

Chumbley, Halford: School should be built all at once

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KULA — The candidates for the 11th House District seat Tuesday expressed strong support for an Up-country high school built all at once and each said they're willing to run up some debt to pay for it.

Both Democrat Avery Chumbley and Republican Chris Halford told Kula parents it's important to the education of their children that the school be built in its entirety and urged the state to use bond financing to help make it become an immediate reality.

"I want to insist on and fight for a high school built all at once," declared Halford at a meeting of the Kula Elementary School PTA.

Chumbley criticized the state for not going into debt to pay for education. He said Hawaii is one of the few states that builds schools with a positive cash flow only.

"We need to be more creative," Chumbley said. "If we continue to fund education the way we have, we'll never catch up."

After the meeting, Chumbley suggested that with its good bond rating, the state should raise \$1 billion for education through bond financing and make a commitment to retire the

debt in 20 years.

"I don't feel bad putting my child in debt, as long as it pays for things that benefit him. In fact, I like being in debt. But we've got to be able to service that debt," he said.

While he doesn't advocate raising taxes, Chumbley said the state needs to search for new ways to pay for such things as public schools. He suggested the state tap into property taxes, as many Mainland states do.

But Halford disagreed, saying property taxes should be reserved for the counties.

"It's the county's only way to raise revenue," he said, adding that it is "economically unsound to over-tax the property owner."

It was one of few disagreements at a forum dedicated to public school issues. Another concerned funding. While both agreed the public school system needs a dramatic boost in funding, they disagreed on exactly how to do it.

Halford pledged to restore education funding to a level of at least 30 percent of the state's General Fund, a huge increase from the present 17 percent level.

But Chumbley said he favors a different way of allocating funds: the dedication of a full 1 percent of the state's 4 percent excise tax to educa-

tion. By his figuring, the move would raise an additional \$370 million per year for public schools, a funding increase of 54 percent a year.

After the meeting, Halford questioned his opponent's numbers and said he was skeptical the funding plan would produce the results Chumbley said it would.

Both candidates said they want to bring greater local control of public schools.

Asked if he would support school boards for each island, Halford said he would go a step further and put the local decision-making level at each school complex (a high school and the schools that feed students into it).

Chumbley said he doesn't know if he fully agrees with school/community-based management, the Department of Education's attempt to bring control to the school and community level. He said the program has failed in Illinois and Florida, and state leaders must keep an eye on SCBM here so that it doesn't go astray.

Chumbley also noted he supports the "school by choice" concept that allows parents to take their tax dollars to pay for their child's education at a private school.