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**Title: GOP SENATE CANDIDATES SPAR**  
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The six **Republican** candidates for U.S. **Senate** traded jabs over job creation and Medicare spending Wednesday in a **debate** at **Furman** University.

Former Gov. David Beasley, the front-runner, was the target of a few sharp barbs as the candidates generally agreed on lowering federal spending while sending more transportation dollars to South Carolina from Washington and creating individual savings accounts for retirement.

Only once did any candidate mention Inez Tenenbaum, the presumptive Democratic nominee, who, polls say, would defeat any of the **Republicans** if the election were held today.

The first question, about jobs, brought a quick rebuke of Beasley from U.S. Rep. Jim DeMint of Greenville. Beasley had touted his job-creation record as governor from 1995 to 1999, saying he was a fan of free trade despite a new campaign ad that blasts the loss of jobs to other countries.

"When I was governor, we prospered tremendously as a result of free trade," Beasley said, blaming unfair trading practices by China and other countries for the state's recent job losses.

DeMint quickly noted the S.C. jobs Beasley helped grow were based on foreign investment from companies like BMW of Germany, Fuji of Japan and Michelin of France. Those jobs were not grown by the state's traditional textile manufacturers, which were hemorrhaging jobs then, DeMint said.

"We need to correct the facts a little," DeMint said. "Even when Mr. Beasley was governor we lost tens of thousands of manufacturing jobs."

The candidates - Beasley, DeMint, former Attorney General Charlie Condon of Charleston, Charleston real estate developer Thomas Ravenel, Myrtle Beach Mayor Mark McBride and Bluffton businesswoman Orly Benny Davis - are vying for their party's nomination for the seat being vacated by Democrat Fritz Hollings, who is retiring.

If no candidate gets more than 50 percent of the June 8 primary vote, the nominee will be chosen in a runoff two weeks later.

**Furman** professor John Simpkins gave top marks to Beasley and DeMint on style, but said Condon won on substance.

"Condon was very strong on the issues and very consistent with his message of fiscal responsibility," said Simpkins, associate director of the Richard W. Riley Institute at **Furman**, which co-sponsored the event.

On every question, Condon returned to his campaign theme of reducing what he calls out-of-control federal spending.

Even "worthy projects," Condon said, like the proposed I-73 to Myrtle Beach, "are being threatened by this out-of-control federal spending." Several times, Condon criticized his fellow **Republicans**, who control Congress, for growing government spending.

That impressed J.E. Ponder Jr. of Dacusville, who was among the estimated 800 in the audience.

"Mr. Condon came across as being the most fiscally conservative," said Ponder, 54. "He was the only candidate of the whole pack to take the **Republican** Congress and president to task for having this tremendous federal deficit."

**Furman's** Simpkins said Ravenel lost points for poor posture. He often slumped in his chair.

"People pay attention to physical presence. I didn't see from his posture that he was as engaged in the issues and that he was taking the moment as seriously."

On Medicare, candidates were asked if they favored revisiting the recently passed Medicare overhaul measure that includes a prescription drug benefit for seniors.

President Bush, who proposed the idea, originally estimated its cost at more than \$450 billion. But after the bill became law, that projected cost jumped.

DeMint, the only member of Congress in the race, said he worked to defeat the bill, even though it included his plan for individual health savings accounts.

"It was a universal entitlement, the biggest expansion of government in history," DeMint said. "I had to vote against it."

But, Beasley countered, Bush "is clearly right. By and large, I was supportive of his proposal."

Condon looked at Beasley and said, "I will have to respectfully disagree very sharply," adding the plan cost too much.

Recent polls have shown Beasley to be leading by a wide margin but not enough to avoid a runoff. His nearest challengers are Condon and DeMint, with Ravenel gaining.

DeMint was the only other candidate on the stage at whom a shot was fired. During the discussion of I-73, he said spending for that road is an example of good federal spending.

But McBride accused DeMint of voting against a bill that would have funded the highway, the first interstate to serve Myrtle Beach.

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