

Sun debate fuels 6th District dialogue

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BEDFORD -- When asked if residents of the 6th Congressional District were better off now than they were two years ago, three of the four candidates in a debate sponsored by The Sun and The Salem News Thursday responded with an emphatic "no."

The one candidate who did not was nine-term incumbent Rep. John Tierney, who called the question "simplistic."



From left, 6th Congressional District Democratic challengers Marisa DeFranco, John Devine, Seth Moulton and incumbent U.S. Rep. John Tierney participate in

" He said that progress had been made, but the middle class was still in the process of recovering from the recession.

"I think relative to two years ago the people of this district are doing better, but they're not doing nearly as well as we all want them to be," Tierney said.

"Massachusetts did better in the recovery than the other states did, and a lot of it was because we made certain investments that really paid off in the long run," he added.

That answer wasn't good enough for Tierney's three challengers in the debate -- U.S. Marine veteran and businessman Seth Moulton, immigration lawyer Marisa DeFranco and business owner John Devine.

"My office is literally on Main Street, and the truth is that Congress has been crushing the life out of small businesses for the past two years and the past 20 years," DeFranco said.

Moulton cited Lynn as an example of a city that isn't living up to its potential as a center of manufacturing.

"When you go out and talk to people in this district, the number one thing on people's minds is that they want jobs, and unemployment today is higher in the 6th than it is in the rest of the state.



Panelists for 6th Congressional District Democratic debate Thursday at Middlesex Community College in Bedford include, from left, Mary Jo Griffin,

We have lost thousands of good manufacturing jobs over the last 10 or 15 years," Moulton said.

A lack of jobs was the problem also for Devine, who said that he would provide incentives for college graduates to stay in Massachusetts to bring high-tech jobs to the region.

Tierney's record was the focus of much of the debate at Middlesex Community College's Bedford campus, where Moulton, DeFranco and Devine challenged the incumbent on his record of having passed just one bill over 18 years of service.

"We need leaders in Congress who can really get things done because Congress is broken. We've never had a more broken Congress in our nation's history and we fundamentally can't fix that by sending the same people back again and again," Moulton said.



6th Congressional District Democratic hopefuls, from left, incumbent U.S. Rep. John Tierney, and challengers Marisa DeFranco, John Devine and Seth Moulton

Tierney defended his work on economic issues and education, and blamed House Speaker John Boehner for making it difficult to get bills passed with bipartisan support.

"Thousands of people come to our office all the time, and know that whether it's a veterans problem or a housing problem, or a Social Security problem or Medicare, they're going to get the kind of attention that they deserve and that we take great pride in providing on that," Tierney said.

As the only candidate in the race who isn't accepting funding from political-action committees, DeFranco said that she would be responsible only to voters, unlike Tierney and Moulton.

Devine said he had accepted a donation from just one political-action committee, Good For Education.



Audience members and reporters listen to 6th Congressional District Democratic candidates debate Thursday at Middlesex Community College and 8217;s Bedford

"I'm the small-money guy," he said.

When asked about what three steps they would take to combat poverty, all candidates advocated raising the minimum wage, though DeFranco said she would only raise it to \$9 to avoid negative effects on small businesses.

Tierney also said he would provide incentives to bring jobs back to the U.S. and invest in infrastructure. Moulton pushed for corporate tax reform, while DeFranco advocated an 8 percent tax cut to small businesses and increased investment in community colleges, which she touted as the only affordable way to get a college education.

On the issue of the U.S.'s responsibility to intervene in Iraq, Moulton, who served four tours in Iraq, said the problem is primarily political, rather than a military issue.



6th Congressional District Democratic hopefuls, from left: incumbent U.S. Rep. John Tierney, and challengers Marisa DeFranco, John Devine, and Seth

He does not support putting troops on the ground.

"Fundamentally, I'm running for Congress because I saw the consequences firsthand of those bad decisions in Washington," Moulton said.

Although she did not support the Iraq War, DeFranco said that she would consider sending soldiers into the country to prevent ISIS militants from taking over.

"Throwing up our hands and saying we're going to do nothing is not an option," she said.

Tierney said he supported President Barack Obama's humanitarian efforts in Iraq over putting boots on the ground, while Devine said he supported more international involvement in Iraq.

The one thing all candidates agreed upon -- Market Basket. All four said they supported the chain's employees and customers who are protesting for the return of ousted CEO Arthur T. Demoulas.

The winner of the Democratic primary on Sept. 9 will face Republican Richard Tisei in the general election. Tierney narrowly defeated Tisei in 2012, with 48.3 percent to 47.3 percent, with 372,224 votes cast.

The 6th District includes the Middlesex County communities of Bedford, Billerica, Burlington, North Reading, Reading, Tewksbury, Wakefield and Wilmington. Most of the district is made up of 31 communities in Essex County, including Amesbury, Beverly, Gloucester, Lynn, Newburyport, Peabody and Salem.

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