



# Newport *this week*

  

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## To Debate or Not to Debate

By Tom Walsh

As election years go, 2014 is not shaping up as a good year for political debates in Newport.

First, there's the competitive Democratic primary race in House District 75 between three-term incumbent Peter F. Martin and his Willow Street neighbor, Lauren Carson. With no Republican or other candidates on the ballot, the Democratic primary winner in September will capture the House seat.

The Newport County League of Women Voters approached the candidates back in July about engaging in a debate. Carson accepted immediately. Martin hesitated before declining to participate.

"It's too bad," said Susan Wells, president of the Newport County League of Women Voters. "There's been so much going on. Informed voters are the best voters."

"I prefer to take my race directly to my constituents and not debate," Martin said. "I don't like debating. I just like doing my job. I'm doing very well with what I'm doing. I don't choose to do a debate."

Carson, who as the challenger probably has the most to gain from a head-to-head atmosphere of a debate, said she, too, was disappointed. "I don't know what to think about it," she said. "This would have been a good opportunity for the people to see the two candidates together."

Meanwhile, a similar story has been unfolding around the campaign to add table games to the current slot machine menu at the Newport Grand slot parlor. The November general election in Newport and statewide will include another ballot question on whether to permit table games at Newport Grand.

Doug Riggs, program chairman at the Redwood Library, said his organization has sought to arrange a debate between pro-table games and anti-table games backers. According to Riggs, lead casino developer Joseph R. Paolino has told him that he wants any such event to be held at Newport Grand and not at the Redwood Library.

"I'm hoping to debate," Paolino said. However, he said the library sponsors want to use a casino foe from Connecticut to debate against the table games plan. "I will debate someone from Newport, not from Connecticut," Paolino said.

The former Providence mayor, now a successful commercial developer, also objected to Riggs as debate moderator. "He's against us," Paolino said. "How can you be the moderator and not be impartial? I say let's have a debate at Newport Grand. Have it there and let me communicate with someone from Newport."

How any of this will turn out is, well, debatable.

"Don't count this one out," said the Redwood Library's Riggs.

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