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Republican candidates vie for values votes

By Stephen Schmidt

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Three Republican candidates vying for the chance to challenge freshman U.S. Rep. Dave Loebsack, D-Iowa, for his 2nd District seat in the fall met Tuesday in Cedar Rapids to woo family values voters — discussing such issues as abortion, stem cell research and freedom of religion.

At the event, hosted by the Iowa Christian Alliance at Elite Home Cabinets & Design, 310 Collins Rd. NE, candidate Lee Harder, 47, a former prison chaplain from Hillsboro, spoke emotionally about an epiphany he had while working for the Conservative Congress in the 1980s.

"I realized that I had started to trust in government to do things only God can accomplish," he said.

In addition to his stance against allowing stem cell research, abortion and euthanasia, Harder argued for the protection of freedom of religion against humanists and unitarians who, he said, now dominate public life.

"Right now, if you're not eclectic, you're not accepted," he said.

Peter Teahen, 54, of Cedar Rapids, a former spokesman for the Red Cross and president of Teahen Funeral Home, said he strongly supports a ban on abortion on both national and state levels.

"To work, it has to be a groundswell from both above and below," Teahen said.

Regarding stem cells, Teahen said he has read research that showed medical breakthroughs could be achieved effectively without stem cells, and their use belied his belief in "the protection of life, from conception to death."

Mariannette Miller-Meeks, 52, an ophthalmologist from Ottumwa, broke with the other two candidates by arguing that abortions should be reduced not through laws but by social mechanisms geared to support families.

"Am I pro-life? Yes I am, but I'm not for hate mongering or denigrating or criminalizing that choice," she said.

Miller-Meeks also said that because all knowledge is given by God, research using non-viable stem cells, incapable of giving life, should be allowed in medical research.

It was a hard stance to take in front of the audience, she said. "I know that's not what people want to hear, but leaders are leaders because they lead," she said. "People lump all forms of stem cell research into one category, when they are not the same."

The primary between the three candidates will be held June 3.

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