

Voters in 4th hear candidates

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From first-time voters at Fairfield University to seasoned voters from the ranks of retirees, candidates for the U.S. House of Representatives from the 4th District sparred Monday over how to deal with North Korea, improve education, and even about whether to permit Internet gambling.

In the eighth of 11 debates scheduled throughout the district, Democratic challenger Diane Farrell charged at the university forum that the Bush administration has courted international crisis by alienating and turning its back on other countries.

"When you don't talk, you end up with these types of actions," the former Westport first selectwoman charged.

But Rep. Christopher Shays, the 19-year Bridgeport incumbent she hopes to unseat, defended President Bush's efforts to involve other nations in this particular issue.

"We need to be multilateral," he said. He also said blockades can work, saying they had worked to address problems in South Africa.

On Korea, Libertarian Philip Maymin, of Greenwich, argued for neutrality, suggesting that the U.S. has funded the problem by historically offering aid to induce deferment of nuclear testing.

Meanwhile, Green Party candidate Richard Duffee, of Stamford, said that the U.S. effort in Iraq has encouraged nuclear proliferation by persuading other countries that they can defend themselves by developing such weapons.

On another topic, Shays explained his support for school vouchers, saying welfare parents who wanted to put their youngsters in a parochial

school with help of a school voucher would also take some pressure off overburdened urban school districts.

But Farrell renewed her criticism, saying that the answers to improved education are better teachers and lower class sizes. She said longer school days and years may also be necessary.

On the question of Internet gambling, Maymin said government should not tell citizens when they could roll dice.

But Farrell agreed with a recent vote by Shays to scuttle Internet gambling.

Earlier in the day, senior citizens at an AARP candidates forum on health care and Social Security in Bridgeport instead heard Shays and Farrell go at it about Iraq and negative advertising.

In discussing how to contain health-care costs, Farrell noted how her opponent never mentions "the \$250 million we are spending every day in Iraq."

Farrell called Iraq a personal issue. She has a cousin serving there.

Shays countered that for all her talk about Iraq, Farrell never offers a solution on how to get out.

"I have a plan. I've been there 14 times. I know what we need to do to get the Iraqis to make the tough decisions," he said.

On Social Security, Farrell said she agrees with the AARP that placing its funds into private accounts would weaken the system.

Shays said he believes in personal thrift savings accounts with all his heart and soul but would not back such a bill unless it had bipartisan backing.

On long-term care, Shays added that he can promise every benefit "you want as long as you don't mind your kids and your kids' kids paying for it."