

Showdown at Howard Beach

by {ga=dking}

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NEW YORK — It was a showdown at Howard Beach last night between the two candidates vying for the 15th State Senate District seat.

The debate between Democratic incumbent Sen. Joe Addabbo and his Republican challenger, Councilman Erich Ulrich, was mainly substantive, but it had its quirks, too. The packed crowd at Our Lady of Grace parish was a mix of partisans and people who seemed legitimately torn that the two were challenging each other.

Each candidate was given the chance by moderators to defend themselves against negative mailers as well as to condemn mailers sent out by outside groups that attacked both men.

Addabbo defended himself against an attack made by an outside group saying, "I don't love parrots more than kids." Addabbo explained that he had introduced a bill in Albany about parrots at the request of a constituent but that he has two kids who he loves both. Both men decried the negative mailers that have flooded the district from PACS and said they wished they

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didn't exist.

During the lightning round, both men were asked to describe the other's campaign in one word. "Negative," Addabbo said. Ulrich paused and, with much gravitas, replied, "Dishonest."

Ulrich called the Democrats' control of the Senate in 2008 to 2010 an "abomination." Addabbo attacked Senate Majority leader Sen. Dean Skelos, saying Skelos did not have the people's interests in mind.

"You aren't running against Dean Skelos, you are running against me," Ulrich replied.

Ulrich insisted that he would be independent of the Senate Republicans and be able to deliver for his district, despite the majority's focus on upstate and Long Island issues saying, "They need me. I don't need them."

[Read our previous story on the race between Addabbo and Ulrich: Rival Candidates in State Senate Race Say They Won't Toe Party Lines](#)

However, Ulrich has taken \$10,000 from Skelos and \$234,700 from the Senate Republican Campaign Committee and \$250,000 from the New York State Republican Party.

When asked about campaign finance reform, Addabbo touted his work as a councilman reforming NYC's election process. However, he touted his support of casino gaming and his relationship with resorts world throughout the debate. Addabbo has received \$10,000 from Genting New York, the force behind the proposed Queens convention center and casino.

Another major difference between the two was displayed when they were asked about The Dream Act. Ulrich said he supported "some version" of the act, while Addabbo said he didn't support it at all because people in his district can't find money to send their kids to college.

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Both men also went to town on their differences on gun violence. Ulrich said it was a distortion that he wanted people running around the streets holding "bazookas" and said he felt microstamping was an unproven technology.

"The problem is not with the laws in New York but with the laws in other states," he said, insisting that illegal guns come into the city from states with laxer gun laws.

Addabbo said that he supports gun ownership, but wants an assault rifle ban because no one needs an "AK47" in their closet.

On hydraulic fracturing there were also stark differences. Addabbo painted the gas extraction process as a direct threat to Queens' business. "There have been fatalities," he said. He also joked that he couldn't go to Gino's (a local Italian joint with an excellent caprese salad) if their food was tainted by hydrofracking.

"I'm for clean drinking water, in case you are wondering," Ulrich said, before adding that he thought scientists should be given time to study the process. He also advocated testing the process in an area of New York where there are no major bodies of water.

Last night's debate was co-sponsored by Gotham Gazette's sister organization, [Citizens Union](#), and the Queens Chronicle & The Forum Newsgroup.

Addabbo and Ulrich posed for photos with local school children after the debate was finished. The two men are seen here just as the photo shoot ended. Photo by David Howard King.