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## Economy takes center stage in debate as Morris politicians stand in for Obama, McCain

Inglesino, Wyka square off, representing their political parties

*By Michael Daigle  
Daily Record*

EAST HANOVER -- The state of the U.S. economy sparked the most contentious debate Monday when Democrat Tom Wyka and Republican John Inglesino presented their parties' positions on key national issues before members of the Hanover Area Chamber of Commerce.

Wyka of Parsippany is the Democratic Party candidate opposing Republican Rep. Rodney Frelinghuysen for his 11th District Congressional seat, while Inglesino, an attorney, is a former Morris County freeholder and a county campaign chairman for Republican presidential candidate John McCain.

The event, which drew about 20 chamber members and guests to Warnock Automotive, mirrored the national discussion as Wyka said that this November election is about how well voters feel McCain or Democrat Barack Obama will bring about the changes needed in Washington to lead the nation into the future, while Inglesino said the election is about "people and issues." He said McCain has been willing to buck his own party on key issues, including the time he voted against sending troops to Lebanon during the Reagan years.

Wyka said that change will come to Washington when voters send the right people there, such as Obama, who he said is dedicated to ending the way business has been done there for the past eight years under President Bush.

The issue of taxes appeared to be at the center of the economic debate.

Inglesino said that McCain would increase the federal government's revenues by cutting taxes on small business, capital gains and others, and would not increase payroll taxes to pay for such programs as Social Security or Medicare.

He said the problem is not that the federal government does not collect enough income, but spends too much money. He said that Obama plans to raise taxes.

Inglesino said measuring the state of the U.S. economy is a relative process, and that while U.S. unemployment is a concern (topping 6.1 percent in August) other industrialized nations have higher unemployment rates.

Wyka said that Americans had heard the theory that tax cuts increase revenue before, under President Ronald Reagan. It was called "supply side" economics or the "trickle down" theory of economics, Wyka said.

No study has ever shown that the trickle down theory worked, he said. Obama laid out a program that would cut taxes for 95 percent of Americans, Wyka said. Obama would roll back the Bush tax

cuts on the wealthiest Americans, so that those income tax rates would return to the levels they were during the Clinton administration, he said.

Improving the education system is a key element of economic improvement, both men said, but they disagreed on how that improvement should come.

Inglesino said that in his acceptance speech last week McCain said that poorly performing teachers would be given the opportunity to find new jobs, and that community colleges would be important to the re-education and retraining of workers whose jobs had been outsourced.

He also said McCain supported offering parents the choice of schools their children could attend as a way of improving public education.

Wyka said that Obama, in his acceptance speech, promised he would invest in public schools and offer teachers higher salaries as part of a plan to generate better education. Speaking for himself, Wyka said that teachers, of all college graduates, comprise the lowest paid group of such graduates.

He said that he would support a system of merit pay to reward the best teachers, but that he was not supportive of vouchers because they were a "cop-out" and an abandonment of the public education system.

The nation's economic future is also tied to its ability to develop new sources of energy to wean the country off foreign oil, both men agreed.

Inglesino said McCain believes that tax incentives for small businesses are the best way to generate innovation and development of the new technologies needed to create new sources of energy. He said that taxing company profits would not help develop these new technologies or reduce fuel prices.

In the meantime, McCain believes that drilling for oil off-shore and in other places is the best way to carry the nation through the transition to alternative sources of energy, Inglesino said.

Wyka said that McCain espoused the drill-now position after receiving \$1.5 million in campaign contributions from oil producers, when he previously was opposed to additional drilling.

Wyka said Obama would use taxes on excess oil company profits to fund research and tax credits for small companies to perform research on new energy technologies.

Wyka criticized Frelinghuysen for supporting earmarks, those additional government payouts to government agencies, saying campaign contributions can influence who gets the money. Inglesino said that Frelinghuysen has supported arms research projects at Picatinny Arsenal, which often are budget earmarks, but has rarely supported additional funds for programs "outside the mission."

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