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Kansas State Board of Education District No. 5 incumbent Sally Cauble answers questions from both the audience at the Depot and those listening in on the broadcast of the candidate forum Tuesday. L&T photo/Earl Watt

By ROBERT PIERCE

• Leader & Times

Local community members had the chance to hear from one of the two candidates the Kansas State Board of Education District 5 seat Tuesday at the Rock Island Depot.

After it was announced her opponent, Meg Wilson, would not be on hand for the forum, incumbent Sally Cauble took questions from those on hand and listening to the broadcast.

One question centered around how to retain teachers in rural Kansas. Cauble said there is not a shortage of teachers in the state as a whole, but there is a shortage of educators who want to come to western Kansas.

“A lot of the schools are doing a really good job of bringing people in from Michigan, going all over the place to find teachers,” she said. “We released some barriers on a couple of teacher licensures that we hope will help. I can’t say I’m cracked up about it. If the teacher is the number one factor of a student’s success in a classroom, if you truly believe that, you don’t want to settle for anything but the best that’s available to you.”

The teaching of both creationism and evolution has long been a touchy subject in the Kansas education system. Cauble was asked if creationism should be taught as an alternative to evolution. She said it should not be an alternative, but it can be taught.

“The evolution is very important as a science field,” she said. “They have to have the evolution to go into anything in medical or anything in the field of agriculture. They must teach evolution.”

While she does consider herself a Christian who believes in the Bible’s creation story, Cauble said God may have used evolution in the creation process.

“Time might tell,” she said. “Time might not, but the way the new science standards are worded, a science teacher has to teach evolution.”

Cauble said anything other than evolution should be done as a study if students choose to explore those areas.

“There are over 40 different creation stories that could be taught,” she said. “They could have a nice project-based learning there if they wanted to.”

Another hot topic for educators has been the recent adoption of Common Core standards. Cauble was asked about the roadblocks to the passage of the regulation and whether it was a good thing many are working to see the standards not succeed.

“Common Core is the one thing, when I’ve been on the school board, that has had more misinformation put out about it than anything I have ever dealt with,” she said. “Somebody tried to make it political. Usually, education is bipartisan. You usually do not have a political factor in it. Common Core, they took hold of it. They tried to say it’s ObamaCare. They’ve tried to say it’s a federal program. It’s not federal. It is national. There is a difference.”

Cauble said Governor Sam Brownback took the money Kansas received for the development for standards in math and language arts and worked with other states to create Common Core.

In a follow-up question later in the forum, Cauble was asked if she supported Common Core as a whole and depending on whether or not she did, what would she do to protect or repeal it.

Cauble said she is very much in favor of Common Core.

“There’s nothing wrong with those standards,” she said. “There are some things around those standards that can look very scary, and we need to make sure those things don’t happen. I think one of the things they’re trying to scare people with is testing. We’re developing our own assessments. We’re not using any nationwide tests, but we not be able to be compared to other states to know how well we’re doing.”

Cauble said she, along with Kansas 125th District Representative Reid Petty, a Hays legislator and a Dodge City lawmaker, fought for Common Core in the state.

“We were able to save Common Core,” she said. “What people don’t realize when they say ‘get rid of Common Core,’ they’re getting rid of the old standards too. There isn’t anything left to teach. Common Core is a group of standards that everybody in the United States needs to know to be competitive with other countries. It’s a group of standards that are taught in one state, and you can move to the other state.”

The state of Kansas adopted Common Core, and Cauble said state education officials then worked to define what college and career ready standards were.

“We took these Common Core standards, and we said ‘we need to make these agree with our statement and definition of college and career ready,’” she said. “We added to our Common Core career ready standards and technical standards. That’s how we ended up with the Kansas College and Career Standards. If somebody tries to tell you they are the same thing, they are not. There’s Common Core in them, but they are different than any other state when it comes to Kansas college and career ready standards.”

Cauble said what is being done in the state is taking cognitive thinking levels higher in order to meet business and industry standards.

“We were no longer producing thinkers,” she said. “We’ve got to have that core root.”

With school shootings seemingly on the rise in America, concerns have likewise risen about the safety of children in schools. Cauble was questioned about what could be done to make schools safer against such things. She said that is already being done at the school itself.

“I do not know of anybody that has anything to do with schools that hasn’t made that campus as safe as they could be,” she said. “Why would anybody want to put children and their staff at risk? It just doesn’t make sense. Whether we’ve gone too far or not far enough, who knows? There’s one thing we can’t do, and that is if there’s a crazy in the room, we’re all SOL. You can’t keep crazies out. You just can’t control somebody’s crazy. If you want to do something about that, start looking at what legislature has or is not doing in mental health. That would scare you to death. That’s scarier to me than the schools.”

Like the candidates for 125th District Representative, Shannon Francis and Jim Rice, who were later questioned at Tuesday’s forum, Cauble was asked about the Kansas Supreme Court’s recent decision to raise school funding.

Cauble said funding is not the business of the court, nor is it the business of KSBE, but rather the legislature itself.

“Whether we’re asking our students to learn too much is basically what it is,” she said. “I don’t think they’re funding it right. I think there’s a war on education in the state of Kansas, and if they can convince everybody it’s a bad thing to have 62 percent of your budget for education, they can keep cutting it.”

Cauble said she believes many state leaders are trying to create a system to destroy public education and encourage private education instead.

“I don’t know about western Kansas, but I think it would take two generations before we could get enough private schools in here to not need public education,” she said.

Cauble noted education is the only part of the state’s budget that allows Kansans to reinvest in themselves.

“Everything else in the state budget is consumable,” she said. “The education part is the only part that we can reinvest and get our money back from in the work force, in jobs being created.”

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