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## EDUCATION

## School board forum

## 4 candidates share views

By Cassidy Smith / Correspondent

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Budget concerns, four-day school weeks and community involvement drew the attention of the four contenders for the Yosemite school board gathered at a candidate forum this week.

About 30 people attended the forum Monday night at Coarsegold Elementary School to hear from incumbents Priscilla Pike, Gregory Schoonard and Christine Wilder as well as challenger Tammy Loveland. The top three vote-getters will be elected to the board.

Members of the audience submitted written questions to the candidates. A majority of the questions related to the fiscal strain the school district has faced and will continue to face in the coming months. Dr. Bill Atwood, Mariposa Middle School principal and Sierra Star columnist, moderated the forum.

Implementing a four-day work week is one of the options the board is considering to cope with the financial challenge.

All four candidates said they were not sure if the four-day week is the best option, but said they were open to any idea that may help preserve current programs.

Loveland encouraged members of the community to join in the district's exploration of the idea by taking part in committees.

"It's a very open forum. The district has invited everybody to participate," Loveland said. "I think it would benefit everybody that if you are concerned about this to come to these meetings and to get involved and be on one of the many committees"

Similarly, Schoonard expressed his approval of research into any possible option.

"The majority of funds that districts have are salaries and benefits. That's the reality of it," Schoonard said. "With respect to the four-day week, I'm glad we're taking a look at it because I think it's important that we consider all options. But even if the district decided to go with that, it's only part of the solution."

Continuing with the budget-oriented theme, another voter asked the candidates if they were willing to forego the benefits included with the board member position in light of the failing economy.

The candidates agreed that they would absolutely do so and Schoonard said he already foregoes the benefits.

Members of the audience also questioned the role of parents in the board's decision-making process and asked how the high school and elementary schools were competing for the board's attention.

"I think we should absolutely hold board meetings at the elementary schools and the high school," Wilder said. "They need to rotate around. There has been discussion with the current board but it is not supported by the entire group."

Pike emphasized the importance of community involvement throughout the evening. "We're all getting together to figure out how best to raise our children, how they can grow in each individual way," Pike said. "What we have done in our district is try to offer each child what he needed."

Other topics discussed at the forum included board meeting attendance, term limits, Yosemite High School drug use and after-school enrichment programs.

Atwood closed the forum by explaining the importance of the upcoming election.

"The decisions you're making on election day are going to impact, policy-wise, kids in the class of 2021," Atwood said. "So as you vote and ponder what these four people have offered you, remember that this decision is not just for this year, but is looking out and touching the future."

Patricia Vallentyne, a Coarsegold resident who attended forum, said she thought the candidates are all "sincerely concerned."

"The candidates are all interested in the development of our community," Vallentyne said. "They understand that the level of the education in the community affects not only our school systems but affects the quality of life of our community."



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