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Union County Gubernatorial Candidates Forum Held in Springfield: "To Build a Thriving New Jersey"

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April 27, 2017 at 1:37 PM



Crowd at Forum

Credits: Ellen Dickson

SPRINGFIELD, NJ - The Union County Gubernatorial *Candidates Forum* held at the Holy Cross Lutheran

Church in Springfield on April 25 focused on affordable housing. The event was called "The Union County Candidates and Community Leader's Forum to Build a Thriving New Jersey".

All gubernatorial candidates were invited to speak or send a representative. The speakers were Democrats and Green Party candidate Seth Kaper-Dale. Some Springfield residents were in attendance including Springfield Township Committeewoman Erica DuBois and Democratic Party Chair Chris Capodice.

The sponsors for the event included Community Access Unlimited, Elizabeth Coalition to House the Homeless, Family Promise Union County, Gateway Family YMCA, HomeFirst, Housing & Community Development Network of NJ, Iris House, Monarch Housing Associates, and the Union County Interfaith Coordinating Council.

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Speakers included Democratic gubernatorial candidates State Senator Ray Lesniak(D-20) and State Assemblyman John Wisniewski (D-19), and Green Party candidate Seth Kaper-Dale a pastor for fifteen years. Assembly woman Annette Quijano (D -20) represented Democratic candidate Phil Murphy as did Democratic candidate for state senate Union County Sheriff Joseph Cryan.

In a press release from the Housing and Community Development Network of New Jersey titled "Build a Thriving New Jersey", there is a call on the next leaders of the state to invest \$600 million annually into homes residents can afford. Their hand-out states "We have a simple solution: start with the basics of making sure everyone can afford to call New Jersey home. If we build homes we can afford and revitalize the communities where we work and live we can *Build a Thriving New Jersey*. Our families, friends and neighbors are the heart of our state and the backbone of our economy. If we can't afford to live here we can't get our economy back on track."

Lesniak said his reason for running for Governor was that "...as Senator I can't do enough to make a difference. I passed bills to turn foreclosed homes into affordable homes, and Governor Christie vetoed the bills three times. He has forgotten about the regular citizens of New Jersey." Lesniak continued saying, "Governor Christie doesn't want the government involved in affordable housing. How are you going to get affordable housing if you don't have government involved? I support your platform 100%."

John Wisniewski has served in Assembly for 21 years. He asked what we can do to make a thriving economy in the state of New Jersey and he said he feels decisions are being made for insiders, political leaders and the top one percent. No decision was more emblematic of that in his opinion than the increase in the gas tax and the cut in the estate tax.

Wisniewski said, "The Governor asks that we Increase the gas tax and cut estate tax? Why are we as Democrats embracing this? Cut taxes to the wealthiest 3,500 families and those people walk away with a billion dollars. By lowering the estate tax we keep all the rich people in New Jersey. What does this do for the rest of us?" The assemblyman was clear that he does not believe in trickle down economics.

Then the assemblyman described the cause saying, "We have had a failure of policy on affordable housing. Government exists to do the things private entities won't do. Government has to provide housing. I will support everything in your agenda." He then said his idea is to create a 'public land trust' with the land upon which affordable housing is built to be owned by the public. "If government owns the land a large component of the housing cost is eliminated since the land will be owned by the public, the cost of housing should be less. I am committed to do if this if I become Governor." He finished with "Change the politics and make New Jersey representative of those who live in NJ. Not the one percent."

Pastor Seth Kaper-Dale of Highland Park is running as the Green Party candidate instead of running as a Democrat because sixty elected Democrats in the New Jersey legislature supported Governor Chris Christie. He said, "Enough is enough." His slogan is "The last are first". He believes it is time to break up the two party system and continued "You can't spaghetti supper your way to build affordable housing." He believes the money is there, the housing situation has gotten worse and now there is not enough money dedicated for housing." Part of his solution is "...an affordable land trust used to buy zombie foreclosures." He added "New Jersey needs to rewrite the tax code for those making 'grotesque' amounts of money from a system that is poisoning our planet." Part of the process involved "...looking at the very best places to place affordable housing. Too many towns are gated." He felt one role of government was to make sure residents are not segregated. Then said, "Every child whether refugee, undocumented, whether they have a single parent making a terrible wage should go to bed in a safe place. Life is about beauty."

About the statement he said, "I believe in everything in this statement. We should put even more money in the fund."

The link to the press release is <http://www.hcdnnj.org/buildathrivingnj>