

Candidates say economy, roads top county issue

FORUM, from Page 1a

Force. He and his wife wanted to move to a rural community and when the engineering firm of Evans, Bierly, Hutchison and Associates was going to open an office in Goodland, he applied.

His work as an engineer for 13 years has given him an understanding of people and government, he said. He has worked on projects with 25 government entities.

"I would like to create more opportunities for the people of the county," Neufeld said, adding that he thought the county commissioners should be responsible for everything the county does.

"This is a great place with really good people," he said.

Thomas said he and his family moved here from Wisconsin 10 years ago when the farm he had was being swallowed up by urbanization.

"I have seen how other places do things," he said.

Thomas said he had been on the commission for four years and served on the farm bureau board.

He thought the county commissioners were doing a good job.

"We cannot always make the choices we want to," Thomas said, noting that federal and state laws sometimes determine what decision can be made.

"I think the current county structure is good," he said. "We don't need an administrator. We have good department heads who know how to improve things and be more



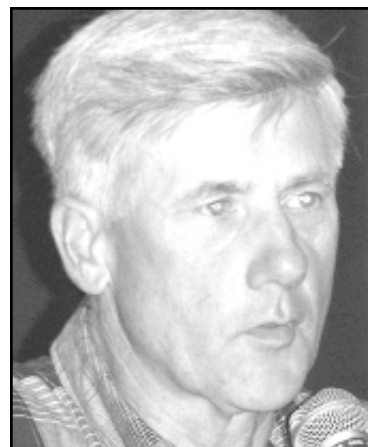
Larry Enfield



Curtis Hurd



Darin Neufeld



Chuck Thomas

efficient."

Deeds had six questions that each candidate got to answer.

What is the next big challenge facing Sherman County?

The candidates all agreed that the new Goodland Energy Center would be a positive challenge. They also agreed that the drought has had hurt the county's economy. Neufeld said he thought economic diversification would help during periods when agriculture is on a downturn. He also thought the county was falling behind on its infrastructure. Thomas said he was concerned about how the county was going to maintain the improved roads from the sales tax.

What is the county's biggest budgeting problem?

Hurd said a lack of taxpayers. Getting people to move in would help, but there will always be

money problems. Neufeld said declining revenue, adding that economic diversification would help that. The budget also needs to be checked, he said, not just approving the amount from the previous year. He noted that the county has a \$8.6 million budget. Thomas said the department heads do a good job with the budget and the commission challenges it every year. At present, he said, the cost of fuel for the road and bridge department and the sheriff's department is a big item. Enfield wondered how the commission was going to plan for rising energy costs, including fuel and natural gas.

Should all county commissioner be elected at large?

All four candidates thought that would be a good idea. Another question concerning the makeup of the county commission is whether

there should be a bigger board? The candidates didn't think it would make much difference.

What will be the biggest challenge for the road and bridge department?

Thomas indicated the biggest challenge would be the maintenance of oil roads. Otherwise, he said, the department is doing a good job. Enfield said he was concerned that the county had gone from 16 maintainers to eight. He wondered how the county would keep up with the maintenance. Hurd said he didn't know what the problems would be without talking to the department heads. Neufeld said the biggest challenge would be money, and he wondered why only eight maintainers. He said he also wondered why it costs more to maintain oil roads.

What do you think of consolidation of city and county services?

Neufeld said there was already some consolidation, including the sales tax for roads and central dispatch. Joint ventures and cooperation should be looked at, he said. Thomas said he did not like the word consolidation, but the county and city are already working together on the sales tax for roads, fire department, law enforcement and central dispatch. They will have to look for ways to work together. Enfield said the city and county have their separate issues and need some separation. Hurd said consolidation for certain services definitely needs to be looked at.

Deeds then asked the candidates two questions from the audience.

What can be done to make businesses successful?

Thomas said that is what economic development director was hired, noting that the county helps pay for the development program. The tax abatement program was set

up to help attract businesses, he said. Enfield said he is concerned about retention of current businesses and wondered why county departments are spending money in neighboring counties that could be spent here. Hurd said he was involved in setting up the Economic Development Council but wondered if they still need \$100,000 every year. Neufeld said it was important to have the right people in the right places, especially in economic development, to help support existing businesses.

How can roads in Sherman County be improved?

Neufeld said 95 percent of Sherman County roads are gravel and that the road department has to make decisions on how much maintenance each gets by how much it is used. Thomas said there is no way to please everyone on the roads. The county has started spraying weeds instead of using maintainers to blade them. Some roads are mainly used at planting and harvesting. Enfield said he thought spraying weeds instead of using maintainers on them was good and cheaper. Hurd said he would like the maintainers to use wider blades to eliminate the gravel ridge on the low side of the road.

The candidates all thanked the audience for coming out and encouraged everyone to vote. Neufeld said that common sense should win out. Hurd said he thought he could help the county move forward. Enfield said he was glad to see the number of people interested in the election.

Education candidate answers questions

CAUBLE, from Page 1a

She said it would be better for the federal and state agencies to create guidelines rather than dogmatic standards that are unreasonable.

Cauble said she has traveled over 30,000 miles across the 41 counties of the district since deciding to run for the seat, currently held by Republican Connie Morris of St. Francis. Cauble said she has visited many of the 77 school districts in the territory.

"I know Goodland is providing a good school learning experience," she said. "It is important to continue that and we need to educate our children for Kansas' future."

She said wherever she has been there are three issues that keep coming up. The impact of the federal No Child Left Behind law, the teacher shortage in math and science and the image of Kansas across the nation and the world.

Jeff Deeds, a member of the Farm Bureau board and moderator for the forum, had five questions to ask Cauble.

The first question was, "What is your view of what Kansas would look like if there was another round of school consolidation?"

"I think there are only a few schools in this district that could consolidate without putting our kids on buses for hours," Cauble said. "I think it is a mistaken idea to think consolidation will save on administration."

The second question was how local districts can reduce energy costs?

"I think the energy costs are going to be a problem nationwide. I

think some districts are opting to give parents a stipend instead of bussing all the children. I am not going to tell local districts how to handle their situation."

The third question was where there was adequate technology in the district?

"I have traveled around the district and believe there is a lot more technology in District 5 than I have seen in other places," she said. "We have been using interactive television for more years out here in western Kansas."

The fourth question was what she felt should be done about the No Child Left Behind and the Annual Yearly Progress requirements?

"Kansas is seventh in the nation on student performance," Cauble said. "We should use our position to tell the federal government that the No Child Left Behind is not working, and we will not tolerate the continued demands."

"There are better ways for students to learn, and it is very unrealistic to think that by 2019 we are going to be 100 percent proficient."

The fifth question was if she had

an opinion on the school finance review going on in the state Supreme Court?

"I am sad that I have to have an opinion," she said. "I think it is a sad day for Kansas when school finance ends up in court."

"The students don't win. I am surprised no one has tried to change the finance formula. I think it has turned into a blame game, and that is all I want to say."

A written question submitted by the audience asked why wasn't there an audit of the state board's finances?

"I don't know," Cauble said. "In 1966 when the people decided to elect the state board, the legislature kept the finance portion."

In her closing remarks, Cauble said she wants to serve on the board because she feels her years of teaching and service on the Liberal School Board and on the Southwestern College board have given her an understanding of what students need to be able to compete in today's world.

Deeds said that Morris had been invited to attend the forum, but declined.

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