



Democrat heavyweights out early for rally at Old Tate Gym

Poythress, Barnes, Porter all hit on theme of water, transportation, education

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In what may have been the first joint campaign appearance for State Election 2010, top Democrat gubernatorial candidates, DuBose Porter, Roy Barnes and David Poythress spoke to a crowd of about 100 in the Old Tate Gym Saturday. In addition to governor candidates, two state school superintendent campaigns and Joseph Man, who will run against Chip Pearson for his state Senate seat, were represented at the picnic/rally.

David Robinson, chairman for Pickens Democrats, said they were pleased with the turnout among top contenders. Thurbert Baker, the state's attorney general, sent word he was not available, but the other three top governor candidates were cooperative, glad to come to Pickens County well in advance of the 2010 elections, Robinson said.

Local Democratic Party leadership was also pleased that 100 party members turned out for a rally this early in the political cycle in an area not known as a Democrat stronghold.

"With no election this year, it being in the summer and not a lot of political activity yet, we were pleased with the turnout," Robinson said.

Moderator Wyc Orr began with a fiery introduction, reminding Democrats in attendance that while this area is now strongly Republican, they should remember and remind newcomers here that this was once solid Democrat country for most of its history. Democrats like Phil Landrum and Ed Jenkins of Jasper made North Georgia the great place it is, Orr said.

It is believed the rally was the first joint appearance by top Democrats ahead of the July 20, 2010 primary.

All three of the gubernatorial candidates present used a similar theme in their remarks, noting there is a great opportunity to reclaim the governorship with the failings of Republican Sonny Perdue.

Former Governor Roy Barnes, who is seeking the seat again after being defeated by Perdue, said Republicans have their priorities in the wrong place and lack the political will to address Georgia's problems. "As the old Testament states, 'People perish where there is no vision,'" Barnes said.

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All three candidates hit on a mix of three top issues: education, transportation and water. Each noted these three issues are all tied to economic development.

“Transportation, water and education—we all know there are problems and know they are bad problems,” said Poythress, a former secretary of state and state labor commissioner.

Dubose Porter said Republicans are afraid of making tough decisions in dealing with the current economic downturn. “We need to return to priority budgeting,” Porter said. “When they make across-the-board cuts, they avoid tough decisions.”

Porter, like the other two, made note of Perdue’s decision to continue funding for a plan to build and promote fishing lakes while the state furloughed teachers and closed a veteran’s home.

Both Porter and Barnes stressed transportation issues must be addressed immediately with education and water as the next priorities.

Barnes termed Georgia’s transportation problem a “severe transportation problem” and said light rail is needed. Porter, who has served 27 years in the Georgia Legislature, said, “Transportation is the big one looming over us. Businesses are already looking to Charlotte and other areas. We are losing our edge. Right now we have got to fix transportation.”

He also noted that rail and mass transit must be given more attention.

Poythress told the crowd his website includes his position on all the issues but wanted to use the majority of his speech Saturday to discuss education. He said teachers must be viewed as the solution, and he said they must be equipped with the latest educational technology. He said this would be expensive, but having classrooms complete with the best educational technology available would improve test scores and help Georgia students compete when they leave high school with other students from around the world.

Also speaking was a representative from the Beth Farokhi For State School Superintendent campaign and Brian Westlake, who is running for state school superintendent.

Closing out the slate of speakers was Joseph Mann, of Fannin County, challenging Chip Pearson for the state senate seat that serves Pickens.