



MATT GODFREY / STAR PHOTO

(From left) Lou Agre, Josh Cohen, Pam DeLisso, Hugh Giordano, Bill Morris and Keith Newman. All but Giordano are up for the Democratic primary next month.

# RDC hosts forum to question candidates

By **Jon Campisi**  
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**T**he only minor-party candidate running for state representative in the 194th Legislative District had an impressive showing at a candidate's forum in Roxborough April 7, garnering the

most applause during a session in which he took on five Democrats. Democratic candidates will square off in a May 18 primary.

While not on the ballot until November, Hugh Giordano, who is running on the Green Party ticket, apparently has already developed a following, as was evident by supporter turnout at the two-hour forum at the

Roxborough Development Corp. offices.

"I grew up in this neighborhood. This is my neighborhood. I understand the issues here," Giordano said during the event, a question-and-answer session in which candidates responded to prepared inquiries from would-be constituents.

*Please see CANDIDATES / Page 4*

# CANDIDATES

► *Continued from Page 1*

Giordano, a union organizer by trade, said what qualifies him for the job of state representative is his desire to help people, and not advance party politics. If elected to the state House, he pledged to be an independent voice in the state capital.

"I'm not part of the system," he said. "Harrisburg is full of people who owe favors."

He urged people to remember his face and name, since he intends on being a serious contender.

"There's no more middle class. There's only the working poor," Giordano said during his opening remarks. "Isn't it funny how people are struggling, but the Democrats give themselves raises up in Harrisburg?"

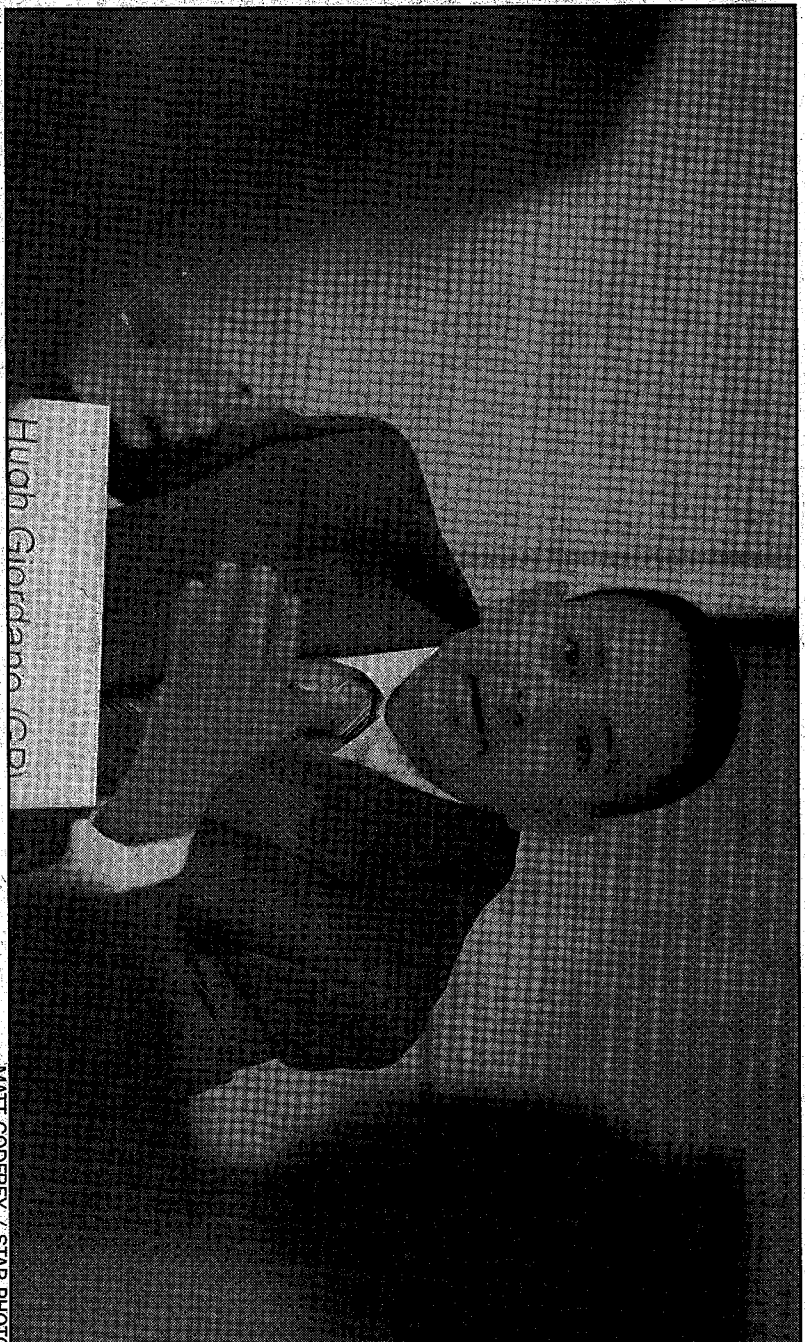
The Democrats vying for the House seat are Keith Newman, a public school teacher and active Manayunk resident; Lou Agre, a longtime Roxborough resident, union organizer, and Democratic leader of the 21st Ward; Pam Delissio, a businesswoman with experience in long-term senior care; Josh Cohen, a Roxborough resident and former aide to City Councilman Curtis Jones Jr.; and Bill Morris, a Roxborough native and union carpenter.

The candidates fielded questions on everything from health care and education to public safety and electoral reform. They also touched on state liquor laws and transportation funding.

"It is not an essential public service," Delissio, the only woman on the panel, said in response to a question from a constituent who asked whether the candidates would support both privatizing the state's Liquor Control Board and allowing the sale of beer, wine and spirits in places like supermarkets.

Delissio was the only one out of the six who said she supported privatizing the state liquor system. If privatized, money from liquor sales could provide an "infusion of capital" to Pennsylvania, she said, and reduce state operating costs. Delissio said she grew up with Pennsylvania "blue laws," which forbade the sale of alcohol on Sundays. That's slowly beginning to change, she said, and the progressive move hasn't caused a major uproar in the state, which leads her to believe more liquor reform will be met with support.

Others, however, disagreed. Giordano said privatizing the liquor system would just mean more profits for corporations. The move would also hurt independent beer distributors, he said, something he couldn't support.



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**Green Party candidate Hugh Giordano** joined the five Democratic challengers for the 194th Legislative District primary/nomination last week at a forum held at the Roxborough Development Corp.

"Why would I agree with putting beer in the supermarkets? Because it would hurt small businesses," he said.

Morris, whose father operates a beer and soda distributor, agrees privatization would lead to unemployment.

Newman, the teacher, said the state system helps guard against underage sales.

"If we want to protect children's lives, we do not privatize state stores," he said.

Agre, a labor leader, said the state liquor store system keeps Pennsylvanians employed, and with jobs being a major campaign platform, the last thing he would do is push for something that could lead to the elimination of work.

The panel also responded to questions about public transportation and highway and bridge repair funding. All agreed that the state losing its bid for the third time to toll Interstate 80 was disappointing. Many Philadelphia-area legislators supported instituting tolls on the east-west roadway, which runs parallel to the Pennsylvania Turnpike, since money would go toward mass transit improvements. Law makers in Northwestern Pennsylvania, however, viewed the potential tolling as crippling their economy, and leading to tractor-trailers congesting back roads.

In light of the federal government not approving the state's application to toll I-80, Newman suggested SEPTA invest in new technology. Light rail service is

expensive, he said, and the agency should explore ways to save money when it comes to public transit options.

Cohen said though unpopular, he would support raising vehicle registration fees. Pennsylvania has relatively low registration fees, around \$36 annually for a typical family car, compared with other states like Virginia, where the costs can be in the hundreds of dollars. In New Hampshire, people must register their vehicles with both the state and the municipality in which they live, again leading to larger sums.

Education was also a hot topic.

"If you want to fix schools, send an educator to Harrisburg," said Newman, the teacher.

Newman said when it comes to city schools, which are notoriously underfunded, it's not always about the money, or lack thereof, when addressing potential improvements.

"Money isn't so much the issue as how we spend it," Newman said.

The others agreed that school district expenses need closer monitoring. Giordano said it's a disgrace that suburban schools, like the Lower Merion School District, which is part of the 194th Legislative District, spends \$22,000 per pupil, while Philadelphia spends \$11,000 per student. Giordano said he would support a state constitutional amendment with regard to income tax, since it's unfair that schools should have to rely so

much on revenue generated by local property taxes. Real estate taxes in the suburbs are traditionally much higher than in the city.

"We have to get the funds down here back in Philly," he said.

The candidates were also asked if they would consider having a satellite office in Roxborough. Such is the case with the current state representative, Kathy Mandernio, whose office is in a strip mall on Ridge Avenue near Fountain Street. Most agreed this would be dictated by the constituency.

More importantly than a physical location, however, the candidates pledged to be a familiar face around town when not working in Harrisburg.

"If elected, this will be my full-time job and my only job," Newman said, noting he'd leave the teaching profession that he loves. "This will be a cut in pay for me, but it's my life's dream."

Giordano said as an elected representative, he wouldn't be hard to find.

"I'm going to be on the street talking to you," he said. "My girlfriend will be even more mad at me because I'll never see her."

He even joked that he'd go to constituents' homes should they have an issue to discuss.

"I love spaghetti and meatballs," he said on his proposed house calls.

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