

DA candidates take to campus

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By ALLAN KATZ

Five candidates for district attorney and a stand-in for DA Jim Garrison spoke reflectively on their campaigns yesterday in a forum at the Tulane University Law School.

Standing in for Garrison was First Asst. DA John Volz who drew laughter when he said, "Jim Garrison would like to be here with you but he's tied up waiting for a very important message," a reference to the vigil being mounted in anticipation of the verdict in the pinball trial.

All the candidates running against Garrison were on hand. The five are William Alford, Denis Barry, Harry Connick, George Reese and Ross Scaccia.

Garrison's opponents touched on an issue that has seldom been publicly aired here—the idea that a DA ought to be less concerned about victimless crimes like use of marijuana and homosexuality and place a higher priority on offenses such as robbery and burglary.

VOLZ TOOK the general approach that much of what was discussed by the incumbent's opponents was "pie in the sky"—mere platitudes that would fast fade away if any of the challengers were faced with actually having to run a DA's office.

The appearance of Volz was in itself somewhat unusual in this campaign. Many groups have held that Garrison could not send a surrogate and must represent himself if he wishes to participate in the campaign.

One candidate, Alford, touched on what has been a political no-no in the past here—the idea of controlling or licensing handguns in the New Orleans area.

The gist of what the candidates said in their presentations to the more than 125 students who turned out:

ALFORD: "I was reluctant to get into any political race but decided to enter this one. I feel there ought to be one candidate who will touch on the real issues—the control of handguns, prison reform, whether victimless crimes ought to be prosecuted and the role of the police in this community.

"I think voters ought to listen very carefully to the candidates and decide whether they're hearing the candidate or the public relations man."

BARRY: "In New Orleans this month, homicide is up 43 per cent over this month last year, rape is up 23 per cent, armed robbery is up 20 per cent and burglary is up 24 per cent. That tells you what kind of job is being done now in the DA's office. Some candidates here will tell you what we need is task forces and committees. What we really need is a DA with a hard-nosed attitude toward multiple offenders and an aversion to plea bargaining of the kind that presently gets a man facing a 99-year-sentence off with a six-month suspended sentence in exchange for a guilty plea."

CONNICK: "In 1969, I ran against the 'giant' when no one else was willing to do so. I suffered a slight shortage of votes in that race but I'm back today and we will win because people in New Orleans are fed up with the rising rate of crime that an apathetic DA's office can't seem to stem. The system has broken down in juvenile court and juveniles commit half the crimes. The number of narcotics addicts is up from 2,000 in '69 to at least 6,000 today. Until we make the system work, crime will keep on spiraling."

VOLZ: "Every four years, we are subjected to the histrionics of politicians seeking office. I hope you won't be bamboozled by these pie-in-the-sky promises. A DA can only prosecute the cases brought in by the police.

"The truth is that there is only so much a DA can do. A DA depends on the 1,400-member police department over whom he has no control. If any of these candidates were elected DA, they would soon discover there is no time for pie in the sky. It is a seven-day a week job that requires more than eight hours a day."

REESE: "As this campaign goes on, I find that all of the candidates, myself included, tend to fall into a pattern of canned speeches. But, what is important is this—I have tried to cut to the heart of the matter and pledge to the voters that I will make my priority the 600 to 700 hardcore criminals who wreaked an epidemic of crime on this community. I will not tell you that I will prosecute victimless crimes as diligently as I will prosecute armed robbers. Any DA candidate who tells you the truth and intends to do a good job will have to say, as I have, what his priorities will be. My priorities are the conviction of murderers, rapists, armed robbers and burglars."

SCACCIA: "It is very well for candidates to speak of the DA as prosecutor. But, the DA also has a responsibility to observe the bill of rights and the rights of the accused that we consider sacred to the democratic way of life. A DA must be a good prosecutor—and I would be that—but a DA must also know that the police bring in many bad cases and that innocent people can get battered around in the criminal justice system. A DA who forgets that won't be a good DA in the total sense."