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# Chamber holds three-part televised forum

by Christian Morrow

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Following Pittsburgh Councilwoman Twanda Carlisle's indictment earlier the same day, the African American Chamber of Commerce of Western Pennsylvania's recent candidate forum was as much about what contenders say they won't do as about what they promise they will do.

Mayor Luke Ravenstahl and candidates for Pittsburgh Controller and for City Council District 9 all said they were committed to transparency.

Carlisle, the current District 9 representative who faces 17 charges in an alleged kickback scheme involving her mother's boyfriend and two former campaign aides, did not attend the April 11 forum at the Manchester Bidwell Corp. auditorium.

"If you look at her spending, the controller should have spoken before the media did," said controller candidate DaMon Macklin. "That's his job to do."

Councilman and controller candidate Doug Shields reminded the audience he had proposed legislation requiring council members to post their spending records on the internet. The proposal did not pass.

"My files are open and my books are open," he said. "And I've let it be known as council president that spending requests will be scrutinized, and if there's not a fulsome explanation, I'm not signing off on anything."

Though Acting Controller Tony Pokora could not attend the other three contenders for the office; Mike Dawida, Michael Lamb and DaMon



**CANDIDATES**—District 9 candidates from left are: Rev. Ricky Burgess, Judith Ginyard, Leah Kirkland and Eric Smith.

Macklin joined Shields in fielding questions from Tonia Caruso, anchor host of Comcast Newsmakers, and New Pittsburgh Courier Editor and Publisher Rod Doss.

The highlight of the controller's portion of the three-part forum came when Macklin, the only African-American in the race said he did not support a Dawida promise to hire a Black deputy controller to oversee the Pittsburgh Public

Schools.

"I don't support it. Why not have an African-American as City Controller," he said. "I think that's one of the problems with Pittsburgh, that we don't embrace diversity. That's why I chose to run a city-wide race and not just run for city council."

Macklin said his degree in finance qualified him for the post and that he would work "for the people." All agreed

they could be independent watchdogs without being adversaries to the mayor and council.

Though only four of the candidates for District 9 attended, all agreed the district has been largely ignored by the city's economic development efforts and that jobs and reducing street violence would be their priorities.

Eric Smith said his varied experience as a financial analyst and youth counselor gives him the required tools to address both issues effectively.

Real estate broker Judith K. Ginyard, also noted the district's deteriorating affordable housing stock and said she is the only candidate to have brought any economic development to the district when she built houses as the executive director of now defunct the Lincoln-Larimer Community Development Corp.

Leah Kirkland said her priority education is her priority because it is needed to address the joblessness, lawlessness and high incidence of HIV and AIDS within the district.

Endorsed Democrat Rick Burgess said he has a comprehensive plan to address all these issues.

"I have a two part plan that combines a violence reduction strategy with intensive intervention by social service providers," he said. "It will take positive, productive leadership and all of us working together, but I do believe we can take back our communities. We can make a difference in the ninth council district."

As for the mayor's commitment to diversity, though he did not give specifics, Ravenstahl said the naming of Nat Harper as police chief was one of many appointments he has planned to make city government more reflective of the city's racial makeup.

"As my administration begins to take form, we're going to be adding positions," he said. "And whether that's in the administration or departments or on our commissions or boards, that's our goal."

He also pledged to urge unions to reach out more to minorities in their employment and apprenticeship programs.

The Forum is the first to be available "On Demand" for Comcast digital cable customers.

Chamber President and CEC Doris Carson Williams, who introduced each segment of the forum, said she was pleased with the event.

"I think it went very well and our members said the same, so I'm very pleased," she said. "Comcast did a wonderful job and hopefully we can do more of these in the future."

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**MODERATORS**—Comcast's Tonia Caruso and the Courier's Rod Doss.