

Education vs. defense — hopefuls debate

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By Tim Richard
staff writer

To U.S. Sen. Carl Levin, the issue is "education vs. defense." The incumbent first-term Democrat favors holding down defense spending to 3 percent real growth a year. He opposes President Ronald Reagan's cuts in the federal education budget.

To challenger Jack Loumsa, America can have both good education and strong defense. "The U.S. Constitution says the first responsibility of the federal government is national security. . . I would prefer local governments to draw up the curriculum, how courses are administered."

The Michigan candidates drew a room full of business people — and national newspaper correspondents — when they debated Monday before the Economic Club of Detroit in the Westin Hotel ballroom.

Afterwards they had a more thorough discussion of the education-defense issue before a news conference of high school and college journalists. The students explored their disagreements over spending priorities, prayer in public schools and the line-item veto.

"WE MUST BE strong, but we've been wasteful," said Levin, pointing to Reagan's proposed 3 percent real growth in defense spending. "We have an obligation to assure local education," the 50-year-old Detroit lawyer said as he advocated cutting the MX multiple-warhead missile.

Levin stopped short, however, of advocating the federal government provide local school districts one-third of the operating funds. That position is advocated by the National Education Association, which nevertheless supports Levin.

Loumsa, 48, a retired astronaut, said defense is only 26 percent of the federal budget and "human needs, including education," are 50 percent. He's supported by the NEA, which wants more federal control of education, not less.

"I'm for the MX, Carl would go to Geneva (usual site of disarmament talks) with an empty basket and give the basket away. I want something in the basket and to bring something back," said Loumsa, calling the MX a "bargaining chip" in dealings with the Soviet Union.

LEVIN TOLD the students he supported supplemental education opportunity



Sen. Carl Levin

'I am opposed (to line item vetoes),' said Levin. 'It would give the president significant additional power. A president could tell a member of Congress, 'Vote for the MX or I'll cut a program in your district.''

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"I support the line-item veto," Loumsa replied. "The president could cut out pork barrel items. Levin has been, by his voting record, a taxer and spender. He has voted 62 times either to raise your taxes or avoid tax cuts."

THEY SPLIT over the controversial proposed constitutional amendment to allow prayer in public schools.

"I oppose structured, organized prayer in public schools," said Levin. "Local governmental officials would select and write the prayer, would determine whether kids would sit, stand, kneel or hold hands. 'Nobody objects to a moment of silence. But do you allow prayer shawls or hats?' asked Levin.

"I'll support voluntary prayer in public schools," Loumsa said.

They agreed on the question of "equal access" to school facilities. "I voted for equal access," said Levin. "This is not for outsiders coming in. This is kids on their own. It does not interfere, dictate, dominate. It is freely exercised."

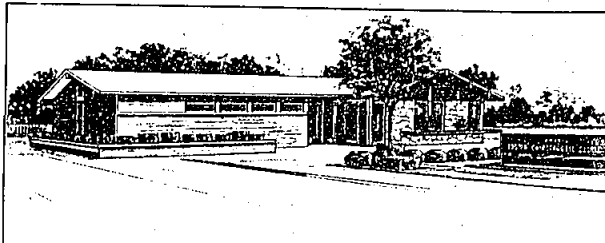
"I favor equal access," said Loumsa. "When I was in high school, we had that. It's healthy. It did not compromise separation of church and state."

THEY AGREED to oppose tuition tax credits — granting parents a deduction from taxable income for tuition paid to a private school.



Challenger Jack Loumsa

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