

3rd District hopefuls weigh resolve to wage war

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The 3rd District special election campaign started with arguments about taxes, immigration and health care, but Tuesday's terrorist attacks underlined the likelihood that the winning candidate will vote on questions of retaliation, war or peace.

"Campaigning for Congress has been a great joy and a great pleasure, but the last 24 hours have really brought home the fact that there is more to it than the warmth of good friends during a campaign," said Bill Williams of Bella Vista, a Democratic candidate. "It's a huge responsibility and a gigantic job.

"When the Congress stood up and sang 'God Bless America' last night, I felt bad ... because nobody there was singing for me," Williams said, referring to the absence of someone to represent the 3rd District.

Asa Hutchinson resigned from the seat to become head of the federal Drug Enforcement Administration. His successor will be chosen in a special election Nov. 20. Party primaries are Sept. 25.

The four Republicans and three Democrats in the race were asked Wednesday: What makes you qualified to decide matters of war and peace?

Williams, 57, served six months in Vietnam as a Marine, an assignment he says was less dangerous than others experienced there, though he recalls he was shot at and sometimes mortars hit the air base where he was stationed.

"Having been to war, I understand both the destruction and the necessity of it," he said. "I wouldn't shirk from that duty if it came to that in Congress, but I would only pursue it when every other option had failed."

Republican John Boozman of Rogers, an optometrist, said his experiences and the seriousness with which he would approach the task were his chief qualifications for making decisions on such issues. He would seek out all the information and other views on such a question, he said.

Boozman said he had no objection in principle to voting to support a declaration of war "if all the facts were in and if I concluded that it was in the best interest of the United States."

Brad Cates of West Fork, an attorney and former U.S. Justice Department official, said deciding to wage war "is a decision no person would ever take lightly, but under the right circumstances, of course I would vote for it."

He said his Justice Department experience in the Reagan and Bush administrations and his travels and business activities in foreign countries qualify him to decide issues of war, peace and foreign relations.

Former state Rep. Jim Hendren, R-Sulphur Springs, a former U.S. Air Force fighter pilot who did not see combat, said two of his close friends and six Marines were killed in a helicopter crash during training in Alaska. "I'm qualified because I know what we'd be asking, and I know that the people we ask will do it, whatever it is," he said.

State Rep. Jo Carson, D-Fort Smith, whose father made a career of the Army and whose brother is a Marine major, said she has "never shirked from a fight."

Carson is an attorney, former public defender specializing in cases involving young defendants, and a two-term state legislator. She said she is an American Indian and that the culture honors warriors without glorifying war itself.

State Sen. Gunner DeLay, R-Fort Smith, said he was the only candidate in the race who has emphasized "border security" since the race began.

"If our borders are open to illegal immigration, they are open to terrorism," said DeLay, who has declared illegal immigration to be the "defining issue" of the race.

State Rep. Mike Hathorn, D-Huntsville, said that during his legislative career he has "worked extensively with Maj. Gen. Jack Ryan and former Veterans' Secretary Hershel Gober, and as a member of Congress I will continue to seek the counsel of military and international relations experts."

"I support the decisions of the current administration and will expend every effort as a congressman to see those responsible for this act of cowardice are brought to justice," Hathorn said.

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