

No surprises: Candidates stand firm at 8th debate

By Mark Ginocchio
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FAIRFIELD — Fourth Congressional District candidates gave it the old college try last night as they fielded questions from students at Fairfield University.

A six-member student panel asked the four congressional candidates about foreign and domestic affairs, and allowed a few residents to ask about topics ranging from public education funding to Internet gambling.

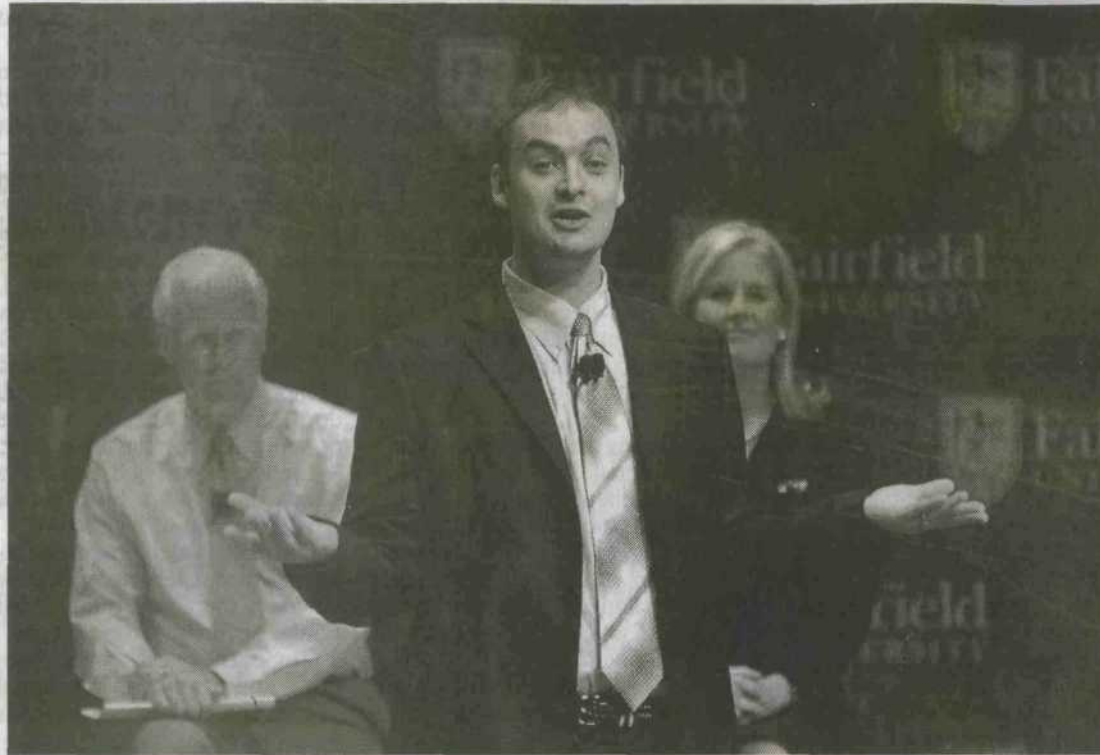
After eight debates this month, and with three left this week, the candidates' messages remained unchanged.

U.S. Rep. Christopher Shays, R-Bridgeport, continued his assertions that he is an independent voice in Washington, who will challenge the Republican majority.

When asked about his voting record siding more with the Bush administration in recent years, Shays dismissed it as partisan misinformation.

"Just after September 11, I believed in most of the things the president was working on, to confront Islamic terrorism," Shays said. "I have maintained my moderate Conservative rating. . . . I am the same person in terms in how I believe in the hopes and dreams of this country."

Democratic candidate Diane Farrell, who has focused her campaign around the need for change in Washington because of the lack of oversight by the Republican leadership, questioned whether Shays' deviations from



Paul Desmarais/Staff photo

Libertarian candidate Phil Maymin, center, criticizes U.S. Rep. Christopher Shays, R-Bridgeport, left, and Democratic challenger Diane Farrell, right, for their Iraq war exit strategies during a debate last night at Fairfield University. Maymin wants a deadline of July 4 to get out of Iraq. Green Party candidate Richard Duffee, not pictured, also participated in the event in Fairfield.

the Bush administration has made a difference.

"Think about the votes that he's cast that matter most to you," Farrell said. "The war, debts and deficits and mortgaging our children's future, his choice and the president's choice to privatize Social Security . . . he's been so in sync with the Bush administration's policies."

Libertarian Phil Maymin has presented himself as an alterna-

tive, favoring small government, eliminating income taxes and establishing an exit strategy from Iraq — out by July 4.

Maymin criticized Shays' plan to set a timeline and Farrell's call for a diplomatic solution with benchmarks for troop withdrawals.

"My Republican opponent suggests a timeline without a time," Maymin said. "Now I know my math may be a little

rusty, but I think that just leaves us with a line. My Democratic opponent wants benchmarks which are undefined. She wants everyone to sit around and say 'Let's just stop fighting guys.' That's not an exit strategy."

In what was his second and last debate for the campaign, Green Party candidate Richard Duffee lashed out against the Bush administration, the Patriot Act and the war on terror.

In the race

■ The 4th Congressional District election has been considered by most political analysts to be a toss-up. The Advocate and Greenwich Time taken this month showed U.S. Rep. Christopher Shays up 44 percent to 40 percent with 16 percent undecided.

"We are in a much safer country than we were in 1989 or in 1984," Duffee said, referring to the end of the Cold War and the country's conflict with the Soviet Union. "What has changed is not that the world is more dangerous but is less predictable. I don't think it's necessary for us to change our laws to be able to cope with this. It's certainly not necessary for us to invade other countries."

The congressional debates conclude Thursday at Continental Manor in Norwalk in a matchup sponsored by the Greater Norwalk Chamber of Commerce.

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A Reuters/Zogby poll released this month put Farrell ahead of Shays 46 percent to 41 percent with 13 percent still undecided; a poll by The Advocate and Greenwich Time taken during the same period showed Shays up 44 percent to 40 percent with 16 percent undecided.