

Forum

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Guthrie, vice-president, of the club, members and guests were shown not just the standard spiel but specific questions on specific issues.

"My questions were based on what I feel is important to the people of Smith County," Guthrie said. "My intent was not only to get their stance on different issues but also to show their character."

And that parlayed into the first big question: pay raises voted in by commissioners last year.

Current Precinct 1 Commissioner JoAnn Fleming was the only commissioner to vote against the pay raise, and Guthrie asked candidates Jeff Warr, Mike Boyter and Derrell Cooper whether they would take the higher salary.

Warr was the only one who said he wouldn't, adding later that he supported Berman's bill.

"The pay raises should have been handled differently," he said, adding that he would follow Fleming's lead in not taking the increase and instead putting the money into a dedicated employee incentive program.

Boyter and Cooper said they would take the new salaries.

"I know what job I'm seeking, and I know what it pays," Boyter said.

Cooper had some different reasoning.

"I don't think \$2,000 would help the county much," Cooper told the group. "The others are taking it, so I would, too."

Guthrie also asked what message each candidate felt the voters were conveying when the Smith County jail bond proposal was defeated for the third time in November 2007.

Cooper said it was a matter of changing plans.

"The problem was that it was first a \$99 million project, then a \$110 million, then \$125 million project," he said. "The commissioners didn't do their homework."

Boyter said poor planning played into it.

"The voters didn't believe it was well conceived or well planned," he said. "And it wasn't presented well to the public."

Warr contended the taxpayers knew what they were doing.

"Taxpayers are smart," he said. "I've spoken to a lot of people and I believe it comes down to confidence."

"Taxpayers have to have confidence in the people who are serving and the jail plan, while critically needed, was in many people's minds poorly located."

Warr said he's toured every jail facility and while he knows something must be done, he's not sure Broadway is the place it should happen.

Guthrie asked the group if any had declared bankruptcy.

Boyter and Cooper both said they had; Warr has not.

"This was an important question," Guthrie said. "It was not intended to put anyone on the spot, but we're talking about a multi-million dollar budget in Smith County, so it was something I had to ask."

She then asked who each believed his boss was should they be elected, and resoundingly, all said it's the voters.

In addressing the ongoing jail needs, one question, posed by an audience member, asked if any of the candidates would consider a "piecemeal" plan to building jail facilities - rather than a bond proposal.

While Cooper said the county could issue certificates of obligation to address specific needs, both Warr and Boyter said neither would take on the issues without the backing of the voters.

"There is a threshold of responsibility that comes with an investment of this magnitude, and it's best to let our bosses - the voters - decide on this."

The three did their best to define their intent on seeking the seat to those present.

"I like helping people with problems," Cooper said "I



From left, Commissioner Precinct 1 hopefuls Mike Boyter, Jeff Warr and Derrell Cooper answer questions at last week's Smith County Republican Women's club meeting.

enjoyed serving as commissioner before, and I've missed it.

"I've got lots of experience and nothing else to do."

Warr said it's a drive to serve the public.

"I've always been involved in public service," he said. "And 10 years after serving on Tyler City Council, I get to see the vision that we - as a group - put into place come to fruition."

He said that in seeking the commissioner seat he hopes to bring that service to another level.

Boyter said he wants to make a difference.

"I want take my 40 years of service in various volunteer boards and do my best to give the county the benefit of my experience."

In addition to Tyler City Council, Warr has served as chairman of the Mayor's Anti-Crime Task Force, on the board of the Tyler Area Chamber of Commerce and several of its planning committees, and on the boards of Historic Tyler, the TISD Foundation, the Alzheimer's Association and Tyler Jaycees.

He owns Warr Insurance Agency.

Warr and his wife of 24 years, Sabrina, have one son. They are members of Green Acres Baptist Church, where they teach Sunday school in the children's department.

Boyter earned his master's of business administration from The University of Texas at Tyler. He served in the U.S. Army from 1983-85 and has been working in the financial services industry since 1987. He opened Boyter Financial Planning in 1995.

Boyter has served as a board member for Meals on Wheels, Tyler Community Concerts, Leadership Tyler and Camp Fire Boys and Girls.

He is a past president of

Smith County Young Republicans and a precinct chairman for the Smith County Republican Party.

Boyter is a member of Green Acres Baptist Church, where he serves as a Sunday morning Bible study teacher. He is president of the Hogg Middle School PTA.

His wife is an elementary school teacher.

Cooper was commissioner for Precinct 3 from 1993 to 2000.

He moved to Flint, in Precinct 1, over the summer.

He served on the East Texas Council of Governments, was elected to Lindale School Board and to the Smith County Water District Board of Directors, is a member of the Lindale Masonic Lodge No. 848 and of Sharon Shrine Temple.

Cooper and his wife are members of Green Acres Baptist Church.

Guthrie believes meeting format - as well as ones set for other elected seats - is important to the voters.

"My intent on the questioning and the club's purpose with these forums is to not only get candidates' stances on different issues, but also to show their character and support Republican candidates."

Guthrie said the next forum will focus on constable races - including the Precinct 2 race between incumbent Frank Creath and opposition Todd Thoene.

The forum will be held at the next Smith County Republican Women's meeting on Feb. 14. Lunch starts at 11:30, and the meeting begins at noon at Traditions Restaurant in Tyler.

The public is encouraged to attend.

The last day to register to vote in order to take part in the March 4 primaries is Feb. 4. Early voting begins on Feb. 19.

# Fleming, Baker still at odds over pay increase

A bill State Rep. Leo Berman is drafting would allow the State Legislature to interfere in local government and take control from the hands of voters, Smith County Judge Joel Baker said on Friday.

"Rep. Berman is assuming that the voters in Texas counties are either unwilling or unable to communicate their wishes to their elected officials," Baker said. "In my experience as Smith County Judge, that is simply not the case. Our voters are intelligent, vocal citizens who will let us know when they disagree with our actions."

"In fact, as a result of comments and actions by our voters, I have decided to decline the last two years of the raise commissioners approved last year."

Baker decided over the holidays to decline the raise after talking to county residents and hearing their comments.

"Something like a raise for commissioners should not stand in the way of Smith County having a serious discussion about our need for a jail and finding a solution to this pressing problem," Baker said. "This

was a decision I made for the good of Smith County and I arrived at it without state interference."

## FLEMING RESPONDS:

Please be advised that the news release you received on Commissioners Court letterhead regarding State Rep. Leo Berman's bill that would have delayed until members are re-elected DOES NOT represent the views of the entire court - at least not mine.

I support the legislation because it will give the people a chance to assess the performance of a Commissioners Court member and the results achieved (or not achieved) before that official gets a raise.

If the official has to wait

for re-election to get the raise, the people's voice is strengthened.

However, I am glad to learn that Judge Baker has made the decision not to take the next two years of the pay raise approved last July. He heard the voters and has acted accordingly. I commend him for his decision.

I have made it clear to our executive assistant that no news releases should go out on general letterhead for the Commissioners Court unless it is a statement discussed in a public meeting and voted upon by the entire court.

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