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Roddey, Onorato spar over economic development issues

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The two candidates for Allegheny County chief executive both view economic development as one of the office's highest priorities.

But Jim Roddey, the Republican incumbent, and Dan Onorato, the Democratic challenger, articulated contrasting approaches to creating jobs last night.

At a debate before the African-American Chamber of Commerce of Western Pennsylvania, Roddey criticized Onorato's economic development plan as a government intrusion into the private sector, even though

Onorato's proposal resembles the incumbent's operation.

Onorato, as he did in interviews last month, called for making the county's Department of Economic Development a "one-stop shop."

"We have to create a situation where developers and businesses can make only one phone call ... to get through the maze of 130 municipalities, 43 school districts, the city of Pittsburgh, the county and the nonprofit agencies that handle economic development," said Onorato, the county controller. "I believe that's the role of the county economic development department."

"The county is the only level of govern-

ment that actually touches all of those organizations and all of those political subdivisions."

Roddey pointed out that the private sector's Pittsburgh Regional Alliance, an 8-year-old creation of the corporate-sponsored Allegheny Conference on Community Development, already does what Onorato proposes.

"[The PRA does] have a one-stop shop," Roddey said. "I believe that system is working well. For the region, and I think we should be thinking as a region, that responsibility [should stay] in the private sector."

Under Roddey, the 70 employees of the county Department of Economic Develop-

ment have collaborated with municipalities, school districts and councils of government to provide various forms of government funding and financing to developers and businesses.

Onorato's proposal, as expressed last night, might not represent much of a change for the department, Roddey's criticisms notwithstanding.

On its Web site, www.county.allegheny.pa.us/economic/index.asp, the department boasts: "Our team of experts can give you 'one-stop shopping' for agencies and regulations. We can also put you directly in touch with local municipalities."

That, in essence, is what Onorato pro-

posed last night.

Roddey and Onorato spent much of the rest of the debate one-upping each other with assertions that they have appointed blacks to high-ranking positions and have helped minority-owned businesses.

Last night's debate was the 11th between the two candidates and among the worst attended, drawing only about 30 people, prompting Roddey to remark, "It would appear that people are as tired of hearing us as we are of hearing each other."

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