

Reviewing the local races

Written by Press-Tribune Staff
Monday, 05 November 2012 09:27 -

Mayors, district judge, police chiefs headline parish ballots

In case you haven't heard, the United States is picking its president this Tuesday with Democratic incumbent Barack Obama and Veep Joe Biden facing GOP challengers — former Massachusetts Governor Mitt Romney and Wisconsin Representative Paul Ryan.

The polls are can be trending to either Romney or Obama, depending on what agency you trust, but one thing is clear: expect a tight race.

Locally, fervor is just as high as there are several contested Bossier Parish races, and uncontested races for Haughton Mayor and Aldermen, and state constitutional amendments.

Below you'll find a wrap up of previous *Bossier Press-Tribune* reports on candidates and those amendments:

Benton Mayor

Benton residents will have their second decision to make on a mayor in less than a year this November.

Mayor Wayne Cathcart and local businessman Ken Shiflett will vie for the office on the Nov. 6 ballot.

Cathcart was appointed to the office by the Town Council last September after the death of Albert Doughty. Voters then chose Cathcart over two other contenders, including Shiflett, in a March 2012 election held to select a Mayor to serve out the remainder of Doughty's term.

“This last year has given me the (necessary) background, experience and knowledge. As

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difficult as it has been at times, I feel like we got things going in the right direction,” said Cathcart. “I’ve learned that for things to happen.”

“I have the integrity and the ability to take care of the town's business and do it in a way that will continue to make the citizens proud of their town,” he added.

The main issue for the town, according to Cathcart, is Benton's future water supply. He is considering conducting a study to give the best option forward.

“It's about what makes the most sense from all perspectives,” said Cathcart. “It's expensive, but it's a whole lot cheaper than making a huge mistake.”

The Air Force veteran and Baltimore, Md. transplant, Shiflett shares concerns with Cathcart that water and sewer pipe deterioration are a major problem and he wants bring road repair to a proper level by building a good relationship with the road supervisor.

“I'm not going to sit around idly and watch the leaders of our town and keep status quo, which is doing nothing. They make it look like they are taking care of the town and its citizens and what they're doing is they're taking care of themselves and their buddies,” said Shiflett. “I'm good for our town, I'm a veteran, and I know the needs of the younger and older members of our community.”

Other problems he sees include trying to improve the relationship with the police department and residents.

“In talking with constituents, a lot of them are complaining about the police force — we have four day shifts, one on (night), and one on graveyards. One individual was a sheriff's deputy who was very displeased his tax dollars are going towards officers working during the day when most crimes occur at night,” said Shiflett.

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He also said there are not enough playgrounds.

“How you fix that is you get myself and a few volunteers on a weekend, buy 1.5 inch pipe, build some sawhorses, get some chain, and make a swingset, carousel, and seesaw for each district,” Shiflett offered.

A businessman — owner of Skinworks Tattoo Shop and transmission shop — Shiflett said he can generate ideas that would help the town.

“I've proven I can lead, I can invest, and I can use my money to grow.”

He would also open his office up to input from the community with a regular suggestion box or website with section to submit concerns and ideas.

“If I have to set up a lemonade stand in each district and get people to stop and give me ideas, I will,” said Shiflett.

26th District Judge

Candidates vying for the 26th District Judge’s election are Whit Graves, Mike Nerren and Judge John Slattery.

Graves said living in both Minden and now Bossier City has given him the opportunity to get to know both communities. He added that being elected judge would be one more way for him to serve the people.

“This would be an opportunity for me to give back to the system and serve the people in one more capacity than I've served before,” Graves said.

Nerren said it’s not the length of time in the system, but the work that’s done during that time.

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"During my 18 years of being an attorney, I have developed skill in every area of the law," Nerren said.

Nerren's experience has taken him through domestic, civil and criminal law and 12 years experience in juvenile law.

"My proven record in all areas of the law and my experience, desire and dedication will bring leadership and integrity to the office of District Judge," Nerren said. "I have worked hard to earn the respect of my colleagues and Judges. I am proud of my record as an attorney. I have the experience and dedication to serve as your next District Judge."

Judge John Slattery said he has experience as a civil and city attorney, an assistant district attorney and as a current Ward 2 judge in northern Webster Parish. He currently serves as one of 19 judges in the state (selected by the Supreme Court) to sit on the Board of Governors of Louisiana Judicial College.

"I'm running in this race because I feel like I'm the most qualified candidate. I've been a juvenile drug court judge for 10 years and a city court judge for over 12 years. In that time, I've handled all kinds of cases – civil, criminal, juvenile, felony and misdemeanor," Slattery said. "I've handled approximately 40,000 cases. Of those, none have been overturned by an appeals court. I not only have the experience, but the correct judgement. To be a judge, you have to know which law to apply and what evidence is admissible to make to correct ruling. I've done that for over 12 years."

Plain Dealing Mayor

The residents of Plain Dealing will choose their first mayor in seven years.

Candidates to take over for retired Dale Barnett are current Mayor Pro Tem, republican, Kenneth Stiles and Democrat Wiley Robinson.

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Stiles describes himself as committed to the Plain Dealing community and is very involved with church and volunteer activities. He retired from the freight industry after 30 years and has served on the town council for more than 5 years.

He was elected by the council to serve as mayor June 5. He took over for Barnett, who retired after seven years in the position.

His desire to be mayor is simple — he loves the community.

“We've got things going on and I want to build on them and extend them and keep the town going.”

Robinson, 61, is the father of four children and grandfather to nine grandchildren is a member of Plain Dealing Baptist Church. He retired from the Louisiana Department of Agriculture and Forestry after 30 years as an agriculture environmentalist supervisor for 30 years. As mayor he would aspire to be a spokesperson for residents.

“Their concerns would be my concerns. My door would be open and anyone could talk to me.” said Robinson. “Being mayor to just be mayor of a town is one thing, but helping the community is what I want to do.”

Benton Police Chief

Lifelong Benton resident Charles Pilkinton has held the position of police chief since 2004. During his years on the force, Pilkinton said he has worked diligently to be fair and honest to the community he serves.

“Benton has come a long way since I started in '96 and it took quite some time for me to gain the trust of the people,” Pilkinton said. “People know they can come to me and not be turned away. They know I'll take care of the problem.”

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Running against Pilkinton is Gene Hillen, said he feels like he is best suited for the job because his track record “goes above and beyond the call of duty.” If elected, Hillen said he will make sure the Benton Police Department goes by the policies and regulations required by the state.

“You have to lead by example,” Hillen said. “It’s a small town so you can be more visible and vocal in the community.”

Haughton Police Chief

Rodney Farrington is looking to add four more years to his service as Haughton police Chief. His years of experience on the police force, Farrington said, are what he hopes will win him those years.

“I try to be fair with everyone and I want to keep it that way,” Farrington said. “I want to keep the town the way it has been and continue providing the citizens with a safe environment.”

Facing off against Farrington is Paul Sims, whose goal as police chief would be to implement community outreach programs like National Night Out and Neighborhood Watch.

“If I am [elected] chief, I’m going to put officers in all these neighborhoods that night where they can also get to know the officers,” Sims said. “What this does is help with communication between the public and the officers.”

The constitutional amendments that will appear on the ballot:

House Bill 9 (Act 868) was authored by Reps. Tony Ligi and Simone Champagne; it seeks public support for an amendment to “provide for the forfeiture of public retirement benefits by any public servant who is convicted of a felony associated with and committed during his public service.”

House Bill 524 (Act 870) concerns the membership of constitutional board/commissions the members of which are selected from congressional districts — including Board of Regents and

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Board of Supervisors for the University of Louisiana System, along with the State Civil Service Commission among others.

House Bill 674 (Act 871) by Rep. Joel Robideaux would authorize granting of ad valorem tax exemption contracts by the Board of Commerce and Industry for business located in parishes that have chosen to participate in such contract granting programs.

Sen. Elbert Guillory's Senate Bill 21 (Act 872) requires that any proposed legislation to effect any change to laws concerning any retirement system for public employees be filed no later than 45 days before the start of a regular legislative session.

Sen. Sherri Smith Buffington's Senate Bill 82 (Act 873) would prohibit funds "in the Medicaid Trust Fund for the Elderly from being used or appropriated for other purposes when adjustments are made to eliminate a state deficit."

Senate Bill 337 (Act 875) by Sen. Jody Amadee and other House members proposes to extend the property tax exemption for veterans to the spouses of those veterans if the veteran has died before the exemption has been enacted into law.

Senate Bill 410 (Act 876), by Sen. Dan Claitor. This proposition would simply require three, instead of two, public notices published in a locale's official journal prior to the introduction of any bill concerning the creation of a special crime prevention district.

Senate Bill 303 (Act 874), sponsored by many members of both houses, offers an amendment to the Constitution of the State of Louisiana to provide that the right to keep and bear arms is a fundamental right and any restriction of that right requires the highest standard of review by a court.