

CA CONGRESSIONAL DISTRICT 1 CANDIDATES' FORUM
MAY 23, 2022
900 Locust St., Redding CA
SPONSORED BY:
THE DEMOCRATIC CENTRAL COMMITTEE OF SHASTA COUNTY

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On Monday, May 23, North State voters had their only opportunity to size up the three candidates opposing Representative Doug LaMalfa in the 2022 primary election for California Congressional District 1. (The Facebook Live feed can be viewed here, with candidates beginning at 0:04:50 minutes in, and concluding an hour later at 1:06:25.)

<https://www.facebook.com/shastadems/videos/5254688521236185>

An edited transcript, and list of candidate quotes is below.

Edited Transcript & Report

The candidates spoke and fielded questions in a congenial display of tri-partisan political engagement before an audience of 60 community members. Democratic candidate Max Steiner of Chico was on home turf at the Shasta County Democratic Headquarters in the IBEW Labor Hall in Redding as he faced off with Republican Tim Geist of Nevada County, and Rose Penelope Yee of Redding, an independent.

Representative LaMalfa declined to attend the forum, with Steiner noting the Congressman was at a ribbon-cutting, "opening up some infrastructure that he voted against."

After the candidates' opening statements, each responded to questions submitted by audience members, who adhered to the debate rule of waiting until the end of the forum for applause.

Steiner, the only Democrat in the Primary race for Congress in CA CD1, started off with a strong defense of democracy. "I think January 6 was an attack on our democratic system, and when I get to Congress, I want to make sure that never happens again." Steiner's other core policy issues are water policy and forestry practices, and he acknowledged that some positions are atypical for a Democratic candidate. "I am a moderate Democrat, and some of you might not love that," he told the crowd, but said he hoped to win votes based on the majority of issues they do agree on.

"Proper forest management is the centerpiece of my campaign," Steiner said, and he promotes funding for thinning, fuel reduction and prescribed fires "so we don't have these massive fires, like the one that took out my brother's house in the Carr Fire."

Candidate Tim Geist provoked laughter with his opening line, "What's a nice Republican like me doing in a place like this?" and joked that the event organizer had addressed him as, "Dear Soulless Candidate." Then, scanning the receptive audience, he offered, "it's looking a lot like democracy out here."

Rose Penelope Yee, who emigrated from the Philippines 30 years ago, became a candidate out of frustration with perceived inaction on economic equity issues. "The core of my campaign is the belief that what is necessary for a functioning democracy is for Americans to have economic rights," she said. Among the policies she promotes are universal healthcare, universal basic income, free public college and trade schools, and cancellation of student debt.

Some of the strongest words against LaMalfa's far right brand came from Republican challenger Geist, who vowed to be a "burr in the saddle of the Republican Party," and used his opening statement to propose a new law that would ensure jail time for lawmakers in Washington DC who spread falsehoods. "Right now, liars have the advantage. Lies are free, they are infinite in number, and they are readily available," Geist said, and in contrast, "a truth teller has to spend time and money to verify what the truth is—and we are getting swamped."

As a Republican in the left-leaning Nevada City area, Geist claimed that "too many of my Democratic friends don't really understand the need to say the truth with emotion." He said Republicans train in marketing and business, using those skills to "sow lies, and grow fear, hate, and division among fellow Americans," adding, "it breaks my heart."

Citing a recent prediction by a US military general that the country is in danger of a coup in 2024, Geist believes democracy "needs more heroes that will put their lives at risk to promote the truth," and spoke of President Volodymyr Zelensky, who "put his life on the line for his country, accepted the risk, and now he's an international hero who's united his country."

On questions about climate change, Steiner said he supports the Sites reservoir proposal near Willows because in a time of climate change and drought, "we're going to get more erratic rainfalls, and that means we're going to need to store more water." When we do get precipitation, he said, more of it "will come as rain and not as snow, and that means we're going to have to build out our infrastructure to adapt to this new reality."

Geist agreed that expanding water storage was a priority, asserting "we have to build more dams, with ever greater urgency," and that hydroelectric power would be a positive byproduct.

Yee agreed more solutions for the water crisis were needed, but questioned where the funding would come from. An avowed anti-war candidate, she suggested the recent \$40 billion allocated for Ukraine could have provided \$96 million in infrastructure funds for every state. "I

believe that war is draining resources away from all the good things we could do for the country."

Steiner, a combat veteran who received the Combat Infantry Badge in Iraq for his role defending a civilian journalist who now serves in the Army reserves, said he believes there are times when war is justified. "We can see what happens if we cede our leadership role; we have the Russian invasion of Ukraine going on right now. I'm not anti-war, but I am pro-Congress."

All three candidates were critical of AUMFs (Authorization for the Use of Military Force) giving additional power to Presidents to wage war, including one enacted post 9-11 that is still in place after more than 20 years. "Congress should not give up its power to declare war, the power of the purse," Steiner said, and proposed a plan to require re-authorization of AUMFs with each new Congress, every 2 years.

Yee adamantly opposed giving broad war powers to a President, and Geist said, "we need to be able to trust our leadership," and that enhanced intelligence available to a chief executive should be used to allow them to make snap decisions defensively, but agreed that "it's Congress's job to declare war."

Yee said that despite her anti-war stance, she is "pro-war for climate change," which she called "an imminent threat, not just for our well-being, but for human survival, and needs to be addressed as if we are in a war." She proposed that Congress reallocate subsidies from the fossil fuel industry towards renewable energy sources and electric vehicles.

Geist noted that "the other Republican in this race, LaMalfa, has compared climate change to a religion," which Geist believes "is an insult to all people of faith." He added, "Faith is a completely different thing from science. In science you need proof, you need evidence." He said he heard LaMalfa say that since carbon dioxide was only 4% of the atmosphere, "why should you worry about that?"

Steiner bluntly noted, "Doug LaMalfa does not believe in climate change. I believe in climate change, and it leads me to make a lot of tough choices." Citing the principles of the Citizen's Climate Lobby, Steiner said "we need to stop removing any source of renewable energy," including nuclear energy. He also supports a carbon tax at the wellhead which could provide a dividend to be allocated on a per capita basis to all Americans to "harness market power," and force industry change.

On the subject of health care, Yee said her distinctive crimson hat indicates membership in "Red Berets for Medicare for All," and was encouraged by current ballot initiatives in the states of Washington and New York that, if passed, could help push the concept nationally.

Geist stated, "I'm a Republican for universal healthcare." He noted, ironically, that "Trump tried to destroy Medicare," and was helped by 83% of white evangelicals despite Biblical directives to

heal the sick, and put health before profit. "Logic is superseded by the emotions," he concluded.

Steiner believes universal healthcare is not currently realistic politically, but does favor expanding the Medicare eligibility age, and highlighted the need to cut wasteful government spending in healthcare. He noted that the "club of rich countries," OECD (Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development), collectively spends 8 to 9% on healthcare, twice that of defense spending.

Returning to his focus on fire, Steiner compared the average tree density of 80-100 trees per acre in the 1890s, to 300 trees per acre today as a major threat. "We can blame PGE, and I do," he said, but added that sparks didn't always cause million-acre fires. "We need to go back to aggressive initial attacks on fire, we need to add enough firefighters to deal with the fires that start," he said. "But to prevent those fires from getting out of control it's really going to take a lot more money spent on forests to reduce fuel loads." He noted that over 50% of land in CA Congressional District 1 is federal, and that two-thirds of the Forest Service's budget goes to fire fighting. "We need to have a Forest Service that looks at the forest again, and is not just a fire-fighting agency."

Steiner proposed a Federal fire insurance program to help homeowners whose rates have soared or whose policies have been cancelled. "This is a market failure," he said, citing too many costs for private insurance to bear. He made a comparison with the Army Corps of Engineers being responsible for floods in the US, which is "why the Federal Government has flood insurance." In the North State, he said, the Forest Service has responsibility for fires, and he believes the Federal Government should bear some of the cost to homeowners on insurance. "Even if you are not on Forest Service land, the fires that start and burn our houses, that burned my brother's house, start and propagate through Federal forests."

Yee didn't disagree on the need for fire mitigation, but questioned how to pay for it. "Max's solutions are brilliant," she said, but that Congress needs to allocate the money properly. "Look at the systems and structures and address the root of those problems," she said. "We always have money for war, but don't have money for solutions."

Geist said flatly, "we're not taking enough revenue for the federal government," joking that he'd "never dare say this to a bunch of Republicans," but then assured the crowd he actually had. "Right now, the way we finance wars is, we pick our children's pockets." Republicans, he said, are better at framing the argument with phrases like "tax burden," and suggested using phrases like 'tax contribution' to "increase the motivation for people to contribute to our future, to make our nation stronger."

On the subject of women's rights and trans-gender rights, there was general agreement on a woman's right to choose, and for LGBTQ rights. Geist said he was, "for that whole alphabet," and for treating people with compassion. "Everyone wants love, I'm all for that," he said, but admits to being confused by the concept of gender reassignment in very young children.

Yee said she believes "the most a congressperson could do," is to prevent discrimination in terms of hiring or opportunities for transgender people, indigenous people, people of color and all marginalized groups.

Steiner framed it as "a question of basic human decency." He noted people in attendance wearing masks, and others that weren't, which was "a personal choice, it doesn't affect me, and I don't judge anyone for that," and said he supports protecting individual rights. "Many in America have decided that somehow it's an attack on them that they have to refer to someone who presents as a male as 'her'." He has known people who were born male, and now identify as female, adding, "I have no problem if they want to wear women's clothing, or what pronoun they want to use, it has no cost to me."

Asked about recent statements in the press by Shasta County's biggest political donor, Connecticut millionaire Reverage Anselmo, that women are not suited for politics, there was unanimous pushback.

Yee, the only female candidate, began by asking, "I'm proof that women should run for office, right?," drawing applause from her two competitors. She noted the Philippines has already had two women Presidents, and recalled her surprise that the US Senate still had no women's bathroom in the 1990s. "Each of us, regardless of gender, regardless of our identity, regardless of race, we all have areas where we are better at and less good at than others, but women definitely should run for office," Yee said. "Tim said we need heroes. I don't think we need heroes, we need ordinary people to stand up and say: 'enough is enough, we deserve a better government.' "

Republican Geist enthusiastically endorsed more women entering politics. "Oh my goodness, please let it be! We need more women in politics! I think there would be fewer wars."

Steiner responded by saying, "I condemn those statements by the right wing of the Republican Party, which has turned into the mainstream wing of the Republican Party—sorry, Tim!" He then made a tough attack on the incumbent. "Doug LaMalfa lacks the spine to stand up to others in his caucus who would take away the rights of women, because Doug LaMalfa doesn't stand up for his beliefs—or he doesn't have beliefs, I just can't tell," he said, adding, "He's like a rice stalk blowing in the wind."

Steiner affirmed his support for more women in politics, with one caveat, adding, "but this one time, in this election, I hope you vote for me, the male, and not Rose, the female," to wide laughter.

There was a highly personal discussion of reproductive rights towards the end of the forum, summarized here:

Max Steiner: "I support Roe v. Wade, up to viability and following that, the physical health of the mother makes sense. I was raised Catholic, and I think life begins at conception. I understand that's a religiously informed and personal belief and I do not want to codify it into law, because I realize there is a difference between my religion, and my state.

"And I also realize that I've been a bad Catholic: I'm a 'turn the other cheek infantryman.' My country sent me to war. Our country is not defined by the sixth commandment, 'thou shalt not kill.' We are a country with a military, we need a military, we are a country that realizes that we are not a biblical state. I do not want us to turn into Iran, I do not want us to turn into Shariah law. I think we have to understand that religiously informed restrictions on female reproductive freedom is a step in that direction, and it is not one I am willing to take."

Tim Geist: "This is a difficult topic for me. By the way, not only women suffer from abortions, I've had personal experience with that as well in a relationship, and was depressed for quite some time. Lots of people have been affected by that. I think it's a tragedy, every abortion, but it's not my body we're talking about, is it? It's the woman's body. I think women have the right to choose what happens to their body. However, I would like to see a limit, first trimester."

Rose Yee, who is Catholic, also believes life begins at conception, but thinks "a woman should have control over her own body." She is "pro-choice, pro Roe vs. Wade," and said the conversation should be expanded, because it's "a class issue." She noted that without universal health care, "those that do carry a baby full term don't have the resources they need." She asked who would be affected most if Roe vs. Wade was repealed? "It's really women of color, it's really poor women."

When asked how the candidates could be held accountable in office, Max Steiner replied: "by getting unelected. That's why congress is only two years, it's easy to keep them in line, if you're willing to keep someone in line. The Republicans are not willing to keep LaMalfa in line." He then urged people to become active voters, and talk to their neighbors, "Talk to Republicans, and Independents, and ask, are you happy with Doug? I'm not a liar, and I'm not a boy scout, but I was a soldier. I keep my oath. When I swear to defend the constitution of the United States, I keep that. Doug doesn't. When I tell you I'm going to deliver for this district on fire, please trust me, and vote me out if I don't. But don't trust Doug, because he's had 10 years, and he hasn't done it."

Tim Geist offered that he was for strong fiscal discipline, but in other ways is not a typical Republican. "If I were elected to Congress, I would be a burr in the saddle of the Republican Party, reminding them that there is no freedom without Democracy, there's no Democracy without the truth. Every time they are lying to us they are breaking their oath, which is there to protect the constitution. We the people make the decisions, we are the mechanics that assemble the democracy, we make it run, we make the engine to run up the great steep

challenges of our country. If we don't get the facts, we have no chance: we will assemble nothing but a pile of junk. I look forward to being a burr in the saddle of the Republican Party."

Rose Yee countered Geist's "burr in the saddle comments," with, "A rose has thorns, right? I vow to be a thorn in the side of the establishment until we get Medicare For All. If you elect me, It's high time we tell the people what's really going on there. Why can't we pass Medicare of all? Why can't we cancel student debt? Why can't they fund our forest programs? Why can't they fund solutions for our water problems? Let's go march in the streets! Think how powerful that would be if a member of congress was marching for Medicare for all. So let's do it!"

In his closing statement, Max Steiner took the opportunity to focus first on International Affairs, highlighting his experience in combat and as a diplomat, and the need for more expertise in Congress.

"I'm a soldier, I'm still a reservist, I've had 17 years in the military, I know how war works, and what the military can, and more importantly, can't realistically do. I've been a diplomat. I understand what diplomacy can and cannot do. We have a war in Europe, we have Biden making comments about making a commitment to defend Taiwan, which is a huge shift away from our strategy of ambiguous deterrence, strategic ambiguity, the idea that we may or may not defend Taiwan when the Chinese attack, up to, or maybe not, nuclear weapons. We are moving towards unambiguously defending Taiwan. I think that's a good step, I think we owe it to the Taiwanese people--they are a democracy, China is not. But it will take experts in Congress who understand that that is a shift, who understand what that means, who are willing to hold the executive to account. It's something the Democrats are weak on. It's something the Republicans are weak on."

"One of the main reasons I'm running: our Democracy is under attack by a Republican party that has decided that truth doesn't matter, that facts don't matter, that if they have to choose between elections, between Democracy, and between everything that makes America great, and power, they will choose power. And we need to stop them. And we need to stop them whether we are Democrats, Republicans or Independents. I need you to talk to Republicans. Say you are voting for a veteran, you are voting for someone who cares, heck, you're voting for someone who isn't a 20-year career politician who has done nothing for this state."

Tim Geist, pointing to the confusing nature of redistricting, revealed he no longer resides in CD1, and can't even vote for himself. (Congressional candidates are not required to live in the district they represent). He agreed with many of Steiner's policy stances, at one point saying, "I like the way you think, Max," later adding, "He's a gentleman, he's a patriot who joined the military right out of school in a time of war, and I really admire that." He then admitted that if he were still registered in District 1 it would pose a dilemma, and said, "Frankly I'm not sure I would vote for myself, or Max Steiner."

Geist continued his theme of fiscal irresponsibility, and a perceived unwillingness to "contribute to the country monetarily." He noted that the US imposes sanctions on "troublesome"

countries, and that "we can do this because we are the largest economy in the world, so far, right now its neck and neck with China."

He warned in 10 or 15 years years China's economy may be half again as big as ours, or 3 times as big as ours in 30 years. "The era of small government is a really stupid idea when you consider what we're up against. If we are going to defend democracy, then we need to be financially strong, and of course we need to be loyal allies to our treaty partners. When Donald Trump came into office, he was a nightmare for me, for many of you I'm sure, and lots of Republicans feel the same way."

He warned of the huge temptations among Republicans to make billions of dollars with a business model based on lies "to sow fear and hate among smaller groups." He said the strategy comes from "a very basic idea in sociology: groups become more cohesive when they perceive, or think they perceive, an external threat. The smaller the group, the easier it is." When those in leadership lie, he said, it has the same effect, resulting in "no questions, no challenges from the peanut gallery, because they're frightened and anxious, and I've got a problem with that."

Rose Yee restated her concerns with working families, saying she cares about "people in our district who cannot seek medical help or are afraid to go to the doctor because they don't have insurance." She also stated concerns about: parents who stay up at night because they don't know how to pay for college; students who are scared of being a burden to their parents; young people who cannot raise a family or buy a home because they don't have the means or have too much student debt; and people who cannot find good paying jobs. "I hope that we get more of you to care as well. I believe that for us to have a real democracy, for us to talk about things like the invasion of Ukraine, and like the domination of China, that we need to take care of ourselves first. Before we can think of others, we need to think of ourselves first, we need to think of our neighbors."

The Candidates' Forum was a rare public debate about serious policy proposals, conducted with civility, humor and mutual respect, and ending with a friendly reception, and group photos of the participants.

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QUOTES FROM THE CA CD1 CANDIDATES' FORUM
MAY 23, 2022
SHASTA DEMOCRATS HQ —900 Locust St., Redding CA

Max Steiner:

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"I'm not a liar, and I'm not a boy scout, but I was a soldier. I keep my oath. When I swear to defend the constitution of the United States, I keep that. Doug doesn't."

"I think January 6 was an attack on our democratic system, and when I get to Congress, I want to make sure that never happens again."

CLIMATE CHANGE

"Doug LaMalfa does not believe in climate change. I believe in climate change, and it leads me to make a lot of tough choices."

"When I tell you I'm going to deliver for this district on fire, please trust me, and vote me out if I don't. But don't trust Doug, because he's had 10 years, and he hasn't done it."

"To prevent those fires from getting out of control it's really going to take a lot more money spent on forests to reduce fuel loads...we need to have a Forest Service that looks at the forest again, and is not just a fire-fighting agency."

WOMEN'S RIGHTS

"I was raised Catholic, and I think life begins at conception. I understand that's a religiously informed and personal belief and I do not want to codify it into law, because I realize there is a difference between my religion, and my state."

"I do not want us to turn into Iran, I do not want us to turn into Shariah law, I think that we have to understand that religiously informed restrictions on female reproductive freedom is a step in that direction, and it is not one I am willing to take."

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INTERNATIONAL RELATIONS

"We are moving towards unambiguously defending Taiwan. I think that's a good step, I think we owe it to the Taiwanese people: they are a democracy, China is not. But it will take experts in Congress who understand that that is a shift, who understand what that means, who are willing to hold the executive to account."

Tim Geist:

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"It's Looking a lot like Democracy out here."

"Right now, liars have the advantage. Lies are free, they are infinite in number, and they are readily available...a truth teller has to spend time and money to verify what the truth is—and we are getting swamped."

"If I were elected to Congress, I would be a burr in the saddle of the Republican Party, reminding them that there is no freedom without Democracy, there's no Democracy without the truth. Every time they are lying to us, they are breaking their oath, which is there to protect the constitution."

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HEALTH CARE

"I'm a Republican for universal healthcare."

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" Please, let it be! We need more women in politics! I think there would be fewer wars."

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"Right now its neck and neck with China... we need to make stronger contributions to our country. The era of small government is a really stupid idea when you consider what we're up against. If we are going to defend democracy, then we need to be financially strong, and of course we need to be loyal allies to our treaty partners."

"When Donald Trump came into office, he was a nightmare for me...and lots of Republicans feel the same way."

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"Each of us, regardless of gender, regardless of our identity, regardless of race, we all have areas where we are better at and less good at than others, but women definitely should run for office,"

"Those that do carry a baby full term don't have the resources they need. Who would be affected most if Roe vs. Wade was repealed? It's really women of color, it's really poor women."

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