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Champaign mayoral candidates square off at forum

Fri, 03/25/2011 - 10:00am | [Patrick Wade](#) ✉

CHAMPAIGN -- The contrasts between the two candidates for mayor were clear on Thursday night as incumbent Jerry Schweighart and challenger Don Gerard faced off during a public forum in advance of the April 5 election.

This week's event, sponsored by the NAACP and the League of Women Voters, was broadcast live on television, and organizers allowed audience members to submit questions, which produced a less-scripted series of questions and responses than the first debate last week. (Here is a [link to video](#) from the forum.)

For the first time in a public, election-related venue, Schweighart was forced to defend his comments a videographer posted [on YouTube](#) last year, in which the mayor questions the birthplace of President Obama.

The question itself was simple enough: "Do you believe President Obama is a U.S. citizen?"

Gerard delivered a one-word answer: "Yes."

In the YouTube video, which has gathered more than 200,000 hits since it was posted last April, Schweighart questions the validity of Obama's birth certificate.

"I think my opinion is pretty well known in the community, and I've seen nothing to change that," Schweighart said.

The issue has been recurring in online comment boards and electronic forums since the video was posted last year, but neither Schweighart nor Gerard had made any mention of it during formal debates.

"But I think what you need to do is to look at what we've done in the community and not what we say," Schweighart said. "I have a right to have an opinion, just like you have a right to have your opinion."

Schweighart said he believes it is Obama's responsibility to prove he was born in the United States, a prerequisite of holding the presidency.

"This is an open question," Schweighart said. "Only one person can solve it."

The question was, however, just one of many the candidates addressed during the night. The two were also asked whether they would be willing to disclose the sources of their



Photo by: John Dixon/The News-Gazette

Champaign Mayor Jerry Schweighart, left, and mayoral candidate Don Gerard squared off at a candidates forum sponsored by the Champaign County branch of the NAACP and the League of Women Voters at the Champaign City Building on Thursday.

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TGI Friday's

campaign contributions. A state law does not require candidates to do so until 10 days after the election.

"I have nothing to hide on my donations, and I think the public should be aware of where the contributions are coming from," said Schweighart, who added he would make his contributions public as soon as he is asked to do so.

Gerard, however, said he would not be willing to do so before the 10-day grace period to respect the anonymity of some of his donors.

"A lot of my support has come from those who would just as soon remain anonymous," Gerard said. "And I will respect that."

The candidates were also asked if they knew the acronym "CCAPP."

"I'm drawing a blank on this one," Schweighart said. Gerard, on the other hand, recited the full name.

It stands for the Champaign Community and Police Partnership, a board of community members and police officials who meet regularly to discuss how to fortify the sometimes rickety bridge between the two groups.

The two were also asked about Olympian Drive Schweighart said it's important to the area of north Champaign as it develops, but Gerard said he would need to be completely convinced of its economic value before he gets behind it.

They were also asked what they would do to prevent another incident like the October 2009 fatal police shooting of 15-year-old Kiwane Carrington.

"Nobody can sit up here and say, 'We're never going to have another incident,' because you can't guarantee that," Schweighart said.

But if the mayor works with minority communities to understand their needs, Schweighart said, the odds are better.

"I think if you have ample jobs and ample chances to get these jobs, it lessens the frictions of the community."

Gerard, during his rebuttal, hit where Schweighart had taken a shot earlier in the night.

"I believe an excellent start to this, quite simply, is for the mayor to be involved in the Champaign Community and Police Partnership," Gerard said.

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Categories (2): **News, Politics and Government**

Location (3): **Champaign County, Champaign, Local**

Tags (1): **2011 election**

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John O'Connor wrote on March 25, 2011 at 11:03 am

#1

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(Updated every 5 minutes)

It's sad that Schweighart has not availed himself of the multiple resources that conclusively debunk his belief in the lunatic birther conspiracy theory. He has become a national laughingstock for his bizarre views. Is that someone we really want representing us? More importantly, do we really want someone who continues to cling to this tripe making important decisions that have far reaching and long lasting implications for everyone in this city?

It's pretty astounding that the Schweighart, who has been claiming Gerard could not be adequately involved as mayor because he has a job and kids, doesn't know what CCAPP is. This is even more surprising since information of the first meeting between the group and city is posted on the city of Champaign's site.

I was also surprised to hear Schweighart deny support of the 'tea party.' Here is video of him **expressing support**. His support for the group is not surprising or even necessarily controversial, but why was he disingenuous about it? Why didn't he just acknowledge that he supports the 'tea party'?

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Yatiri wrote on March 25, 2011 at 1:03 pm

#2

He wants to be Mayor real bad. He will say anything, even untruths, if he calculates what is uttered will best help him become Mayor.

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gamera wrote 2 days 19 hours ago

#3

"This is even more surprising since information of the first meeting between the group and city is posted on the city of Champaign's site."

I have yet to see *any* evidence that Mayor Schweighart uses---or knows how to use---email or the internet in any way. His campaign manager admitted that she does the Twitter/FB accounts.

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BIID wrote on March 25, 2011 at 12:03 pm

#4

I agree with Mayor Schweighart that he is entitled to his opinion. However, evidence of the presidents' birth certificate has been produced multiple times, most recently by the state of Hawaii. The mayor is also free to ignore information contrary to his beliefs if he wishes.

What bothers me is that he's also free to pick and choose what information he sees as true, relevant, important, etc. What if he ignored information relating to a dangerous crosswalk or intersection? What if a policy being reviewed by the city was deemed irresponsible or costly? What information would he "choose" to believe in cases of building code violations or public works priorities. There are thousands of details to the job of mayor I cannot begin to list (my own ignorance I suppose). Ignorance of facts does not make them go away. Nor does it make for a good public servant.

Mayor Schweighart is entitled to his opinions but he is not a good candidate for mayor any more than a "flat earther" is a good candidate for a geographer, navigator, or airline pilot. If you think about it, willful ignorance tends to be a problem in any profession. The people of Champaign deserve a mayor who isn't bound by propaganda, ideology, or his own stubborn limitations.

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jthartke wrote on March 25, 2011 at 6:03 pm

#5

Again, the mayor has a hard time distinguishing between "fact" and "opinion". The fact is that President Obama was born in Hawaii. An opinion would be that this mayor embarrasses us in front of the entire nation.

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ConeyPayton wrote 1 day 2 hours ago

#6

Neither is a good candidate. Gerard has no experience in any form of public politics, and has stated that he can't give his full attention to being mayor due to his other job (while at the same time claiming that the mayor should be a 24/7 job). Schweighart is an old country boy who will always have racist undertones and won't cater to the needs of the minority communities.

Neither is ideal, but it is clear that Schweighart can at least improve local business and has done a good job developing downtown Champaign.

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Community-police group schedules forum

Sun, 03/27/2011 - 8:00am | Patrick Wade

CHAMPAIGN -- Residents and city officials will hold a community forum next week to discuss pervasive issues straining the relationship between the city's police force and those whom it polices.

It is the first such event to be hosted by the Champaign Community and Police Partnership, but organizers hope to continue the forum on a quarterly basis. The meeting is open to the public and will convene at 6:30 p.m. at the Champaign Public Library, 200 W. Green St.

"Our main objectives are to try and build a better relationship between the community and police," said Seon Williams, a member of CCAPP.

The group meets regularly itself as a whole and in committee breakout sessions to promote a dialogue on an often tense relationship between the community and police, but Williams said members want to inform the general public of what they are up to and field opinions from others.

"We've been doing a lot of dialogue, a lot of subcommittee meetings on how we can be better at building relationships, talking about the problem," Williams said.

Monday's forum is somewhat reminiscent of a larger March 2010 event the city held in response to the October 2009 fatal police shooting of 15-year-old Kiwane Carrington. That event drew close to 300 attendees, and organizers collected hundreds of suggestions on how to fortify community-police relations. City officials have been working since then to carry out some of those thoughts.

Williams said he does not expect Monday's forum to draw such a large crowd, but it could become a regular way for residents to share their concerns.

"This is going to be something on a smaller level, and we hope it kind of takes its own life and its own shape," Williams said.

The comments they collect Monday will be discussed during regular CCAPP meetings, and Williams said the group hopes to address some of those concerns before the next community forum.

He stressed, however, that the relationship between the community and police will not improve without mutual effort between the two groups.

"This will not be able to happen if we don't have community support," he said.

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Raw Audio: Champaign Mayoral Candidates Hold First Debate

Story air date: Thursday, March 17, 2011



Champaign voters had the chance on Wednesday March, 16, 2011 to hear from the two candidates running for mayor. Current mayor Jerry Schweighart and political newcomer Don Gerard debated for about an hour at the Champaign Public Library. They addressed a range of issues from the economy to reducing youth violence.

Schweighart touted his efforts during his 12 years as mayor in maintaining a balanced

budget without increasing property taxes. He also defended a proposal to cut overnight service in the lobby of the Champaign Police Department. Meanwhile, Gerard criticized those cuts saying they create a public safety risk. He said he would push for a financial audit on all city departments to improve Champaign's economy.

(Photo by Sean Powers/WILL)

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Urbana apartment buildings condemned

Sat, 03/26/2011 - 8:00am | Patrick Wade

URBANA -- A handful of residents of Urbana Townhomes in the 1000 block of South Lierman Avenue have until April 18 to find new housing until two of the buildings in the complex can be renovated to meet city codes.

The city has condemned the buildings, which Aegis Properties oversees locally, and has deemed them uninhabitable until the owner makes necessary improvements.

"There are general property maintenance issues that have gotten to the point where the place is basically not livable anymore," said Stephen Chrisman, a city housing inspector.

The buildings have no fire alarm systems, and some of the smoke detectors do not function, Chrisman said. Fixtures have been removed or are missing, and glass is broken, he added.

The current owners took possession of the property about 1 years ago, Chrisman said, and the city has been working with the managers to correct problems up to this point.

The owners had been planning to make the upgrades, said Kris Gerischer, who manages the property. They were going to renovate one building at a time, but the city felt the improvements were not happening quickly enough.

"It'll be a good thing in the end," Gerischer said.

In the meantime, Curtia Summers feels like she has no options. She said she received notice of the situation on March 21, which gave her less than a month to find a new home.

"We don't know where we're going yet," Summers said.

Summers says the building looks abandoned. Gerischer said some areas have been boarded up since he joined the company about two months ago. But Summers never felt in danger; she would rather stay in her home.

"We just don't have no options, and I don't think that's right," Summers said.

She and her two children, ages 18 and 13, will have to find a place to go for an undetermined amount of time.



Photo by: John Dixon/The News-Gazette

This Urbana Townhomes apartment building, at 1003 S. Lierman Ave., U., was recently condemned by the city, and residents have until April 18 to find new places to live.

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Gerischer deferred most questions to a California-based representative of the corporate owner, who could not be reached on Friday afternoon. He said the decision of whether to provide options for displaced tenants will be left for that office. The corporate office will also determine how the renovations will play out.

Just because the buildings have been condemned does not necessarily mean they will be torn down, Chrisman said.

"We give them time to make the repairs and get it back to a livable condition again," Chrisman said.

That could take months, assuming the owners do not decide to just demolish the buildings, Gerischer said.

"So we're just going to move the tenants out and board them up," Gerischer said.

Summers will start looking for a new home on Monday, she said.

"I have to pray about it," Summers said. "That's all I've been doing is praying about it."

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Categories (4): **News, Housing, Politics and Government, Business**

Location (3): **Champaign County, Local, Urbana**

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Well, there was a debate

Posted in [NEWS](#) to [Champaign](#) by [Joel Gillespie](#) on Thursday, March 17, 2011 at 6:59 am



For more or less exactly an hour last night, Jerry Schweighart and Don Gerard participated in a briskly-paced, occasionally snippy debate before a packed house in the Robeson Pavilion at the Champaign Public Library.

Stern taskmasters, the ladies at the helm of Chambanamoms got things off to a punctual start at 6:29 p.m. and didn't slow down from there. I fought a headwind on the way home from work and didn't arrive until 6:31, after which I fought an extremely slow wireless connection for a few minutes. But, enough whining: click on the box below to replay the live blog of the proceedings:

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How is his work place not criminally responsible. Did the work place require that he examin the plots in a rapid manor? Or did they give him plenty of time to stop the car, pull out the maps, view the land landscape, make notes, get back in...

Posted by Christopher Wallace to the entry 'A senseless tragedy awaits resolution on 03/28/11.

This event is such a tragedy and certainly an



WILL radio is supposed to be posting audio of the debate on their site, and I'll link to that at the first opportunity (UPDATE: [Here it is](#); you can stream or download). Also, their plan is to broadcast the debate in its entirety (provided their recording quality was acceptable) tonight on 580 AM at 7 p.m.

Chances are, if you had a preference before the debate, you probably didn't switch allegiances based on anything that happened last night. The highlights were as follows:

- Nobody wants to cut city services, and nobody wants to raise taxes
- Schweighart suggests that mayor's job is too much work for someone with a full-time job, and says Gerard won't be able to "double-dip" on his day job
- Gerard says "I wouldn't want my secretary scheduling my campaign on city time."
- Schweighart able to work Bonnie Blair into an anecdote, a mere 17 years after her last Olympic win
- Gerard used several quotes of Schweighart's that Schweighart claimed he made up; Gerard responds that "the Internet is a fickle mistress" and that he'd be citing sources on his website later in the evening
- Schweighart cited his 12-year run of balanced budgets and steady property taxes; Gerard countered by pointing out Champaign's current deficit in relation to Urbana's relative fiscal health
- Not a lot of differentiation on issues that strayed from concise talking points: both candidates prefer infill for new high school location, but didn't plan to influence Unit 4 board decision; a lot of vague talk from both sides about "working with people" when it comes to economic growth, dealing with poverty and violence

It was encouraging to see such a great turnout from the community. The League of Women Voters and NAACP announced plans earlier this month to host a second debate. To the best of my knowledge, no specifics have been revealed. We'll keep you posted as events develop, and election day is less than three weeks away.

7 comments



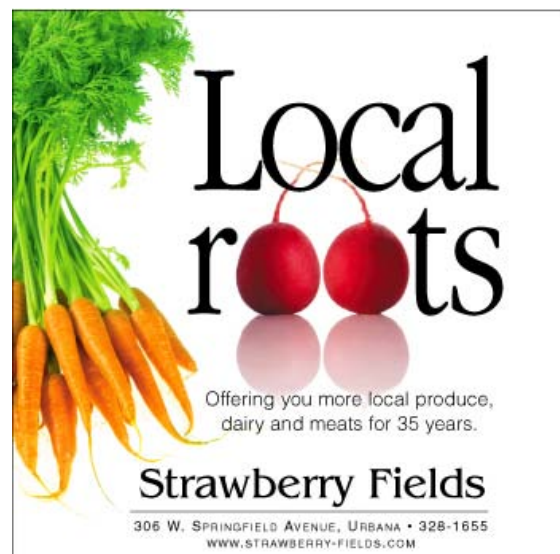
avoidable tragedy. However, as a serious cyclist, I would like to see this tragedy result in safer cycling routes. Every driver of a vehicle has at some time or another been a distracted driver. We all remain thankful...

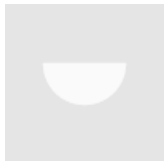
Posted by Ron Hoyne to the entry 'A senseless tragedy awaits resolution on 03/28/11.



Thanks Nancy. it may be better to contact Julia Rietz at the email she has listed on her

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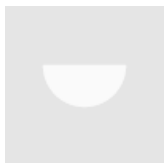


Ronada

03/17/11 at 03:35

#1

I wonder how the huge number of Champaign citizens who earn less than \$35,000 a year, some with much more education than Mr. Schweighart, think about his comments that the mayor's salary is equivalent to a part-time job. #effthatguy



Just

03/17/11 at 03:24

#2

Interesting that Gerard did not mention that Urbana doesn't have the financial crisis because they raised taxes. A Democrat through and through.



WRITER

Rob McColley

03/17/11 at 03:53

#3

Urbana has plenty of financial crisis. And the budget surplus is now completely depleted. We're in deficit spending.

Frankly, the only way we can dig our way out of this is more bike lanes.



Bill

03/17/11 at 03:13

#4

You see the one rule in the cmo is they are perfect they do not make mistakes ,just ask them.Rule #2 if anything goes wrong see rule #1.I do not know alot about Don ,but I bet he can run one of these clunky soon to be out of style ,very complicated square things called a computer.Just saying!!

#5



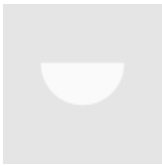
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Mark Palmer's response to the News-Gazette. I think he nails it! (Mr. Palmer's bio: Mark C. Palmer is a Champaign attorney who was recently Central Illinois Business Magazines "Man of the Year" for his work in the community. He is a graduate of Champaign Central High School,...

By lga to the entry 'News-Gazette endorses



Hmmm

03/17/11 at 03:52

@Just You know what else is interesting??? Marjorie Williams, the Mayor's campaign coordinator/manager use to be a democrat until a few years ago :) Just sayin'



Just

03/18/11 at 03:15

#6

@Hmm Guess she saw the light. :)
It is also interesting that Don formed his campaign committee as a Democrat but now says he is an Independent. So, what is he? Does he know? Or does he just not want the voters to know? Just sayin'



Smokie

03/18/11 at 03:08

#7

No need for a debate really. A 'birther' should be deemed unfit for public office in the mind of any right thinking voter.

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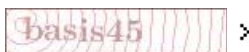
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Schweighart on 03/28/11.



You can look at the comments yourself, unless they went over the top and got pulled by the N-G. But you don't even need to have an article that mentions Obama to get comments about Obama not being born in the U.S. Those are everywhere. ...

By Robert Knilands to the entry 'News-Gazette endorses Schweighart on 03/28/11

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