

## Legislative debate in Atlantic City focuses on economic issues

By **DEREK HARPER** Staff Writer | Posted: Thursday, October 3, 2013 12:30 am

**ATLANTIC CITY** — Candidates for the 2nd Legislative District focused on economic issues Wednesday night when they debated at Dante Hall in the resort.

The winners in next month's election will represent the 2nd District in the state Legislature. That district includes most of Atlantic County.

In his opening remarks, state Sen. Jim Whelan, D-Atlantic, said the deal that people had thought was theirs for the taking has all but disappeared.

"Instead of a deal, the rich are getting richer," Whelan said. "The poor are being buried."

In his opening remarks, Republican challenger Frank Balles said, "Our government spends too much. Our government taxes too much."

He is running to bring back "real leadership" to the district, the current Atlantic County sheriff said, citing former state legislators Bill Gormley, Steve Perskie and Hap Farley.

In the later Assembly debate, Assemblyman John Amodeo said the most important issue in the election is the state's high property taxes, which he said are almost three times the national median.

Amodeo, R-Atlantic, touted a bill that would provide a direct 10 percent credit to residential tax bills, while saying the renter's credit should be quadrupled.

Assemblyman Chris Brown, R-Atlantic, agreed that property taxes and jobs are paramount. He, too, called for the 10 percent cut, saying a break needed to be given to the middle class.

On the Democratic side in the Assembly race, Nick Russo, the mayor of Longport, said that Atlantic City is the second most important issue after property taxes. There have been limited achievements in the Tourist District. Now, he said, the dots need to be connected.

Vince Mazzeo, the mayor of Northfield, said state aid cuts have driven property taxes upward, hitting local taxpayers. He touted his city's police chief-sharing, and said he wants to do more with shared services.

Whelan also called for raising the minimum wage and diversifying the local economy. "The central issue of this campaign is: how do all the residents feel the benefits of a rising economy?" he said.

In his turn, Balles waved a handful of campaign fliers directed at him. "This is what desperate career politicians do," he said, saying he was proud of his record as a police officer.

He attacked Whelan for support

Township. The 9th District candidates, covering parts of Ocean, Burlington and Atlantic Counties, will debate at 6 p.m. Oct. 23 in Stockton's Campus Center theater.

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