

## Candidates give views at forum

By **David Richards**

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Some are business men and women. Some are current school board members.

One by one, 11 in all, they took the stage at the Yosemite High School Performing Arts Center Monday for the candidate's forum hosted by the Yosemite Teacher's Association.

More than 60 Mountain Area residents and students turned out for the two-hour event, moderated by David Sebastian, minister of Oakhurst Lutheran Church.

The 11 candidates are running for the five school board seats that will open if Measure P, the unification of Yosemite Joint Union High School District with the Coarsegold Union School District, passes on the Nov. 8 special election.

If the measure fails, both district's board of trustees will remain unchanged.

The candidates include (in order they appeared on stage and in the sample ballot): Karen Hutchings, 58, of Raymond; Gregory Schoonard, 44, of Coarsegold; Priscilla Pike, 74, of Oakhurst; John Reynolds, 52, of Coarsegold; Ron Bucheger, 57, of Oakhurst; Dan Burrow, 56, of Oakhurst; Thomas Allcock, 54, of Ahwahnee; Linda Olson, 58, of Coarsegold; Bert McSwain, 81, of Wishon; Monika Moulin, 52, of Ahwahnee; and Christine Wilder, 45, of Coarsegold.

Hutchings, Pike, Allcock, Olson and McSwain are current board members of the Yosemite Joint Union High School District; Schoonard, Reynolds and Wilder are board members of the Coarsegold Union School District; Bucheger is a board member of the Bass Lake Union Elementary School District, while Burrow is a businessman and Moulin a church music director.

At Tuesday's forum, candidates provided brief introduction and wrap-up statements about themselves in addition to answering a range of questions, including several provided by the public.

"We think an informed constituency is a very good constituency," said Deborah Brown, PTA representative.

In the initial part of the program, two candidates were given the same question to answer and two minutes each to respond before a new question was asked to the next two candidates. In answering audience questions, candidates were given one minute apiece.

In a civilized setting, the candidates responded.

"We have wonderful educational programs," said Hutchings, when asked about what the strengths of the districts are and some of the challenges that lie ahead in the future. "The budget, that's always a challenge."

Questions ranged from budgets to the arts to specific facilities offered at Yosemite High School.

"The most valuable resource any organization has are the employees," Schoonard said, when asked if he felt the opportunities the pool offers outweighs the money it costs to fund the programs. "Without the employees and the students, the buildings and the programs amount to nothing. Yes it is worth the money we spend on the program, just like any other program."

Pike answered one question on how many hours a teacher works beyond an eight-hour work day.

"I understand the hours," Pike said. "We need to provide for them as much as we can. It is the position of the school board to show them they are appreciated."

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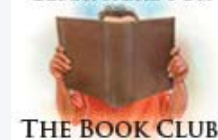
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Reynolds responded to the same question.

"We just can't thank them enough," he said. "Clearly, they are putting more hours in than their contractual obligation."

Bucheger was asked how he would address conflicts regarding employees of the district.

"You need to set policies and procedures in how to solve problems," he said.

During one question about whether he was in the election to make change, Burrow touched on his reason for running.

"It's an opportunity to serve my community," he said. "I'm not necessarily looking to change something as much as be there for other people."

Allcock responded to the same question.

"Change is going to happen if this (Measure P) passes," he said. "It would be my goal to have a smooth and seamless transition from two districts to one."

Olson commented as to if she felt board members deserved benefits packages since they are not full-time employees of the district.

She said that such a package is appropriate

"I think that it's a hard job," Olson said. "A school board member knows the district. They are embedded in what is going on."

McSwain agreed.

"You're looking at people tonight who have worked very hard to get where we are," he said. "My heart and soul is in this and I thank you for the opportunity."

Moulin was asked what value she saw in keeping the arts programs in schools.

"The facts are that music instruction helps in core academics as well," she said.

Wilder fielded a question in regard to how to maintain staff members at current salary levels.

"We need to find ways to give other perks to ensure people want to be here," she said.

Organizers of the forum said they were pleased with how the occasion went.

"I think it went quite well," Brown said. "It's going to be a new time and a new board and we all have to participate, so we elect the best because in the end, it's about the kids."

Yosemite High School senior Nicole Chirolo kept track of the amount of time allotted for each of the candidates.



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