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## **Democratic candidates come to Macon for forum, funds**

**By Travis Fain**

Democratic candidates for governor and state superintendent of schools were in Macon on Thursday for a handful of events.

Former Gov. Roy Barnes held a fundraiser at SoChi in downtown Macon, House Minority Leader DuBose Porter held a fundraiser at a home off Vineville Avenue and a teachers group held a forum for several candidates in a banquet hall near Interstate 475.

The forum drew about 20 people, less than organizers expected.

But gubernatorial candidate David Poythress, a Macon native and former head of the Georgia National Guard, was there, as was Carl Camon, the mayor of Ray City in south Georgia. Candidates for state school superintendent and the United States Senate also attended.

The event was billed as a "Talkback Thursday" before today's "Furlough Friday," and was to be followed by a party for teachers complete with a bar and D.J. Teachers across the state are off today for an unpaid furlough enacted to save the state money.

Barnes' and Porter's fundraisers conflicted with the forum, though both made an appearance there. Poythress and Camon spoke at greater length, and both hit on their backgrounds. Camon is a teacher, as well as mayor of Ray City, and Poythress' mother taught school in Bibb County. Both candidates promised strong advocacy, and appropriate funding, for public education.

Poythress said education will be "the defining issue" of the 2010 gubernatorial elections and that whoever teachers unite behind will be the next governor. Camon said it's time to give teachers more authority and that "in short, we need to respect teachers."

They were joined at the forum by Brian Westlake and Beth Farokhi, who are running for state school superintendent, and RJ Hadley, who is running for Sen. Johnny Isakson's seat in the U.S. Senate. Westlake, a former Marine and a teacher, said he'd advocate for teachers in a way current State Superintendent of Schools Kathy Cox has not.

"We've heard virtually nothing from the state schools superintendent (as the budget has been cut)," Westlake said. "I will be that advocate."

Farokhi said the state needs to give teachers "the time to prepare, the time to teach and the time to be creative ... not teaching to the test."

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