

Fiegen's answers stand out on terrorism, Middle East

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(Photo: Morgan Gstalter/The Register)

At STAR*PAC, the Iowa-based Stop the Arms Race Political Action Committee, our purpose is to advocate for peaceful policies in federal office campaigns. Our May 15 Democratic Senate candidate forum, however, was an opportunity for the candidates to respond to our questions with their own views. We have since carefully reviewed a videotape of that event at starpac.org/news-blog and formed some responses of our own.

First of all, we were very pleased overall with the candidates' preparation, clarity and content on several issues, consistent with our own: among them on supporting the diplomatic success with Iran, on opposition to torture, on dealing with climate change, on addressing the causes and effects of global migration, and on controlling the influence of special interests in campaigns and especially the military budget.

However, we saw some critical distinctions among the candidates on two important matters that we feel rise above others: how to address the conflicts between Israelis and Palestinians, and how to best handle the scourge of international terrorism. Indeed, the continuing and deepening oppression of Palestinians is one of the roots of conflicts throughout the Middle East, which is in turn the principal bed of terrorist motivations.

Of the four candidates, only Tom Fiegen clearly articulated the importance of the United States being more balanced as an honest broker for peace in the Israel/Palestine conflict. Just as the U.S. was slow to call out apartheid in South Africa, we are slow to call out the Israeli government actions against innocent Palestinians as unjust, inhumane and counter-productive. Instead, the U.S. unquestioningly continues to fund the Israeli military to the tune of billions annually.

Judge and Hogg in particular repeated Democratic Party dogma in standing with Israel and the moribund two-state solution proposal, adhering to the lobbying group American Israeli Public Affairs Committee' Zionist position. However, all correctly advocated for U.S. top-level engagement and advocacy of a negotiated solution.

Similarly, Fiegen was again the most articulate in his advocacy of actions the U.S. should take to address international terrorism. He cited the need to join other nations in dealing with the economic and cultural injustices that create the isolation and desperation that are at the root of terrorist recruitment; and to stop the military actions that incite terrorist reactions. He advocated challenging Saudi Arabia to confront their local sources funding terrorist groups.

By contrast, candidate Patty Judge advocated "increased air strikes" and was silent about the underlying causes. Rob Hogg advocated working for peace through addressing cultural and economic oppressions. Bob Krause also proposed working more with NGOs to do the same, along with cultural sensitivity in our communications. Again, all advocated more emphasis on communication and gathering of human intelligence as critical to our domestic security.

STAR*PAC's role is to advocate that the public and candidates get behind peaceful solutions, which is the motivation for responding to the views expressed in our forum. We again applaud all the candidates for their participation, and for the interest shown by the many people who chose to attend. We thank Kathie Obradovich, Kay Henderson and others for their coverage.

Tom Leffler of Johnston is chairman of the STAR*PAC Central Committee. He is a retired senior manager from Pioneer and former candidate for the Iowa House.



Tom Leffler (Photo: Special to the Register)

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