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171ST DISTRICT

Two Dems vie for spot on ballot

Mike Joseph Two Democrats are competing in Tuesday's primary election to challenge the five-term incumbent in the 171st state House district.



Tosti-Vasey



Joanne Tosti-Vasey, of Bellefonte, and Tim Wilson, of Spring Township, have been running low-key campaigns that have been overshadowed by presidential and congressional contests.

The Democratic primary winner will face state Rep. Kerry Benninghoff, R-Bellefonte, in the Nov. 4 general election. Benninghoff, first elected to the seat in 1996, is unopposed in the primary.

Tosti-Vasey, president of

the Pennsylvania chapter of the National Organization for Women, said campaigning has convinced her that people from throughout the district fret about health care, jobs and education.

"They worry about putting gas in the cars and food on their table and making sure that the family members have access to health care," she said.

Wilson, citing new increases in the cost of gasoline this week, said that "people are concerned about the fact that things are costing more and more."

The 171st District includes Brown and Armagh townships in Mifflin County and much of

southeastern Centre County: the townships of College, Gregg, Harris, Penn, Potter, Spring and Walker and the boroughs of Bellefonte, Centre Hall and Millheim, along with the Penn State campus area in State College.

At a League of Women Voters forum this month, Tosti-Vasey said she had to fight her own health care insurance system almost two decades ago. She was stricken with leukemia and had to arrange for a bone marrow transplant from her twin sister.

As the insurance companies delayed making a decision and a hospital refused to perform the transplant without the insurance companies on board, Tosti-Vasey was left in limbo.

“People should never have to go through that kind of stress and strain when their life is in danger,” Tosti-Vasey said later. “It was at that point that I started advocating for single-payer health care.”

Wilson, a software systems engineer for SRI International, has a platform that calls for economic development to create more jobs, a health care program good enough to cover all children, education reform at all levels and greater government accountability.

“Our kids need more attention — smaller classes,” Wilson told the League of Women Voters audience. “Let them leave high school with a better plan of what to do with their life.”