

News

Brown, Orozco clash over life science, slots

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Challenger Sara Orozco of Needham, left, and incumbent state Sen. Scott Brown, R-Wrentham, debate Wednesday night at Attleboro City Hall. (Staff photo by Mark Stockwell)

State senate candidates debate in Attleboro

ATTLEBORO - State Sen. Scott Brown and Democratic challenger Sara Orozco clashed over support for the life science industry and slot machines in a debate long on policy and absent of jokes, sound bites or personal attacks Wednesday.

Brown, R-Wrentham, presented himself as an independent voice who has delivered for his district in the debate sponsored by The Sun Chronicle and the business group FAIR.

Orozco, a psychologist from Needham, said she represents change and would be an advocate for middle class families.

The newcomer to politics repeatedly challenged Brown on his vote against a \$1 billion life science bill that she said will bring high-paying jobs to the state. She said she would like to make Attleboro and its planned industrial park a center for life science firms and their jobs.

"To vote against life sciences is to vote against jobs," she said.

Orozco said the economy and education are closely linked and the new Bristol Community College branch in Attleboro could train local residents for jobs in the life science industry.

"Attleboro is in a perfect location," to capture those jobs she said, adding "economic development is my No. 1 priority."

Brown said Attleboro would never benefit from the bill and Stop & Shop provides more jobs in Massachusetts than the life science industry.

He said he is not opposed to life sciences, but the bill passed by the Legislature was a \$1 billion "boondoggle" full of pork barrel earmarks.

"I don't want to throw \$100 million a year at it," he said.

Brown said targeted state grants he has worked to get have paved the way for jobs at Patriot Place, Wrentham Village Premium Outlets, and Stern Metals.

Brown said more jobs for the area could be created by legalizing slot machines at race tracks, such as Plainridge Racecourse in Plainville.

"Jobs are jobs. Good jobs, bad jobs, people want to work," he said.

He also said slot machines would generate revenue for the state and host communities such as Plainville at a time when governments are slashing budgets.

Half of all slot machine revenue would go to the state, he said.

Orozco said slot machines do not stimulate the economy like life sciences or "green technology" firms would.

Legalizing slot machines would open the way for more gambling and could hurt the state lottery, she said.

The challenger also questioned if all the campaign contributions Brown receives from gambling interests influenced his support for slot machines.

Brown responded that he never bends to special interests.

The candidates found one area of possible agreement.

Orozco said approving a law giving cities and towns the option to impose a small meals tax and making telecommunications companies pay property taxes on wiring would give communities like Attleboro the money they need for projects like the city's downtown renewal effort.

Brown said he favors the telecommunication tax and has an open mind about allowing communities to have a meals tax.

The senator pressed Orozco on whether she would have voted for the current state budget that is now out of balance. He and other Republicans voted against it.

She did not directly answer, but said Republicans wanted to deplete state reserve funds last spring.

Brown said he has the support of people like state Reps. John Lepper, R-Attleboro; Betty Poirier, R-North Attleboro, and organization like the National Federation of Independent Businesses because he is fiscally conservative, works across party lines and is independent.

With 16 years as a Wrentham selectman, assessor, state representative and senator, comparing resumes with Orozco is no contest, he said.

Orozco said she has won the endorsements of Gov. Deval Patrick and U.S. Reps. James McGovern and Barney Frank because she works hard, listens to people, and sees opportunity for great things for the Attleboro area.