

## Mild-mannered debate for 8th

Three's company as candidates largely agreed on most major issues

By ROBIN HINDERY

Article Created: 05/17/2008 08:32:06 AM PDT



8th Assembly District candidates Christopher Cabaldon, left, Mariko Yamada, center, and Manuel Cosme made their first and only scheduled joint appearance in Yolo County at a Woodland League of Women Voters forum May 15. (Jim Smith / Democrat)

In their first - and most likely only - joint public appearance in Yolo County before the June 3 primary, the three 8th Assembly District candidates gathered in Woodland Thursday night to discuss issues ranging from water use to the state budget to transportation.

More of a polite discussion than a debate, the event was hosted by the Woodland League of Women Voters and featured the two Democratic contenders, West Sacramento Mayor Christopher Cabaldon and

Yolo County Supervisor Mariko Yamada, as well as the lone Republican on the ballot, Vacaville businessman and political newcomer Manuel Cosme.

All three are competing for Democratic Assemblywoman Lois Wolk's soon-to-be vacant 8th District seat, which covers the majority of Yolo and Solano counties. Cabaldon and Yamada will battle it out June 3, and the winner will take on Cosme in November.

Over the course of the two-hour forum, the candidates attempted to distinguish themselves from one another - with mixed success, as they largely agreed on most major issues.

Cabaldon touted his mayoral achievements and big-name endorsements - including Wolk and her two predecessors in the 8th District - while Yamada labeled herself a grass-roots campaigner and a champion of the people, referring frequently to her background in social work.

Cosme, meanwhile, claimed to be running for office with two main goals in mind: To stand up for small business owners like himself and to offer an alternative to the career politicians who make up the majority of the Legislature.

"I haven't worked in the government, and I think that's a plus," Cosme said, telling the audience, "I feel your pain. God, I've lived your pain."

Thursday's program combined questions drafted by the League of Women Voters with those supplied by the audience, and two issues came up again and again: Water and transportation.

Cabaldon was quick to note his accomplishments in the realm of transportation, such as doubling West Sacramento's public transit funding and tripling the city's bike-lane mileage. He said he would continue

to focus on transportation in the Assembly by making a Woodland-based Interstate 5-State Route 113 connector his "No. 1 priority" when determining the state's transportation spending.

But the mayor was hesitant in voicing his support for a proposed 800-mile high-speed rail linking Sacramento and San Francisco to Los Angeles and San Diego. After years of delay, a statewide bond measure to fund the project is scheduled to appear on the November ballot.

"The high-speed rail has some big potential, but it is a gigantic investment as well," Cabaldon said. "If it doesn't serve this region, we have to be very skeptical in November."

Yamada was also on the fence, saying the rail project made sense from an environmental perspective but that she had not yet made up her mind about it. She also admonished past state leaders for lacking the "political courage" to set up a statewide rail system earlier.

She said when it came to transportation funding in general, she would like to see just as much focus on city-to-city transportation as there currently is on transportation within individual cities.

Only Cosme came out unequivocally in favor of the high-speed rail, calling it a "godsend," especially for seniors with limited means or who can no longer fly or drive long distances.

On the subject of water, all three candidates agreed there is an urgent need to protect Yolo and Solano counties' water supply from being reallocated to parched Southern California cities.

"Our water rights are being threatened," Yamada said, acknowledging that as a Yolo County supervisor, she is currently in the middle of a

contentious debate over the proposed creation of a countywide water management agency - something all other counties in the region already have, she said.

The main goal of the proposal, Yamada and other supporters say, is to give Yolo County a seat at the table when the state is making decisions about the county's water.

Cabaldon said concerns over the 8th District's water supply should not be viewed as a battle between agriculture and the rest of the water users, but instead as something residents need to work together to solve. He suggested placing greater emphasis on water conservation and using groundwater basins as storage mechanisms.

The candidates rarely referenced one another in their comments Thursday, but one question from the audience - "What makes you the strongest candidate?" - did serve as a momentary reminder that this is, after all, a race.

Cabaldon, the group's clear leader in fundraising, seemed content to rest on his laurels. He said he was a strong believer in something his father used to tell him: "The best proof of what you'll be able to do is what you've already done."

Yamada acknowledged her campaign could not match Cabaldon's impressive fundraising, which by mid-March had topped \$468,000. However, in an implied reference to the large donations Cabaldon has received from building interests - and their potential to influence his future policy decisions - Yamada said she prefers to concentrate on "how a community's very least are treated, not its wealthiest."

She also noted Cabaldon's endorsements from Wolk and others, but said she "would prefer to have

support come from the people," rather than former politicians.

Cosme chose not to engage his opponents, saying simply that, if elected, he believed he could "create a balance" within a politically divided Legislature.

Thursday's event was the 8th District candidates' only scheduled public forum in Yolo County before the primary, according to Yamada's campaign manager Brian Micek. An April 24 forum at the Davis Democratic Club did not include Cosme and was not advertised to the public, Micek said.