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## Candidates battle it out for Council seat

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By Stephanie Samuel

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Montgomery County Sentinel

District 5 Prince George's County Council seat contender and Edmonston Mayor Adam Ortiz won the endorsement of Progressive Cheverly during its March 6 candidate forum. Progressive Cheverly members made this decision after the candidates spoke their piece on issues ranging from the environment to county's future. Of the 38 dues-paying members who voted, 32 voted for Ortiz.

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Kenmoor Middle School teacher and National Educators Association member Theresa Dudley, who came a distant second with five votes, seemed to fare well by popular opinion.

Legals

"I thought Ortiz and Dudley were the two forceful ones," resident Charley Gallion, Sr. said.

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Ortiz was especially vocal about issues pertaining to a concrete-batching plant that is expected to come to the community shortly. Currently the facility is a crushing and mining operation. The plant change has been approved by the zoning hearing examiner and is waiting district council approval.

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Cheverly residents are against the facility.

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"We are all opposing this," said Progressive Cheverly member Lisa Lincoln. Ortiz said he has toured the area surrounding the facility and recalled lots of dust. He said he will be pushing for environmental studies to "get science on our side."

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He also voiced his clear opposition to County Executive Jack Johnson.

Prince George's Sentinel

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"I do feel very strongly that Mr. Johnson has not kept his eye on the ball," he said during the forum. He also reaffirmed his support for Johnson's 2006 challenger, former Del. Rushern Baker (D-Dist. 22B).

Legals

Both Ortiz and Dudley expressed their displeasure at the county's handling of the Prince George's Hospital Center in recent years. The morning of the forum, Gov. Martin O'Malley, Lt. Gov. Anthony Brown, County Executive Jack Johnson and members of the county council announced plans to put the center up for bid. A seven-member board to be appointed by the governor, county and the county senate delegation will be selecting the new authority which would take over from Dimensions HealthCare, the county hospital system's operator since 1983.

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"I strongly support the Governor's proposal and would as councilman," Ortiz said. He also said he disagreed "with the recent county efforts to shoehorn Ascensions Healthcare into the hospital center without an open public process."

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Dudley criticized the county's handling of the hospital system saying it should step back and let medical officials make the decisions.

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"If you depoliticized the hospital and [remove] the county council, you won't have the same debacle that you had last year [when] the councilmen walked away from the table," she said. Ortiz also chimed in with his displeasure with the deal.

"I don't think that this is the kind of process that we want," he said. He said the deal must bring residents into the discussion, not be made in "smoky back rooms."

Another audience member said that both Ortiz and Dudley were the only two to "name names."

"I'm really happy to get the endorsement," Ortiz said the decision, his second endorsement so far. The other he received came from the Sierra Club. Ortiz praised the Progressive Cheverly endorsement as a sign of his political record in the local community and his refusal to get caught up in the "political machinery."

Both Ortiz and Dudley say they are taking on the old politics in this race. Candidate Adrion Howell, a former lobbyist for Johnson, has been criticized for his glitzy campaign, which includes glossy lawn signs already visible from some roadways and an endorsement from former state senator and NAACP president Kweisi Mfume. He also hopes to receive Johnson's endorsement. Others also questioned his knowledge of the district, citing that he is new to District 5. Forum onlooker Charles Christian criticized him, saying, "Mr. Howell, most people don't know this, but he just moved to the district."

Dudley says candidate Andrea Harrison is being tainted by developers.

"She created a slate committee to take money from the developers without recusing herself from the council [race]" she said, pointing out the donation committee name and address listed on a fundraising flier. Harrison, daughter of 2002 county council member James C. Fletcher, Jr., is former County Councilman and current state Sen. David Harrington's (D-Dist. 47) handpicked choice for the seat.

In the forum, Ortiz and Dudley along with other candidates Harrison, registered nurse Sherry James-Strother and Howell, fielded various questions from the Cheverly community.

Most notable among the questions was that of an audience member asking candidates if they would cross party lines to endorse a Republican candidate much like County Council Members Camille Exum (D-Dist. 7), Samuel Dean (D-Dist. 6), Tony Knotts (D-Dist.8), Marilyn Bland (D-Dist. 9) and Harrington did.

"I've supported Democrats all my life," Howell said, recalling all the campaigns he helped. "So unequivocally I will be supporting a Democrat." Dudley, who formerly ran as a Green Party candidate against U.S. Sen. Albert Wynn (D-Dist. 4), said "if Democrats are [being] progressive, I will support them."

One of the biggest concerns of the night for Cheverly residents was urban development. Harrington weighed in the strongest in favor of development. Having had experience with the county's Livable Communities initiative as Harrington's aide, Harrison said she favored mixed development, retail, residential areas and businesses with the community's involvement. Dudley expressed apprehension to increased development, saying that services such as schools, police and fire departments must match the development. Howell said the county needed to build its commercial tax base to fund those services.

Strother, who says her strengths are in the health needs of the district, advocated a research arm be added to the hospital, saying it would bring money to cover the uninsured and bring world-renowned doctors to the county.

Democratic candidates Derricks Parks and Melvin Johnson, both registered with the Prince George's Board of Election for the District 5 race, did not join the forum.

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