

[back to article](#)



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# Creative ideas emerge at local political forum

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Light turnout at a political forum Sunday afternoon gave a smattering of candidates a few extra moments in the spotlight - and that shone at times on some creative ideas that have received little attention so far this election cycle.

It kicks off the final full week of campaigning before the June 10 primary.

All candidates in contested state and local races were invited to Wofford College's Leonard Auditorium Sunday - 28 in all. But as candidates and their families came and went, there were fewer than 30 people in the audience at any given time. At the end of the day, 16 participated.

Topics ranged from the environment to public transportation, and from spending caps to public education funding.

A snapshot of some of the answers:

In the increasingly contentious House District 34 race, retired Piedmont Natural Gas executive Mike Forrester and insurance salesman Ken Roach both advocated a stronger emphasis on recycling. Forrester, who also highlighted the need to strengthen state ethics laws, said, "This is a county that really needs to push recycling very hard. We could probably extend the life of our landfills by 10 or 15 years if we just recycled."

Roach took a bit harder stance: "If we as a state can mandate recycling as the first form of waste disposal, that would be a very positive signal from the state level back to our government agencies and the private sector. Because it's been proven that recycled products when used in the manufacturing setting are more energy proficient." Roach also said he'd support a third-party financial audit of the state education system to make sure that money in public schools is being used the best way possible.

On the topic of air quality, Spartanburg County Council District 4 candidate Jane Hall said she would "love" to see a ban on brush burning - in part because such burning could cause asthma attacks in people who normally wouldn't have them. Later, Hall cited the lack of industry in the Woodruff-Enoree area and then highlighted the need for public transportation outside of the city of Spartanburg: "Our people have to go where the jobs are. To drive 20 miles one way back and forth every day to a job is going to be more expensive than a common person can pay for."

The incumbent in that race, County Councilman Rock Adams, highlighted the need for planned development in order to keep the Woodruff and Pacolet areas from looking like Boiling Springs. He cited the encroaching development on the Abner Creek community as an area in danger of uncontrolled growth from the Greer area. Adams, a supporter of the county's \$25 road fee, was not asked about that controversial issue, but he brought it up anyway, and defended it.

Incumbent Harold Mitchell pointed out that House District 31, which he represents, ranks second in the state for saturation of public housing. He also said there has never been any strategic plan for housing in that community, which has had negative side effects on education and economic development.

Mitchell heads an affordable housing task force, which he helped launch, under the auspices of the lieutenant governor's office.

Mitchell's challenger, Raymond Russell, talked about the need to combat gang violence, teen pregnancy and the high school dropout rate. He also said he would be in favor of putting more money into the public school system.

Senate District 12 candidate Scott Talley said the state funding formula for public education does not take into account rapid-growth areas, and that under the current setup, schools in such areas - he specifically cited Spartanburg School District 5 - receive a disproportionate amount of funding. He said a bill to address that problem stalled in Columbia this year, but he vowed to support it next year.

House 32 candidate Christina Jeffrey said there was a shortage of educators in the Legislature and the Republican Party, and she offered to help out with that deficit. "The key to excellent education is not necessarily how much is spent on it," she added. "The problems that plague our education system are probably not related directly to funding."

Derham Cole Jr., who is challenging Jeffrey for the vacant House seat in their district, advocated a "market-based" attempt to find ways to use cleaner forms of energy and to better promote conservation.

Senate District 13 candidate Max Hyde said that "people are not following jobs, but jobs are following people," and he tied that in to the need for good neighborhoods, sidewalks, trees and education - basically, saying that addressing quality-of-life

issues can directly impact recruiting and retaining new businesses.

House District 37 candidate Steve Parker said the state needs to look more at solar power and nuclear energy to combat rising energy costs. He also said the name "South Carolina Education Lottery" makes him sick, because "it's sending the message to our kids that it's OK to gamble."

County Council District 1 candidate Michael Brown said there was an illegal landfill in his district, and that the county was looking into a methane-extraction project there, similar to the one recently approved to supply that gas to a Milliken & Co. plant from the county's landfill near Wellford.

Sunday's forum was sponsored by the local League of Women Voters, News Channel 7, Upstate Forever, and 107.3 JAMZ.

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