever it's going to take to guarantee us that we're going to have water for the next century."

In speaking of overpopulated prisons, Vernon said it is her philosophy if children are not properly nurtured or if they feel they are unwanted, and if they see the world as a hostile place, they become hostile citizens, then they will likely end up in the juvenile system or in prisons.

"That's why I feel so strongly that we shouldn't be bringing unwanted children into the world unless we have a way of being sure they're nurtured and taken care of physically and emotionally," Vernon said.

Dietterick notes many anti-drug accomplishments

Scott Dietterick said in his opinion drugs are a top priority, that the drug problem is everywhere.

"They are here and we need to do everything in our power to make it so tough on persons who sell drugs that they give it up. The problem is, the drug dealers can outspend the enforcement officers. It's very lucrative. Pennsylvania has some of the toughest laws on the books. I co-sponsored Attorney General Preate's proposed laws.

Dietterick said he has spent a great deal of time studying drug-related issues. "When the tax reform was defeated, we took \$90 million and put it into a drug reform for prevention, education and enforcement. I even sponsored a bill that would allow the National Guard to help the police. Not that they would go out and make raids, but do some of the work that the police would do such as searching and guarding, to free up the police to go out and make arrests.

"I also supported the drug

free school zone, which doubles the penalty for selling drugs near schools. There are other, tougher measures working their way through the Legislature. We're doing as much as we can on the penalty and education side. It's up to the federal government to try to keep it off our shores.

Dietterick says that drugs are responsible for many of society's problems. "If you look at what's happening in many things, you can trace a lot of it back to drugs: Child abuse, drunk driving. There are a lot of things, all of them bad, that are happening because of drugs.

The recently enacted anti-takeover bill drew Dietterick's support.

"I am a full time, on-the-job, pro-active legislator. When something happens in the Back Mountain or anywhere, I respond." He pointed out that he had been in touch with PennDOT attempting to solve recent problem with rumble strips that had been installed in Dallas.

Kotch says area needs more high paying jobs

Andrew Kotch says one of his greatest concerns is employment improvement. He says that in his work on the road he has seen families pick up and leave the area.

"Instead of trying to import employment that pays \$5-6.00 an hour, we have to look for things that pay a better rate that people can survive on. We have close to a dozen colleges, universities and trade schools, and they can be used to direct education toward more advanced technical skills that are needed today."

Kotch feels that a trained workforce would attract higher-paying employers. "Hopefully that would create the base of a community that would grow," he said.

"The environment is important. People are concerned about it, especially trash and garbage. They don't want it coming in here and being dumped on them. We need to sit down and resolve the matter and stop squabbling about it," Kotch stated. "Whatever route we take, we should stress a good recycling program that would lengthen the life of our landfill system."

Kotch is also concerned about the educational systems, especially in terms of keeping children in school. He recommends that the

curriculums be looked at and made more appealing, if necessary.

"We should give teachers incentives to help them develop new classroom ideas and support them. Don't just give them a one year grant. If something's effective, it should be looked at to be kept in the system."

Kotch says the state's infrastructure is in need of attention. "Our highway systems are in dire need of help across the state. Pennsylvania roads are ranked second worst in the country," he said.

He cited statistics that showed approximately 40 percent of our bridges are deficient and 80 percent of our highways are in need of repair.

"We've got a lot of problems in the state," Kotch says. "Dealing with news in a 17 county area. I see a lot of this in a regional way. As a legislator, you've got to look at a lot of things."

Kotch says he's unsure where the necessary money will come from. "People want more and more services, and no one wants to hear about higher taxes. When Thornburgh left office, he left the state with a \$375 million surplus, now Casey has a \$1.2 million surplus." He feels that the next few years will be challenging for Pennsylvania.

Don't miss the Candidate Forum

Sunday, May 6, 6:30 p.m.

Penn State Wilkes-Barre campus, Lehman

Each candidate will make opening and closing remarks, and answer questions from the public

See question form elsewhere in this issue

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