

Tenenbaum, DeMint square off in second debate

By JENNIFER HOLLAND
THE ASSOCIATED PRESS

GREENVILLE — Republican U.S. candidate Jim DeMint tried to paint Democratic opponent Inez Tenenbaum as a liberal along the lines of Ted Kennedy and Bill Clinton, while she argued that he needs to put the focus on South Carolina instead of national politics in a second statewide televised debate Tuesday.

Tenenbaum, who has campaigned as a moderate Democrat, said the issue is not about national Democrats but about "who is going to put South Carolina first."

"Jim, you know, you need to stand on your own two feet. You try to wrap yourself up with national Republicans because you are in a fight for your political life in this race, so you bring them in to shore you up," said Tenenbaum, the state education superintendent. "I ask you tonight, stand on your own two feet, Jim. Make this race about Jim DeMint and Inez Tenenbaum."

DeMint said Tenenbaum has made an issue out of being an independent, but said she's supported liberal Democrats such as presidential candidate John Kerry and former President Clinton.

She said she would vote for Kerry, but said she disagrees with Kerry saying that the war in Iraq is the "wrong war at the wrong time for the wrong reason."

"I from the beginning said we have done the right thing to go into Iraq. Saddam Hussein needed to be removed," Tenenbaum said. "I stand with our troops, and I do believe we have done the right thing. Now I would like to focus after the election on how do we win this war? How do we make Iraq more secure so it can have freer elections on schedule?"

DeMint, a Greenville congressman, said he will continue to support President George W. Bush, who he said has led the world on the war on terror. Kerry, meanwhile, has changed his position on the war many times, DeMint said.

"To support John Kerry at a time like

this suggests a problem with judgment, and I support this president," DeMint said. "Getting senators that would support this president is key in this race."

The race was less contentious than the first statewide televised debate last week. The candidates sparred over tax reform, health care, social security and trade.

About 250 supporters of the candidates rallied outside the Greenville television station, shouting and waving signs. It was literally a dog and pony show.

A brown pony stood among the crowd draped with a sign that said: "Inez's One Trick Pony," while a black and white dog wore a red Tenenbaum campaign T-shirt.

To start off the debate, DeMint apologized again to voters for a comment he made last week that gays and unwed, pregnant teachers are not fit to be in front of public school classrooms.

"I answered that question as a dad, with my heart," DeMint said. "I shouldn't have answered that question. It's a local school board issue, and I apologize because it's distracted from the debate, and I want to focus on the issues that can help us build a better future in this country."

DeMint said he would not support classifying attacks on gay men and women as hate crimes.

"I think the law needs to treat everyone equally, and crime against one person or another should be punished the same way and so regardless of who there's a crime against, our laws should be consistent," he said.

Tenenbaum said she would support it.

"I would support a law on hate crimes because gay men and women are singled out many times for persecution, as well as people of other ethnic groups, and I would support a hate crime legislation for that purpose," she said.

The airwaves have been flooded with negative advertisements with only three weeks until Election Day.

DeMint advocated the right for third parties to advertise during the campaign, while Tenenbaum said there should be more campaign finance reform to limit special interest groups.

Each candidate had a plan to spur the economy and create jobs.

Tenenbaum called for creating regional economic clusters, bringing research and development grants in to help businesses expand and helping universities do research to develop more products.

DeMint said he wants to make it less expensive to do business in America.

"It means legal reform to stop the junk lawsuits. It means an energy policy that cuts the cost of producing in this country. It means lower health care costs so they can have more employees," he said. "If we can do what has to be done to make them profitable, they will raise wages, and they will grow their markets around the world."

Tenenbaum said she would support raising the minimum wage from \$5.15.

"I do support a minimum wage, and I think once the economy is going full blast again and we have our companies up and going again that we need to entertain the idea to increase minimum wage, but...we can only do this when the economy recovers," Tenenbaum said.

The two candidates are vying for the seat being vacated by retiring Democratic U.S. Sen. Ernest "Fritz" Hollings.

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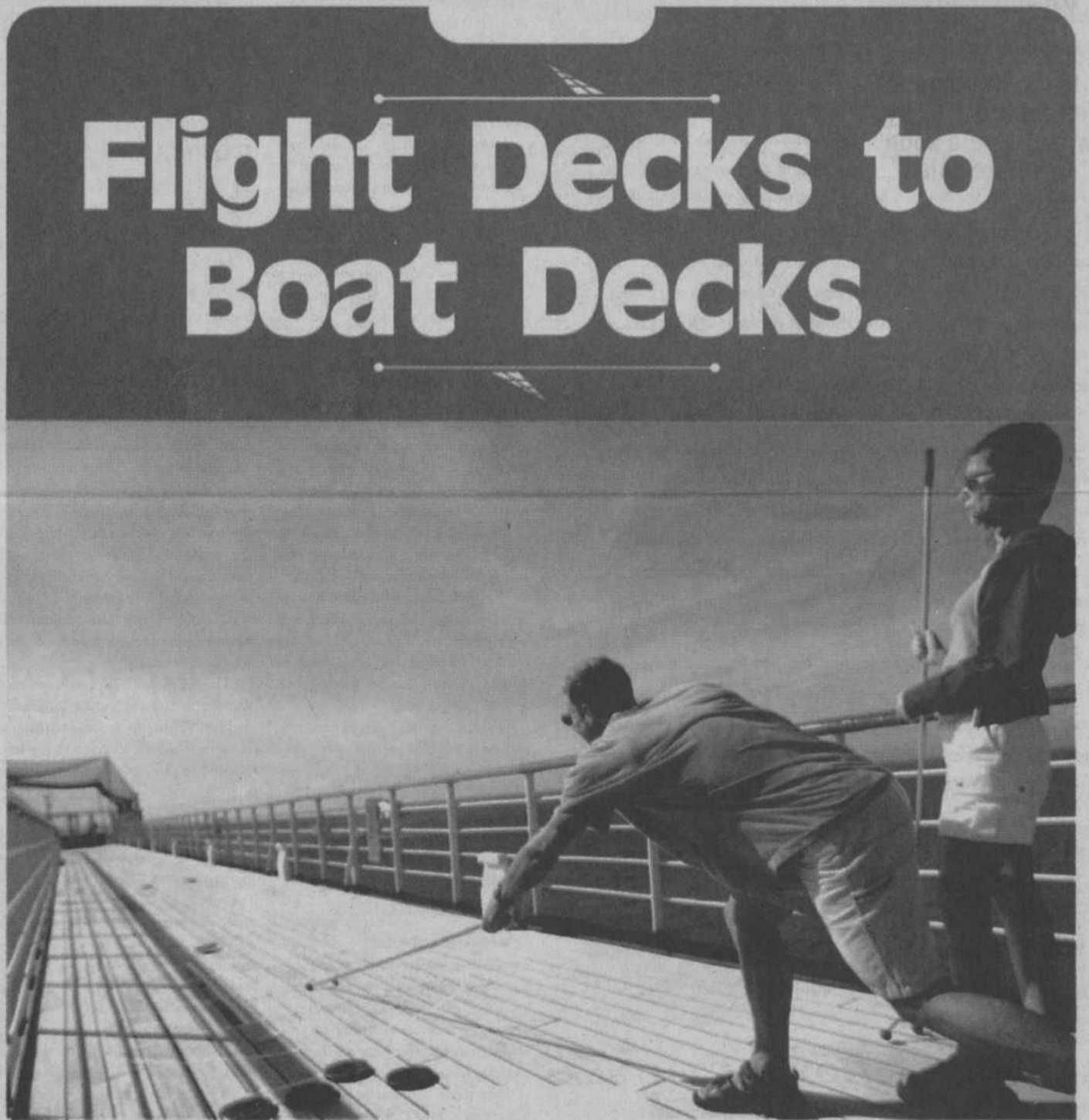
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