

Warren goes on offensive in debate

Public safety issues dominate latest face-off

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Charging that Mayor Thomas Richards' administration has not taken public safety seriously enough, City Council President and mayoral candidate Lovely Warren went on the offensive Thursday — painting the mayor as out of touch with the city's challenged neighborhoods.

"If you live in the same neighborhood as Tom, things look pretty good," Warren said, but the view is different from where her grandfather lives on Jefferson Avenue.

She returned to the topic later: "I just don't believe he has what it takes to bridge the gap and bring us together as one city."

Warren is challenging Richards' re-election in a Sept. 10 Democratic primary. The two faced off during a fast-paced, 30-minute debate sponsored by the League of Women Voters and hosted by

WROC-TV. Green Party candidate Alex White, on the ballot for the November general election, was not invited.

A spate of violence — including three homicides in the past two weeks — and a pair of videos of forceful arrests has focused attention on the Police Department. The local NAACP called for Police Chief James Sheppard's firing Thursday.

Asked about Sheppard's status during the debate, Richards said the chief "is doing a good job. I'd keep him where he is." Warren did not answer the question during the debate but said afterward that she did not blame Sheppard for recent events, and that he has worked hard to improve community relations.

Pressed on whether that meant that he should keep his job, she responded: "I didn't say that. I will evaluate that, (if elected)." The chief serves at the pleasure of the mayor.

For his part, Richards painted the city as challenged but making progress. He referenced neighborhood and hous-



Lovely Warren



Thomas Richards

ing improvements that began in the final years of the Duffy administration, in which he served as corporation counsel and, briefly, as deputy mayor. He said he has unique skills, as a lawyer and former CEO of Rochester Gas & Electric, to address the city's financial challenges.

"It may not be the most interesting thing, but ... if you fall apart financially, everything else goes," he said.

Warren, also a lawyer, touted her background in state government and six years on City Council but stressed her neighborhood connections. She noted more than once that Richards lives in the city's high-end Browncroft neighborhood. She grew up in the 19th Ward, spent a lot of time at her grandfather's house and now lives near Culver Road

and Empire Boulevard.

"Some people say I lack experience," Warren said, adding that is true in the respect that she has "no experience selling one of the (community's) most trusted companies, taking a \$10 million payout and laying off hundreds of workers."

It was a charge leveled in the 2011 special election by Richards' then-opponent, former Mayor William A. Johnson Jr. Warren backed Richards' candidacy at the time. He has said he was fired after the merger, having resisted Energy East's demands to lower the sale price for fear it would hurt stock prices and employees' 401(k) plans. The \$10 million was mostly in stock and stock options, he has said, and he, like all stockholders, received cash for RG&E stock in the merger.

"That's the shot I have to take," Richards said after the debate. "I'm proud of my time at RG&E."

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