

Democrats in race for 22nd District split over raising funds for road repairs

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Two Macomb County Democrats who disagree about how to increase state road repair funding are vying for an open seat in the Michigan House of Representatives in the 22nd District, which covers Roseville and a portion of Warren.

Roseville Mayor John Chirkun and Gary McMenamain both have deep roots in the community and professional backgrounds in public service.

They are running in the Aug. 5 primary to replace state Rep. Harold L. Haugh, a Roseville Democrat who is term limited.

Chirkun worked in law enforcement as a Wayne County Sheriff's deputy for 28 years, while McMenamain is a firefighter and paramedic in Ferndale who has worked in Metro Detroit for 28 years.

Chirkun, who has been a member of the Roseville City Council since 1995, says he supports a 1-cent sales tax increase for road funding and repair.

"I feel I could serve the residents best by going up to Lansing," he said.

"I have a track record of working with management and unions. I think I can reach across the aisle and work with Republicans. We need to fix this for the people."

McMenamin, a 51-year-old who lives in Warren, said he would not increase state road funding by raising taxes at the pump or the state sales tax.

He does back eliminating business tax credits approved in 2012 and wants Congress to reauthorize federal highway funding known as MAP21 — an issue that has stalemated the Democratic-controlled Senate and GOP-run House.

He also wants to figure out a way to capture user fees from the increase of freight on the state's roadways, perhaps through tolls.

"There is a cost to fixing roads. It's going to be pick your poison," he said.

"We have to pay for this. If we put the costs on the average workers at the gas pump, we are going backward, not forward."

Chirkun, 61, retired from the Wayne County Sheriff's Department in 2004 after being executive sergeant in charge of special operations for the Internet crime unit.

Education funding and revenue sharing are highest on Chirkun's agenda, if elected.

He wants to find ways to improve revenue sharing for communities, saying Roseville has lost \$17 million in state revenues since 2000, forcing it to consolidate services.

Residents in the community have been telling Chirkun, who attended community college after graduating from high school in Detroit, that they are unhappy about the Detroit bailout.

"They have a lot of art they can sell. I know everybody doesn't like to hear that," he said.

Chirkun has been married for 29 years and has two children, one foster child and two grandchildren.

McMenamin, who is a 2013 graduate of the University of Michigan, Dearborn, and previously worked for Clawson and Troy as a volunteer firefighter, said he feels the region is not seeing the type of economic recovery that other parts of the country are experiencing.

“We are putting corporate profit ahead of a true recovery. The No. 1 issue here is bringing sustainable jobs in diverse areas to the region,” said McMenamin, who is married and has two children.

Investing in education and providing money for infrastructure such as road repairs are issues McMenamin would tackle, if elected.

He said he would eliminate taxes on pensions for individuals already collecting them.

“We are supposed to be a benevolent society. We should be looking after our most vulnerable population elderly and children,” he said.

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