

Zimmerman and Flannigan spar at contentious District 6 forum

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Austin City Council Member Don Zimmerman and challenger Jimmy Flannigan threw down Thursday evening in a contentious forum in Northwest Austin, their first meeting in the rematch of their 2014 battle.

The two duked it out over traffic congestion, the proposed transportation bond, lobby reform and the District 6 representative's record of controversial statements and votes.

"You can yell and scream all you want, but if you can't count to six — if you can't count the votes (to get majority support on the 11-member council) — nothing will change," Flannigan said.

He was responding to Zimmerman's criticism of the city's efforts to reduce climate change. Zimmerman described Austin Energy's controversial East Texas biomass-fueled power plant as a "deal that looks like an Enron scam," and said the climate-change arguments used to support signing the deal were "propaganda."

The hour-long forum, moderated by the League of Women Voters, drew nearly 100 people.



Austin City Council Member Don Zimmerman, right, and City Council candidate Jimmy Flannigan speak at a forum for the Austin City ... [Read More](#)

The two men, who originally faced each other in the 2014 runoff that Zimmerman won by 191 votes, kept returning to their own themes Thursday evening.

Zimmerman told residents of the far northwest Austin district, which tends to vote conservatively, that “I am your voice,” and he described himself as a warrior against the city bureaucracy and liberals on the council. Flannigan argued that District 6 voters could get more done at City Hall if their representative were more willing to compromise.

In one exchange, Zimmerman argued that instead of addressing traffic congestion, city staffers try to use that problem to push for people to live in dense apartment developments.



Attendees cheer at a forum for the Austin City Council District 6 candidates moderated by the Austin League of Women Voters ... [Read More](#)

“There is a political agenda, in this city, promoted by this staff, to use traffic congestion to change your behavior,” Zimmerman said, voicing support for another freeway through western Austin, running from Lakeline Mall to Buda. “They’re using traffic congestion for social engineering.”

“He’s going to represent insects and salamanders. I’m going to represent voters and commuters,” Zimmerman added, drawing a fast rebuke from a moderator, reminding him that direct attacks on his opponent were not allowed. Zimmerman later used that phrase repeatedly but did not directly aim it at Flannigan.

Flannigan, who has worked with the Austin Chamber of Commerce’s transportation committee, responded by claiming his efforts — not Zimmerman’s — helped get Anderson Mill Road improvements included in the \$720 million bond package going to Austin voters in November.

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“There are serious needs in our district, and it’s not enough to just yell and scream about city staff and pretend that they’re going to get fixed,” Flannigan said. “The real work of fixing infrastructure is about making the hard decisions about the budget, not abstaining when you’re given an opportunity to fix those challenges.”

Flannigan, who owns a website design firm, entered the summer with the decisive advantage on the campaign finance front, raising nearly \$47,000 between May 12 and June 30, reports show. Zimmerman, a software engineer who sued the city over its campaign finance limits, reported roughly \$36,000 over the same period. The next campaign finance reports are due Oct. 11.