

Testy

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ment is the district is high, and said he would help nurture a pro-business environment.

"We have to look to create an economic environment that is business friendly. The only way we're going to do that is to bring taxes down to a level where people can survive and operate a business," DeWeese said.

Van Drew said the Legislature needs to cut government red tape and bureaucracy that stymies business growth. He said there should be investments in green technology in the district that bolsters job growth.

"We need to have plentiful energy at every level, not only solar and wind, but we need to look at some of the other options. If New Jersey has plentiful energy that's not too expensive we will be able to move forward and be competitive," Van Drew said.

DeWeese hammered Van Drew on the various taxes the senator voted for, mocking Van Drew's self-label as "bipartisan."

"He talks about bipartisan way over and over again," DeWeese said. "Jeff, tell the truth. You voted 35 times for tax increases and fees, \$3 billion in increases in taxes."

This led to a testy exchange between the two candidates, as Van Drew interjected that the Republican candidates "distorted his record."

"Please don't interrupt me, Senator Van Drew," DeWeese said. "Calm down, sir. Relax."

DeWeese, a retired judge, said he supported tenure reform for teachers.

"I think the system that is in place is antiquated. It's time to reward good teachers and there are teachers out there who are not performing. I think the teachers in general agree there needs to be reform to the tenure system," DeWeese said. "What other

job do we have where you're guaranteed your position no matter how you perform?"

One woman called out "Judge," which drew chuckles from the audience.

"If you don't perform as a judge, they don't reappoint you," DeWeese responded.

Van Drew said tenure reform should be done in a way that omits politics.

"I really do believe this is an area where we need to work with teachers. We never work with them. We're always doing things to the educational system," Van Drew said. "Reform, yes, but intelligent reform that doesn't allow indiscriminate punitive activity where teachers would be hurt."

During the final portion of the debate, the candidates had the opportunity to ask each other questions.

Van Drew asked DeWeese why he criticized him over the proposed closing of the Vineland and Woodbine

developmental centers, which house developmentally disabled residents. Van Drew's plan proposed an overview to study the impact of closing the centers.

DeWeese said he found it hard to believe Van Drew said he was "blindsided" by the closing of the centers.

"We have in this district two developmental centers. I think you would be paying very careful attention to this issue if you were a legislator in this district," DeWeese said. "You weren't blindsided."

DeWeese accused Van Drew of championing the repairs of the Beesley's Point Bridge in Upper Township. The bridge, which links Cape May and Atlantic counties, was purchased for \$1 from its private owners. The county hired an engineer to examine the structural integrity of the bridge. Costs for repairing the bridge would be \$35 million, \$15 million more than

the New Jersey Department of Transportation estimated.

"Jeff, you stood in front of the Beesley's Point Bridge. You championed it as your cause to get that bridge open. You made a mistake. Stand up and admit it," DeWeese said.

Van Drew said Republican Freeholder Director Daniel Beyel condemned rhetoric from DeWeese's campaign regarding the bridge, which Beyel posted on his Facebook page.

DeWeese's campaign claimed Van Drew and his Assembly running mates incumbent Assemblymen Nelson Albano and Matt Milam supported the "McGreevey-Corzine agenda".

Van Drew said these claims were false, because Albano and Milam weren't in office during Gov. Jim McGreevey's term.

"I pointed out you, and Albano and Milam during

your time in Trenton over the past years have supported the McGreevey-Corzine agenda, and for this you have called me a liar," DeWeese said. "My wife, my daughter, my son are here tonight. Can you look them in the eye and tell them I'm a liar based upon those facts?"

Van Drew replied, "I say this with the greatest respect but yes, I can."

The senator rebuked DeWeese's campaign for the constant barrage of attack ads running for months.

"Dave, my son who bears the same name that I do and he sees the stuff you put out," Van Drew said. "It's been going on for almost a year. You know what the definition of a bully is? A bully is someone who likes to keep hitting you and hitting you over and over again, but when you finally say I've had enough, I'm going to hit you back, they start crying," Van Drew said.

Flag

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she said, the group hung a rainbow flag on her front door.

According to Panamarenko, around 7 p.m. a couple came in looking for something to eat. They asked about the function being held there, and were told it was a meeting of a gay and lesbian group. Panamarenko said the couple looked uncomfortable and the man said, "Why don't we just get some pizza," and left. She said after the couple left her mother took down the flag and said it was hurting business.

According to Raniszewski, the incident and the remark about hurting business was confirmed by two GABLES board members (GABLES is the name of an organiza-

tion promoting rights for gay, bisexual and lesbian citizens).

Panamarenko acknowledged her mother made the comment, but she said it does not characterize her attitude toward the gay community or justify accusations she is homophobic.

"There is no reason for this (controversy)," Panamarenko said. "They had no permission to hang their flag on the front door."

Panamarenko said she has been anything but homophobic toward the group, and has hosted their gatherings six times without asking for compensation.

"I was making no money, and I finally spoke to the group leader and asked for a minimal purchase by those who attend," she said.

Panamarenko said she is

being criticized for allegedly catering to customers who were homophobic.

"I want to make all people feel comfortable here, but they are making me take a position against bigots," she said.

Comments on facebook suggest Panamarenko should have taken a position against bigotry, saying taking down the flag was pandering to closed-minded people. Panamarenko said she does not exclude anyone from entering her shop. Likewise, she does not want symbols in her business or on her door. She said if you look around her store you will not find any such symbols, and that is why she supports her mother in taking down the flag.

"What it meant was (the flag) has nothing to do with

serving people a grilled cheese sandwich and a cup of coffee," Panamarenko said.

Attempts to explain her position have not had good results. Panamarenko said when she told members of the gay community she didn't care what they did in their personal life, one individual wrote on facebook, that phrase was "code for you're doing something perverted."

When she said they didn't do anything to harm or discriminate against the group, saying, "we welcomed you, we didn't do anything to your food or charge you higher prices" the writer said it was "code for, some people would think that was OK, but at least we didn't do that."

Raniszewski has posted comments of his own saying, "BOYCOT Higher Grounds

Coffee House, Cafe and Natural Market in Cape May. They hate the LGBT community. Can't wait to see them go out of business!"

A lengthy response from Panamarenko stating her position was likewise rebuffed.

"Do you have any idea what a load of crap that is?" Raniszewski wrote. "Apparently not... you and your business are a sickening disgrace to this community."

Raniszewski wrote that he would do everything in his power to inform people Higher Grounds did not deserve their business.

Event organizer Ann McCabe posted a message to Panamarenko saying she would never understand the hurtfulness and discrimination being suffered. McCabe

said the group was given permission many times over eight months to display their flag, something Panamarenko disputes.

Panamarenko said she has left the comments on facebook for two weeks to let people know she is not trying to stifle the criticism.

"We want the public to see both sides," she said.

She said people on both sides of the issue have said the matter has been taken too far. She said she and her business are above politics and labels.

A return email to Raniszewski asking for comments received no reply before deadline.



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Free

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take a look at things from a different perspective," Gabor said.

She said she wants to examine shared services county-wide.

"I think being in municipal government gave me a little perspective on sometimes you need county government to help you when you have an issue you can't get some results on," Gabor said. "County government has to pay more attention on what people need instead of worrying about what they need to do."

Morey points to the Wildwoods as a success in sharing services.

"Maybe one of the three communities provides beach maintenance and maybe another community provides the lifeguarding. Those are

the kinds of things we need to look at," Morey said.

Gabor advocated for more open discussion and resident input during freeholder meetings.

"Right now everything seems to be wrapped up tidy and neat and ready to go and it's done before anybody knows it. That's not how it's supposed to work. I'd like to have a lot more human contact and input by people," Gabor said.

Gabor said freeholder meetings currently last 15 minutes with little or no discussion by the board.

"If you need to get work done, you need open discussion and an open forum," Gabor said.

Morey said he wants to focus on economic development in the county.

"I want to look at a plan for how we can evolve into a better place to live, work and visit," Morey said. "I think the county has a great number of assets. I think it's time for us to turn our attention to work making our brand more appealing."

He said he is not afraid to gather experts and information.

"That's what we do when it comes to marketing and product development. I think I would take that same discipline or approach to the county as well," Morey said.

Morey said the county should determine what aviation opportunities, industry or services could be developed for the Cape May County Airport.

"I don't necessarily see it as a tourism opportunity, but maybe there is one. That's an area where it's important to pull people together and get ideas," Morey said. "I'm a believer in asking a lot of questions and getting a lot of input. As a county, we own the problem and have to work with the Naval Air Station and Lower Township to find a solution."

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