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Sandy mayor race going into final stretch with no debate

By Jacob Santini
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Let the debate about no debates begin.

Sandy Mayor Tom Dolan is refusing to go one on one against rival Gary Forbush between now and Election Day.

"I'm not going to give him a forum to spout misinformation," Dolan said Wednesday.

But Forbush says the incumbent is just trying to duck voters 13 days before they go to the polls.

"I'm getting sick of his evasiveness," Forbush said. "I never imagined this guy would run and hide."

Dolan has declined three debate requests - one hosted by a foundation, another on an AM radio station and another one on television.

The three-term mayor insists it has nothing to do with avoiding his challenger or constituents. He maintains most residents attending debates already have made up their minds, so he feels a more productive use of his time is to attend neighborhood meetings and knock on doors.

"Tell him to go run his own campaign," Dolan said. "I'm running my own."

The two candidates for the top office in Utah's fourth-largest city squared off twice before the Oct. 4 primary - once for the Sandy Area Chamber of Commerce and later at the University of Utah.

A chamber-sponsored "meet the candidates" event is scheduled for today at 11:30 a.m. in the South Towne Exposition Center, 9575 S. State St. Both mayoral hopefuls plan to attend, but it won't be a debate.

Forbush says the chamber is basically a pro-Dolan group, and he fears many residents won't be able to attend because it's at midday. He wants an evening debate.

"It's totally inappropriate to dodge this," he said.

Entering the campaign's homestretch, Forbush has some ground to make up if he wants to pass Dolan at the wire. In this month's primary, the mayor amassed 54 percent of the vote to Forbush's 40 percent. Even so, Forbush is closer to toppling Dolan than any another candidate in the past 12 years.

Besides scolding Dolan for deflecting debates, Forbush is stepping up his offensive in other areas as well. The challenger is criticizing the mayor for a recent Utah Taxpayers Association report on the money cities pay federal and state lobbyists. The report pinpoints Sandy as Utah's biggest spender on lobbyists with a \$350,000 tab in 2005. About \$170,000 of that total was directed at state lawmakers.

"How far are we from the [state] Capitol?" Forbush asked. "If [Dolan] would rather spend time at the golf course than the Capitol, he should be out of office."

Dolan counters by pointing to the benefits that lobbying brought to Sandy.

"It's another part of [Forbush's] inexperience," Dolan said. "He doesn't know how this works."

Lobbying the feds netted about \$25 million in road upgrades this year, Dolan said. Lobbying at the state level helped Sandy snag \$18 million for parking expansion at the South Towne Expo Center.

"You may or may not like it," Dolan said, "but this is how government works."

Forbush also takes issue with the \$18 million in parking funds. Sandy and Real Salt Lake are talking about using that money for shared parking between the Expo Center and the proposed 25,000-seat soccer stadium near 9400 South State Street.

It appears that an initial concept to tap some of the funding for the land for the stadium no longer is part of the plan.

"It's like play money," Forbush said. "[Dolan] knows how to milk the system. It's not right."

Dolan says the idea is to get two uses out of a single parking lot, an outcome that would spread the impact of the funding. And no one, he adds, is talking about giving money to the team.

"You can't take government money and give it to Real," Dolan said.

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