

Fitzpatrick defends acceptance of money

By: **BEN FINLEY** (Thu, Sep/30/2004)

Breaking with Congressman Jim Greenwood's practice of refusing political action committee money, the Republican candidate seeking the representative's seat in Congress is taking donations from local unions and other groups.

Bucks County Commissioner Mike Fitzpatrick told the Courier Times editorial board Wednesday that he's received contributions from the International Union of Operating Engineers, the Credit Union Legislative Council and a political action committee representing independent bankers among others.

Fitzpatrick said PAC money allows individuals to pull their money together and, therefore, have a stronger voice in the electoral process. The money also gives him much-needed financial help in shouldering the significant costs of television campaign ads, he said.

"These are contributions made by union men and women out of their own pockets to become a bigger part of the process," he said.

Fitzpatrick added that Greenwood, R-8, took PAC money in his first congressional campaign, and that his Democratic opponent, Ginny Schrader, is accepting it.

Schrader campaign manager Brian Moot said she's received donations from the International Brotherhood of Electrical Workers, Planned Parenthood and the Brady Campaign to Prevent Gun Violence among other groups.

Fitzpatrick spoke at length about his experience at the county level and the issues he'll concentrate on if elected. Straying a bit from the presidential campaign's unrelenting focus on national security, Fitzpatrick listed health care as his No. 1 priority, with national security and the economy following close behind.

He said 43 million people are without health insurance while the costs for it are skyrocketing, to the dismay of small businesses. Some of his proposed solutions to lower insurance premiums: Limit the amount of jury awards for pain and suffering in malpractice lawsuits and allow small businesses to join together under association health plans to reduce their insurance costs.

As for national security, Fitzpatrick said: "If I'm elected to Congress, I will support a robust defense budget with a missile defense system."

Fitzpatrick said that unlike Democratic vice presidential candidate John Edwards, he believes the United States is a safer place since the capture of Saddam Hussein. He said he supports President Bush's doctrine of pre-emption to preserve national security. He said he would support withdrawing American forces from Iraq when it's "practical," adding that he expects the former dictatorship to embrace democracy.

"Elections are scheduled and people are registering to vote. I believe freedom will prevail," he said.

Although more reservists are being tapped to serve in Iraq and their tours of duty are sometimes extended, Fitzpatrick said he sees no reason to support reinstating the draft.

The Republican candidate said he won't even consider revamping Social Security if the retirement age is raised, benefits are cut, the payroll tax increases or if the program is privatized.

Fitzpatrick played down the significance of his anti-abortion beliefs if he's elected to Congress. He quoted Democratic presidential candidate John Kerry, who said he's personally against gay marriage but still willing to work with people on the issue. Fitzpatrick said he's the same way.

"I will try to find common ground and find areas to work together on issues important to women," he said.

Fitzpatrick said abortion isn't a U.S. House of Representatives issue because they don't confirm Supreme Court justices, the Senate does, should the court reconsider Roe v. Wade.

Fitzpatrick said he strongly supports adult stem cell research. He said he would consider extending federal funding for embryonic stem cell research if scientific research demonstrated the benefits.

The Courier Times editorial board meets with Schrader next week.

The 8th District includes the residents of Bucks County, some districts of Abington, Upper Dublin and Upper Moreland in Montgomery County and two wards in Philadelphia.

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