

Mayoral candidates debate safety

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The mayoral candidates agreed Wednesday night that safety is a major campaign issue, but the hopefuls for Cleveland's highest office often disagreed about ways to make the city safer.

The forum, held by the Cleveland Police Patrolmen's Association and the Cleveland Firefighters union Local 93 at the police union hall on West 58th Street, touched on issues specific to each union, but also on themes of interest to many voters. Topics included increasing the number of police and firefighters, merging the EMS and Fire departments, safety force regionalism and whether Cleveland should continue its residency requirement for city workers.

The candidates said they wanted to rehire laid-off police and firefighters and hire more if funds could be found.

Former Safety Director James Draper and Michael L. Nelson, a lawyer and president of the Greater Cleveland chapter of 100 Black Men, were among the candidates who said city officials should do a better job of tapping federal and other grant money to increase the safety ranks.

Former Cleveland Municipal Judge Robert Triozzi said economic development could help pay for more police and firefighters by increasing the city coffers. He said creating jobs also lowers lawlessness.

"Crime is an economic issue," he said.

Council President Frank Jackson, who chairs the Finance Committee, said as mayor he would work to find funds to hire police and firefighters, though finding money isn't as easy as some of the candidates said.

"To make . . . a political promise without the revenue is not only impractical, but deceptive," Jackson said.

Mayor Jane Campbell said she brought back laid-off employees when there were openings. She said deciding about the layoffs was hard but that the city's fiscal troubles left her with no alternatives. What would her challengers have done if they had been faced with the same situation?

"I am the only one who actually had to do this," Campbell said.

Retorted David Lynch: "As mayor of the city of Euclid, I faced . . . [fiscal problems], but faced them successfully."

Lynch has said that he was able to take the suburb from a deficit to a surplus.

Former City Councilman Bill Patmon said the city could save money and lower response times by combining the EMS and Fire departments. He said money wasn't the main motivation.

"The real reason for doing this is saving Clevelanders' lives," he said.

Bob Beck, the police union president, and Bob Fisher, president of the firefighters union, said the candidates' answers would play a role in endorsements for the Oct. 4 primary. Beck said, "I happen to think that Jim Draper will make a great mayor," but he said union officials would have the final say.

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