Office seekers inform students

By MARY KENNEY | Indiana Daily Student, September 28, 2012

Fourteen candidates sat in a half moon facing just more than 30 students and locals at the Hutton Honors College.

The candidates were Democrats, Libertarians and Republicans. They were running for the first time or the third.

Freshman Madeline Zook of Mooresville, Ind., said she plans to vote in Monroe County. She said she didn’t yet know many local candidates and attended the session to try to change that.

Senior Margaret Christian, too, plans to vote locally. She has lived in Bloomington since 2008, and she said she wanted to learn before she voted.

The candidates introduced themselves in the college’s Great Room. Among them was Cheryl Munson, who will run for Monroe County Council following the death of candidate Sophia Travis.

The attendees divided into four groups randomly assigned to local candidates. Some stayed in the Great Room, and others moved, a little lost, with the help of PACE volunteers to other classrooms.

Each group was assigned a member of PACE’s Student Organizing Committee to start conversations between the candidates and observers.

Sophomore Catherine Krege began her group’s discussion by asking both the candidates and students if they wanted to start. No one did.

“OK, I'll start,” she said with a laugh.

Her group included candidates Alphonso Manns, Geoff McKim, Nelson Shaffer and Lee Jones, along with five other students including Kae Grossman, another member of the organizing committee.

Jones, Democratic candidate for the county council at-large seat, began by talking about the role of the county council and the fiscal health of Monroe County.

“Ultimately what the county council does is budget money to make sure the roads are working, everything around you is working,” Jones said.

Democrat and at-large county council candidate McKim spoke next.

He said the county council’s party comes from the “power of the purse,” as it appropriates funds and levies taxes.

Shaffer, candidate for District 2 County Commissioner, was the lone Republican candidate in the group of Manns, McKim and Jones.

He said before the beginning of the forum that, as a scientist, he isn’t used to the political maneuvering carried out by candidates in an election setting.

Manns, Democratic candidate for judge for the Monroe County Circuit Court, spoke quietly and was drowned out by Dave Nakarado, Libertarian candidate for commissioner, who was assigned to a group seated nearby.

Nakarado told the students his children were closer to their age than him. He also cautioned them against using media such as “The Daily Show with Jon Stewart” intended for comedy to be their sole source of news.

“Don’t rule the Libertarian Party out,” Nakarado said.

Nakarado was assigned to a group with candidates John Newlin, Jennifer Mickel and Teresa Harper as well as five forum attendees.

Mickel, Republican candidate for county council seat at large, said as someone who was raised and attended college in Bloomington, she tries to relate to students. She said she believes students’ top priority is to have a vote that counts.

“I wouldn’t want to vote here,” Mickel said. “I would want to vote in my hometown.” Mickel said, though, that it’s crucial students vote this election season, and she said even if students don’t vote here, they should be involved in local forums.

Newlin, Republican candidate for county commissioner, said many students come to Bloomington and wonder whether they will stay, which might give them a reason to vote locally.

“Search and look,” Newlin said. “Don’t take my word for it. Don’t take any other politician’s word for it. Find out what the truth really is.”
Members of the local candidates’ forum answer questions from the audience on Thursday at the Hutton Honors College. The forum was made up of candidates running for County Council, County Commissioner, and County Circuit Court.

Alphonso Manns, a candidate running for the Monroe County Circuit Court position, addresses a group of students on Thursday at the local candidates’ forum. The forum took place at the Hutton Honors College.

Teresa Harper, a candidate running for the Monroe County Circuit Court position, addresses a student’s question on Thursday at the local candidates’ forum. The forum took place at the Hutton Honors College.

Brian Ellison, a candidate running for the Monroe County Council position, listens to a student’s question on Thursday at the local candidate’s forum. The forum took place at the Hutton Honors College.

Nelson Shaffer, a candidate running for the Monroe County Commissioner position, speaks to a small group of students on Thursday at the local candidate’s forum. The forum took place at the Hutton Honors College.

Photos by Luke Schram, *IDS*