

Campbell Among Issues Raised During Debate

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Several Cleveland mayoral candidates took jabs at incumbent Jane Campbell on Saturday, as they sat shoulder-to-shoulder on the altar of a Euclid Avenue church.

The nine candidates were at the Church of the Covenant for the year's second mayoral debate, sponsored by the African American Women's Agenda.

Sometimes their jabs were subtle, as when former Euclid Mayor David Lynch answered a question about bolstering city health programs, in part, by saying: "Mayor Campbell wouldn't have been laying off police officers if we didn't have budgetary problems."

Other times they were more blatant, as when Cleveland lawyer Michael L. Nelson said the mayor "bragged" about securing 20 percent of jobs on city construction projects for residents. He said residents should have 50 percent of the jobs.

The mayor stood up -- literally -- to her critics, rising from her chair for her turn to speak. She defended her record, saying it's easier to talk about how to run a city than to actually run it.

With the primary election less than six weeks away, the candidates tried to distinguish themselves by offering ideas on how to improve health care, create jobs and fix Cleveland's cash-strapped school system.

Nelson said he wants to end mayoral control of the schools and let residents elect a school board again. He also advocates handing out condoms and clean needles to help curb the spread of AIDS.

Former Cleveland Municipal Judge Robert Triozzi proposed creating an Office of the Inspector General at City Hall. He said it's not enough to call for a special investigator to review allegations such as using minority contractors as front companies for non-minority contractors, which Campbell did last week.

Lynch, who is emerging as the most persistent critic of Campbell, faulted the mayor for letting the Bond Accountability Commission -- charged with overseeing the \$1 billion school construction project -- "fade away into nothing."

Campbell said the commission is scheduled to meet on Tuesday.

For the most part, City Council President Frank Jackson, viewed by many as the biggest threat to Campbell, avoided jabs at the mayor. The one exception was when he criticized the administration for not completing an economic impact study before granting approval for construction of a Wal-Mart superstore at Steelyard Commons.

The study, which is being done now, will look at how the big-box retailer and supermarket will affect neighborhood grocers and retail businesses.

Jackson highlighted his deep Cleveland roots, saying he has lived in the same neighborhood his entire life and understands the problems his community deals with every day.

He said he has family members who are in prison, addicted to drugs, unemployed and dealing with teen pregnancy.

Cleveland's future, he said, is his family's future.

"For me, it's not a campaign," Jackson said. "It's a mission."