

HD 25 hopefuls debate budget, ballot items

By Joe Moylan

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In addition to hearing from candidates for the Jeffco commission, residents who attended an election forum Sept. 27 at Center/Stage Theatre in Evergreen also heard from Tim Leonard and Tammy Story, who are vying for the state House District 25 seat.



Leonard, R-Evergreen, was appointed to the HD 25 seat in January and served for 100 days of the last 120-day session. Originally from Detroit, the incumbent moved to Colorado about 30 years ago. During opening statements, he pledged to protect what he believes are America's two guiding principles: its constitutional republic and free-enterprise economy.

Story, a Democrat and a Conifer resident, was raised in a military family and moved a lot growing up. In 1987, she moved to the foothills with her husband, Mike, and raised two children who attended Jeffco public schools. She said she can best be described as a public education advocate.

As was the case with the county commission debates, Leonard and Story fielded a series of questions from moderator Doug Bell, the editor of Evergreen Newspapers, as well as questions posed by some of the roughly 50 people who attended the forum.

The Taxpayer's Bill of Rights and Colorado Amendment 23 became the focus of the first two questions posed by Bell when he asked how the state continues to balance the budget considering the two amendments conflict with each other. TABOR, passed in 1992, limits the annual growth in state revenues by the rate of inflation plus population change, while Amendment 23, passed in 2000, ensures K-12 funding at least keeps pace with the rate of inflation.

Those two amendments, Story argued, are making it impossible for Colorado's underfunded school districts to catch up after experiencing funding declines during the last recession. In addition, Story said TABOR requires revenues to ratchet down during a recession, but provides no mechanism for revenues kept by the state to ratchet back up during times of economic recovery.

"It would be my desire to release some of the pressure on those revenue streams so that we can address the loss of revenue in public education and remain competitive with our greatest asset, our teachers," Story said. "The amendments are very much in competition with each other."

Leonard countered by saying that for as long as he can remember, the theme at the statehouse is that there always is a revenue crisis in Colorado. Nevertheless, Leonard pointed out, in 2010 Gov. Bill Ritter signed the largest state budget in history at \$18 billion, and Gov. John Hickenlooper exceeded that mark when he signed off on a \$27 billion budget.

"There is a theme in the statehouse right now, which is the government doesn't have enough money, but if you give us more of yours, we'll spend it better," Leonard said. "I believe the more money we can put in hands of the people, the better it is spent."

The candidates then fielded questions from the audience, the first of which was what principles would guide them when drafting or voting on legislation. Story responded simply that she would be guided by her constituents. Leonard's three-pronged litmus test is whether the legislation is constitutional, good for business and whether or not it's dependent on government.

Considering all of the questions on the ballot, Bell closed the forum by asking Leonard and Story to choose one issue going before voters and explain their stance.

Story chose Amendment 71, the Raise the Bar initiative that aims to make it more difficult to amend Colorado's constitution by requiring special-interest groups to collect a certain number of signatures from every Senate district in the state — not just metro areas — before a question could go on the ballot. But Story argued the proposed signature requirements, which are intended to level the playing field for rural Coloradans, could have the opposite effect by giving too few people too much power to block certain initiatives from ever going to a vote of the people.

Leonard decided to focus his final thoughts on Amendment 70, which aims to put into motion annual increases in Colorado's minimum wage until it reaches \$12 per hour in 2020. The current minimum wage is \$8.31. Leonard opposes the initiative because he thinks it is going to adversely affect small businesses.

"If you're a small business owner with 10 employees, you're going to be forced to divide by nine — someone is going to lose because of this wage proposal," Leonard said. "Wages are something you negotiate, and business owners should be able to do that without interference from the government."