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Congressional candidate wants to link education, jobs

By Mary E. Young
Reading Eagle

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Sheila Dow Ford said running for public office feels like a natural step because she has spent most of her life working on education issues as an attorney and community issues as a volunteer.

She wants to put that experience to use in the U.S. House of Representatives, 17th Congressional District, and is challenging U.S. Rep. Tim Holden, a Schuylkill County Democrat in his ninth two-year term, for the party's nomination in the May 18 primary election.

At the top of her agenda would be fixing what she sees as a disconnect between education and jobs, Dow Ford of Harrisburg said.

The economic meltdown of the country was one manifestation of that, she said.

"I live in the city," Dow Ford said. "I see what's happened in Reading. I see cities and areas that were once major manufacturing centers. I've watched the decline. I also meet young people who don't have skills, or if they do have skills they don't have opportunities.

"We have a myriad of programs, but there should be a bridge between education and jobs. The two are connected."

The two should be reconnected with job training and basic skills building, with community colleges and targeted initiatives linked to them, Dow Ford said.

"Getting through high school and higher education or training should be basic," she said. "It has been lost. A legislative earmark doesn't get us there. Policy initiative will.

"It's holding politicians and people accountable. It's good use of tax resources. It's not rhetoric. It creates a nexus between inputs and outcomes."

Politicians talk about it but have done nothing about it, Dow Ford said.

Her ability to relate to people and experience will enable her to fight for good policies that will move the country and its communities forward, Dow Ford said.

"Part of it is accountability," she said. "You need to be able to say what works and correct what doesn't work. You have to have expectations that students will do well. You have to have leadership.

"I have time, energy, capacity and courage. I have a good resume of experience for the kinds of challenges that confront America and our communities within the 17th District. I know I have strong leadership. We need that right now."

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