

## Carney, Markell pledge aid to housing

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Both candidates vow to find more funding

By ADAM TAYLOR

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WILMINGTON -- Delaware's two Democratic gubernatorial candidates vowed Tuesday to make housing issues a higher priority in state government.

Doing so will take lots of cash, and state Treasurer Jack Markell and Lt. Gov. John Carney Jr. each said they'll put their money where their campaign-promising mouths are if elected.

The two men made their remarks at a candidates forum sponsored by the nonprofit Delaware Housing Coalition at Theatre N in downtown Wilmington. About 100 people, mostly from

the housing industry, attended.

Carney said housing issues have long been considered federal matters by state officials, a mindset that has made matters worse for Delawareans in need because funding for housing

programs from Washington has steadily declined in the past eight years.

"The Delaware State Housing Authority has always been kind of a stepchild department," he said.

"We can have a housing policy that ensures every person in Delaware has a safe and

affordable place to live."

Markell said housing is a "basic civil right." He said his "plan for prosperity" includes a "foundation of fairness" that will try to form private-public partnerships to make sure that every

state resident has decent, safe and affordable housing. For many, he said, a car accident or a brief illness is all that separates "the fine line of achieving the American Dream to losing

everything.

"That's unacceptable," he said. "Delaware has always been the 'state of neighbors' and it ought to stay that way."

Paul Calistro, executive director of West End Neighborhood House, a successful nonprofit housing group that has worked on dozens of properties to increase home ownership on

Wilmington's West Side, said he was "pleasantly stunned" by what he heard.

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"This is one of the first times ever that governor's candidates are mentioning housing in the same breath with education and health care. And they both committed to bringing money for housing programs."

Carney said he's committed to finding state money that would double the state's Housing Development fund, from its current \$4 million to \$8 million. Markell said he'd fight to increase it as well.

The event was not a debate, as each man was given the questions in advance. They did answer some off-the-cuff questions from the audience, but there was little spontaneous interplay between the candidates.

Carney, however, ended his opening comments with a shot at Markell.

"My opponent likes to say that he has been fighting the status quo and criticizes me for not doing enough," Carney said. "My question is, 'Where has he been for the past 10 years?' He has been an independently elected statewide official like me. I've used my time in office to dig in and get things done -- not used the excuse that, 'It's not in my job description.' "

Later in the event, Carney made a veiled reference to the fact that he's a longtime resident of Wilmington, where much of the state's housing needs exist. Markell lives in Rockland.

"I'm not somebody who just talks about creating affordable housing in somebody else's community," Carney said.

Later in the event, Markell defended himself, saying he created the Delaware Money School, which provides free classes on saving for college and retirement.

He's hosted conferences on money management and worked with the Nehemiah Gateway Community Development Corp. in Wilmington on the Earned Income Tax Credit Campaign.

Those efforts are a key to improving people's housing conditions, Markell said. Carney agreed that other programs, such as job training, education, and drug and alcohol counseling, are often critical to people winding up in decent housing.

Markell also contended that he's the better leader. They both favor affordable housing; the better question, he suggested, is who will be better at finding more state and federal money

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to pay for programs that will work.

"I'm going to fight as hard as I possibly can to make it happen," he said.

Carney said his experience, such as chairing the Livable Delaware Advisory Council, would make him more qualified to tackle the state's housing needs.

Each candidate said he would fight for more housing money for people with HIV/AIDS.

They both promised they would not ignore Kent and Sussex counties' housing needs and would not focus on New Castle County alone.

The last point was good news for David W. Moore, president of Milford Housing Development Corp., a nonprofit that works with low-income downstate residents.

"It sounds like they want the Delaware State Housing Authority to have a more highly visible position in state government, and that's what it's going to take, at least as a starting point, to get more money for programs," he said.

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