

Takeover move doesn't slow campaigns

By IAN THOMS
Current Staff Writer

The mayor's schools takeover plan colored much of the discussion at last week's District II school board forum in Cleveland Park, but it was the final question of the night that hit the issue on its head.

John Eaton Elementary parent Laura Broach asked the question that had been lurking behind most of the night's queries. Given the greatly reduced role of the board under the mayor's seemingly soon-to-be-approved legislation, why do the candidates still

"I believe I can have an impact on the educational



Bill Petros/The Current

Mayor Fenty's takeover proposal dominated citizens' questions.

past simply has not worked."

"As I see it, it's about educating the children so they

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outcome of the children in this city," said Martin Levine, one of the seven candidates in the race to represent wards 3 and 4 on the school board.

"Whatever the position, whatever the role, I knew I was committed to bring my talent, my experience to help this city's students receive the same great education I received," said Sekou Biddle.

"I view it as an opportunity to serve," said Joe Carrillo. He added that he supports the mayor's plan because "what we've done in the

Levine said the board should avoid such a stalemate. "If we build in an expectation of a loggerhead, we are going to continue to not serve our students."

Carrillo, Biddle and Scott all agreed that the board should foster negotiations to resolve any stalemate. Biddle said he believes the collective board would carry enough weight to move a discussion forward.

Scott said that as the father of three children, "I run into a number of stalemates." He said he is accustomed to resolving differences.

Abdul Rahman, however, said the proposed structure sets up the potential for such a standoff. "We're not going to be able to change hearts. That's the way the system is set up."

A resident took exception that Levy's questions were "couched in negative terms." Since the legislation looks as if it will pass, he asked the candidates if they could "make the most of it."

They all said they could.

mayor's legislation, which received the D.C. Council's initial approval last week, the school board would lose many of its decision-making responsibilities. The council would take over budgeting, and the mayor, through a new Department of Education, would control much of the schools' day-to-day operations. The new board, in more of an advisory role, would approve high school graduation requirements and address other matters normally handled not by the school system but by the state in which the system is located.

In her first question, Levy asked the candidates what they would do if the mayor asked them to cut \$25 million from the school system's budget.

Scott said: "I would advise them to take it from the baseball stadium."

Carrillo said he would cut funds from the management level and from support systems. He said he would avoid taking money out of the classrooms.

Abdul Rahman said budget-cutting is the reason the school system is "in this mess" in the first place. She also said she would suggest bringing more special-education students into regular classrooms.

Levine chastised the school system's central administration for wasting money and said he would cut funds from there. He said that the city spends more money per student on central administration costs than anywhere else in the country, and "we get lower results than any jurisdiction in the country."

Biddle would co-locate charter schools in public schools where there is space. He also said he would bring some special-education students back into the regular system.

Levy next asked what the candidates would do if they were on the school board outlined in the mayor's plan. What if the board denies a set of graduation standards, but the State Education Office refuses to revise them?

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can become lifelong learners," said Mai Abdul Rahman.

Candidate Herb Scott attended the majority of the forum but left before the final question due to another commitment. Fellow candidates Ann Holiday and Leonard Bennett did not attend the event.

The Cleveland Park Citizens Association sponsored the forum held Thursday at the Cleveland Park Library. The schools takeover led from the get-go.

Mary Levy, the director of the Public Education Reform Project, presented handouts to the audience on the takeover legislation and gave a brief presentation on it. Levy and Broach then queried the candidates before giving way to questions from the audience.

"You may wind up with a rather different job than you signed up for," Levy told the candidates.

Levy explained that under the