

# Statehouse candidates come together to address county's poverty

BY NATE TAYLOR  
NateTaylor@coloradoan.com

Statehouse candidates agree they need to cooperate to solve poverty issues, but they disagree on what exactly needs to be done.

They also agree it's a complex issue.

Ten candidates for area state House and Senate

seats gathered Tuesday evening at Front Range Community College to weigh in on poverty issues facing Larimer County.

Hosted by the nonpartisan organization Pathways Past Poverty, the forum attracted about 75 people and every candidate in an area Statehouse race.

Candidates discussed how state government could help make more people self-sufficient, how to improve child care and how to provide affordable housing.

"There are many things we can do to address this problem, but no one silver bullet is going to reverse

the trend," said Sen. Bob Bacon, D-Fort Collins, early on in the forum.

Matt Fries, the Republican challenging Bacon for Senate District 14, agreed with all the candidates that an increased emphasis on education would help with all poverty issues, but when it came to

the child care he stressed the importance of creating possibilities for stay-at-home parents.

"I want to make it easier for Colorado and Fort Collins families to have one parent stay home and take care of the kids," he said. "That is the ultimate option for child care."

Fries also suggested cutting the cost of development fees to reduce the average home price.

Other candidates echoed Bacon's "silver bullet" comment. Their ideas were unique and sometimes crossed party lines.

When discussing ways to help people afford child care, both Bacon and

House District 52 Republican challenger Bob McCluskey promoted tax credits for residents who give to nonprofit, child care providers.

"Tax credits are a smart way to go to help motivate businesses and individuals," McCluskey said. "It's a better way to go than just having the government pay for child care. You want to motivate people and companies."

Democrat John Kefalas, the incumbent in House District 52, said the state should re-establish a state-funded, earned-income tax credit that would give low-income families a tax credit — a bill Kefalas sponsored earlier this year that didn't pass.

"One role for government is to make sure there is an adequate social safety net," Kefalas said.

Donna Gallup, the Republican challenger in House District 53, which covers west Fort Collins, agreed with several Democrats when she promoted the need to eliminate the "cliff effect" for people on welfare who might not want wage increases because they could lose their welfare eligibility.

Democratic House District 53 Rep. Randy Fischer suggested using severance tax revenue from minerals to fund affordable housing initiatives.

"We have tremendous mineral wealth here and that wealth is being squandered by the state," Fischer said. "Other states have taken mineral wealth and they've invested it in schools, they've invested it in universities. That money could go to the division of affordable housing in Colorado."