

Legislature hopefuls discuss carbon fee, idea of sanctuary state at forum

PORT ANGELES — The four candidates vying to represent the 24th Legislative District in the state House of Representatives tackled the environment, immigration policy and other issues in a political forum last week.

Incumbent Reps. Steve Tharinger, D-Port Townsend, and Mike Chapman, D-Port Angeles, are being challenged in the Nov. 6 general election by Republicans Jim McEntire of Sequim — challenging Tharinger — and Jodi Wilke of Port Townsend — challenging Chapman.

The panel fielded 10 wide-ranging questions from audience members in a League of Women Voters of Clallam County forum at the Port Angeles Library on Thursday.

The candidates were asked whether they would support legislation to make Washington a sanctuary state like California.

Sanctuary statehood would limit cooperation between local officials and federal immigration enforcement.

“I’ve never heard of any such legislation,” said Tharinger, who chairs the House Capital Budget Committee and is seeking a fifth two-year term in Olympia.

“I think overall, as being a public servant and looking at what government provides, humanity and human-to-human relations is probably No. 1. So I’d support it.”

McEntire, a former Port of Port Angeles and Clallam County commissioner who challenged Tharinger for the House seat in 2010, noted that immigration policy is “in the province of national government.”

“I wouldn’t support such legislation because anything that inhibits communication and cooperation between law enforcement agencies, both at the local, state and national level, I think tends to hurt public safety,” said McEntire, a retired Coast Guard captain.

“And so I would not be inclined to support such a bill if it were to come up.”

Wilke, a political newcomer and licensed practical nurse who has worked in a variety of fields in the private sector, said she, too, would oppose sanctuary statehood.

“I really believe in the sovereignty of the United States,” Wilke said.

“I also notice that we spend a lot of money supporting people who are not citizens here. ... So I would have to vote against something like that.”

Chapman took issue with the hypothetical question.

“These are those moments in these forums,” Chapman said. “This isn’t a serious question because this piece of legislation has not been drafted.

“There’s nothing to look at,” he added. “You don’t know if it would be a one paragraph bill or 50 pages.”

Chapman, a former law enforcement officer who served with Tharinger for multiple terms as a Clallam County commissioner, said a one-page bill declaring Washington as a sanctuary state would never be drafted, introduced or supported in the Legislature.

Chapman added that he “might take a look” at a comprehensive immigration reform bill.

“Comprehensive immigration reform from a state perspective might make some sense since the federal government really is inactive on that issue right now,” Chapman said.

In her rebuttal, Wilke said Chapman’s “non answer is classic.”

“We have direct questions asked on several different occasions and find it difficult sometimes to get a straight answer from my opponent, which is unfortunate,” Wilke said.

“I think I would like a straight answer on the sanctuary concept, and I would also like a straight answer on other things like the carbon bill.”

Chapman declined to make a rebuttal on the sanctuary state question.

When asked if he would be comfortable with state Initiative 1631 – which would impose a fee for carbon emissions – diverting revenues to restrict housing development, Chapman said: “If the choice is preserving farmland and allowing farmers to keep their land in farming or turning it into development, I will support farmers.

“I will support farmland,” Chapman said. “I will support the ability to grow crops here locally every day of the week.”

Wilke said she opposed the carbon fee measure, which would impose a pollution fee of \$15 per metric ton of carbon released into the atmosphere if voters approve it in November.

The 24th District, which covers Clallam, Jefferson and part of Grays Harbor County, sequesters more carbon than it creates, Wilke said.

District residents should not be penalized for pollution generated in other areas, she said.

“I think it really depends upon which model you look at as to whether or not humans are to blame for the cause of global warming,” Wilke said.

“We know that [climate change] has happened over the history of the earth. And if a volcano goes off, it releases a whole lot of carbon, just like forest fires do.

“I think that we could do better on reviewing our scientific models before we start to put the pressure on people,” Wilke said.

If approved, Initiative 1631 would raise the cost of fuel and the various goods that are trucked to the North Olympic Peninsula, McEntire said.

“It’s going to have an impact on the cost of living,” McEntire said.

“And so for that reason and for that reason alone – and I’ve talked about the economy and the difficulties that our working families are already having and seniors on fixed incomes – I’m against the initiative.”

Tharinger said responsible growth and using natural resource lands to sequester carbon is a “good strategy.”

Speaking in general terms about carbon pollution and global warning, Tharinger said: “Mother Nature does not care whether we live on this planet.

“Mother Nature has sequestered for millennia carbon and we’ve released it, and it is damaging our ecosystem,” Tharinger said.

“And if we don’t get smart – and we’re supposed to be the thinking animal – and figure out a solution to this we won’t be around.”

Chapman said he was humbled to have been voted as an environmental champion and to have been selected as the Washington State Legislator of the Year by the Rural Jobs Coalition during his first term in office.

Chapman and Tharinger decried the “false choice” between economic development and environmental stewardship.

“If you can do it, why can’t I?” Wilke said of Chapman’s awards.

“When I’m in place, I’m going to do everything that I can to do a great job for looking out for our environment and looking out for the economy and our people in this area.”

McEntire said Washington state has a “custom and a culture of valuing the environment.”

“I would certainly look to continue that,” said McEntire, adding that there needs to be an “equal value and equal emphasis on economic growth.”

“The Department of Natural Resources right now is considering a sustainable harvest plan that will sequester more timber, state-owned timber, that provides funds for my opponent’s [capital] budget for school construction and money to local taxing districts, counties, fire districts and so on in favor of a seabird called the marbled murrelet,” said McEntire, who has served on the state Board of Natural Resources.

“We’ve seen this movie before with the Northwest Forest Plan and that is likely to really damage this county’s, in particular, economy.”

Tharinger countered that the sustainable harvest model and marbled murrelet conservation plan would release more timber for harvest.

“There will be impacts, there’s no question, because that will be a permanent set-aside,” Tharinger said.

“But in the end, there will be less acreage that’s set aside than right now.”

McEntire disagreed in rebuttal, saying all but one option proposed by DNR would keep more timber from being harvested.

“All of those options satisfy the requirements of the Endangered Species Act,” McEntire said.

“The Legislature is the trustee. The Legislature can do the right thing for the environment and the economy.”

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