



Democratic candidates call for job creation, stronger leadership

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Lebanon resident John Harvey talks with Congressional candidate Sheila Dow Ford at the Lebanon County Democratic Committee's annual Spring Fling fundraiser. Dow Ford will face incumbent Tim Holden for the 17th District Congressional seat. (LEBANON DAILY NEWS JIM ZENGERLE)

MT. ZION - Democratic candidates pushed for strong leadership, job creation and more affordable education Friday night at the Lebanon County Democratic Committee's annual Spring Fling fundraiser dinner.

"We're worried about our jobs, retirement income and worried about funding our children's education. We better be more focused politically in

terms of government," said state Auditor General Jack Wagner, who is seeking the Democratic nomination for governor in the May Primary Election.

Candidates or their staff from the local, state and federal levels attended the event.

Wagner told about 100 attendees at the Mt. Zion Community Fire Co. that Pennsylvania must play up its strengths, many of which (manufacturing, distribution and agriculture) are found in Lebanon County.

"We need to make the business climate more competitive in Pennsylvania, and I'm a Democrat saying that," he said. "I believe that we need a competitive environment in Pennsylvania."

One way to do this, he said, is by tapping into Pennsylvania's huge natural gas resource that would create thousands of jobs. Regarding education, Pennsylvania is one of the highest cost states where an average student out of college is faced with \$26,000 debt, he told the crowd.

One way to make higher education more affordable is to follow the lead of other states by using public funds to provide scholarships to Pennsylvania residents to attend state schools.

Sheila Dow Ford, who will face off with Congressman Tim Holden for the nomination for the 17th Congressional District seat, said she understands the need for education reform as well.

Holden spoke early and left before the dinner.

Working in the educational policy arena for 25 years, Dow Ford said she will aim to expand access

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to community colleges and technical training programs within the state and ensure student loans are offered at affordable rates and that grants are available to offset certain costs of higher education.

Dow Ford also called for the need for an effective tax policy that does not injure the middle class.

She also said she has been a vocal health-care reform supporter.

"I don't believe it's unpopular to stand up for what is right and say that families are hurting and that we need health-care reform," she said.

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