

Two Contested Races for Nemaha County Voters During May 11th Primary

Written by Nemaha County Herald

Monday, 29 March 2010 00:20 - Last Updated Friday, 23 April 2010 03:36

The 2010 Primary Election will be held May 11 at the usual polling places in Nemaha County. County Clerk Joyce Oakley said the polls will be open from 8 a.m. until 8 p.m. that Tuesday for the purpose of nominating candidates to various offices.

Nemaha County will have two seats up for election as both candidates represent the same political party. Jana V. Smith and Wendy J. Hemmer are Democrat candidates seeking the Nemaha County Assessor position becoming open due to the retirement of Lila Gottula. Also, incumbent Bob Hutton and Jim Jarvis are both Republican candidates for District 1 Commissioner on the Nemaha County Board.

The Nemaha County Herald submitted questions for candidates for the two contested offices to be able to better inform our readers about the individuals seeking elected office. Those responses follow:

County Assessor Candidate

Jana Smith

What is your address and how long have you lived in Nemaha County?

"I have lived in Nemaha County for 35 years and reside in Brock. I am married to Sam Smith and have two stepchildren: Samantha Collins and Steve Smith, both of Nebraska City."

In response to a question regarding her qualifications for serving as Nemaha County Assessor, Smith replied, "I started working as the clerk for the Assessor's Office in January of 1987. The opportunity for me to advance to deputy assessor came in 1990. I passed an examination by the State Department of Revenue, giving me a required certificate on Sept. 11, 1990 to perform the duties of Deputy Assessor or County Assessor. I have served this county as Deputy Assessor for the past 19 years and obtained the required 60 hours of continuing education to be eligible to receive approval by the Property Tax Administrator for re-certification. The 60 continuing education hours, necessary every four years, have been a requirement by law since 2001. My experience and qualifications of the past 24 years and the people I have helped have given me the confidence in filing for the office of assessor."

What do you believe to be areas needing additional attention in the County Assessors' Office?

"The main area requiring attention was looked at prior to today. The printed cadastral maps of Nemaha County were in need of being replaced. The commissioners and the assessor looked into the request for new mapping in 2007. The funds were budgeted in the same year by the county commissioners and a \$25,000 grant was received from the Nebraska State Board of Records, the application having been submitted by Lila Gottula. The assessor's office was able to proceed with implementing a property information website for the public's use and a GIS

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(global information system) mapping system that works with the current CAMA system in assisting the office in the valuation process.”

“I have advanced professionally because I received training to assist in implementing the mapping system. I keep the information current in the GIS computer; perhaps it may be a simple division of 80 acres from a 160 acre track or a more complex survey of an acreage. The computerization of mapping makes the work less time consuming and more accurate than it used to be when drawing the survey on a paper printed cadastral using a ruler, compass and pencil.”

“The mapping system and website have improved the office efficiency and give the staff more time to work on current projects with less interruptions.”

What are your goals for the County Assessor’s Office in one year and four years?

“A sales analysis will be completed for residential, commercial and agriculture classes of properties to make sure their values are within the guidelines of the Department of Revenue, reviewing properties where necessary. The review of rural homes and buildings will begin in 2011, making sure the listings are correct with new pictures and correction of sketches as necessary. We will also list, measure and value all new construction for the county. The rural homes and buildings will take more than one year to complete.”

Are there any ways in which you believe the County Assessor could better spend its budget?

“The staff has been diligent in its use of the budget allowed by the county commissioners. In dealing with expenses, I feel the assessor’s office is at the lowest budget possible in order to do the required work. We do not know how the effect of state laws may change the requirements of the office.”

County Assessor Candidate

Wendy Hemmer

What is your address and how long have you lived in Nemaha County?

“A resident of Auburn, I have lived in Nemaha County for the past 13 years as well as spending some of my elementary and middle school years in Auburn. I have always felt safe and included in Auburn, thus it seemed like the right decision to raise my son in a community that cared about the children and their future. Even though my son Blake graduated from Auburn High School in May and has moved on to attend Southeast Community College in Lincoln, I see Nemaha County as my home. I would like to give back to that community.”

What are your qualifications for serving as county assessor?

“For eight years, I have worked in some aspect of real estate or real property. I started working in a real estate office in Auburn and found that I really enjoyed the position and working with the public. However, it was not until I had the opportunity to work in an assessor’s office in a different county that I realized I had found my niche within the trade. I enjoyed this position so much I decided to pursue the required certification from the state in order to run for Nemaha County Assessor in the next election.”

“The following summarizes my work experience; all four positions are directly related to understanding real estate and property valuations:

Three-plus years with American Dream Real Estate (sales agent and property management)

Three-plus years: Otoe County Assessor’s Office (appraisal assistant)

Two-plus years: Professional Mortgage Services (loan processor)

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One-plus year: Southeast Nebraska Community Action Council, Inc. (housing coordinator).
What do you believe to be areas needing additional attention in the county assessor's office?
"Property valuations need to be set in an impartial and equitable manner."

"County employees must remember that they are elected to serve the public. Thus, they need to be respectful and courteous toward the public/community and strive to maintain a courteous, helpful and user friendly office."

"The assessor needs to be more visible and interact positively with the public. I would implement and maintain an open door policy for the people of the county in order to address all questions or concerns in an open manner."

What are your goals for the county assessor's office in one year and four years?

"From the beginning of the term, I will begin to implement policies addressing the fore-mentioned concerns. Being courteous and respectful towards the public, as well as being more visible and available will be first priority. In the long term, I will strive to implement practices that ensure property valuations are impartial and equitable."

"Every market area needs to be re-evaluated on a regular rotation in order to maintain property assessments and accurate information. The previous statement especially holds true to the farming community. The accuracy in the farming community is crucial to this county. Of course, property valuation is only one aspect of an assessor's office, so that is why it is extremely important to maintain a positive environment while executing all other designated tasks."

Are there any ways in which you believe the county assessor could better spend its budget?

"As with any business there is overhead or expenditures that need to be taken into account and a county assessor's office is no different. Upon reviewing the current assessor's budget, I found it to be in check. Establishing a budget, to be spent prudently and effectively, is an essential aspect of the assessor's job description. As an elected official, we must never forget who earns the funds for our budget."

"I am familiar with generating and establishing budgets. Not only have I completed various accounting courses, while working on my business degree, but one of my previous positions required that I prepare the yearly budgets for the rental housing program. Furthermore, I volunteered with a local organization where I prepared and maintained the finances. In addition to my own personal budget, I taught potential homebuyers how to budget for a household and handle financial situations."

Dist. 1 County Commissioner Candidate

Bob Hutton

What is your address and how long have you lived in Nemaha County?

"I live in the Nemaha area and have been a resident of Nemaha County my entire life. My wife Deloris and I have three children: a daughter Laura Gossman of rural Stella, a son Alan Hutton of rural Auburn and a daughter Robin Sudman of Nemaha."

What are your qualifications for serving as District 1 Nemaha County Commissioner?

"I have been a board member of the Nemaha County Commissioners for three terms. During these 12 years, I have served on the Blue Rivers Agency on Aging — which has given substantial funding to the Auburn Senior Center to defray expenses. I have also served on the Agricultural and Horticultural Tax Equalization Board, SENCA and Southeast Nebraska Development District."

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“In my working cooperatively with other agencies, many accomplishments have been achieved to benefit our community. The Household Hazardous Waste Program, the Tire Recycling Program and the installation of lighting at the intersection of Highways 136 and 67 are some examples of those accomplishments.”

“I have worked very hard to keep an open mind about my patrons’ concerns and ideas while discussing ways to solve problems for the betterment of Nemaha County. Communication is essential for progress to be made.”

What issues are you hoping to address while serving on the County Board?

“Due to the severity of the winter weather, Nemaha County’s roads are in need of maintenance. There are also bridges in need of repair. We are also working to obtain grant money to replace the windows at the courthouse as an energy efficiency step. Working with insurance brokers to find affordable health care coverage for all eligible employees is another issue to address.”

What are your goals for the county board in one year and four years?

“Continuing to work with our highway superintendent to recognize problem structures during bridge and road inspections is one goal. Keeping cost down, applying for federal aid money in order to help pay for bridge replacements and working with FEMA to assess disaster issues are all important goals to work towards. Another goal is to continue sharing some road equipment with the other two districts.”

Is there an area(s) in which you believe the county board should direct more finances?

“Budgets for the different areas are set on a yearly basis. Each area works within its allotted funds. The state sets some limitations which must be followed. We need to control the General Fund to manage the fluctuating costs of fuel, steel and repairs.”

Is there an area(s) where you believe the county board should direct less finances?

“I feel that the budget has been controlled closely. We have worked hard in keeping the mill levy low while still maintaining quality services to the patrons of District 1.”

Dist. 1 County Commissioner Candidate

Jim Jarvis

What is your address and how long have you lived in Nemaha County?

“My wife Pat and I live about three miles east of Auburn and have been there since 2000. We have two daughters: Susan (Mrs. Dave) Thomas of rural Auburn and Kate Jarvis of Salina, Kansas, and a son Jim Jarvis of Kansas City, Mo.”

“I was born in Auburn and grew up in Nemaha. I graduated from high school in Nemaha and attended Peru State College for one year. I then went to work for a national retailing company and spent over 35 years in that field. That career took us to several locations in the Midwest. Shortly after I chose to retire, we decided to move back home to Nemaha County.”

“I served five years on the Good Samaritan Center Advisory Board and have been involved with the Nemaha County Neighbor to Neighbor program for over a year in soliciting volunteers to help the area’s elderly with their needs.”

What are your qualifications for serving as District 1 Nemaha County Commissioner?

“I have 35 plus years of business experience that ranges from small business beginnings to management positions in the corporate headquarters. I’ve worked extensively with sizable budget issues, have dealt with a wide range of personnel management matters and have much

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experience in managing and protecting assets. I feel I can make good decisions and will protect the interests of Nemaha County taxpayers.”

What issues are you hoping to address while on the county board?

“I want to explore new or additional opportunities for the board to increase its role in promoting economic development in the county; to find ways to team with city and village governments and existing development agencies in the effort to grow our community, create new jobs and protect existing jobs.”

“One issue I would plan to be actively involved in is the county budgeting process. County government does need to provide all of the needed services, but I feel strongly that this needs to be done without raising the county tax levy.”

“Protecting and maintaining county infrastructure: roads and bridges is another issue. I plan to work closely with the County Roads Superintendent on the one and six year plans as they come up and to follow projects through to completion.”

“The costs of dealing with the after effects of substance abuse are a really significant burden on the county’s budget. It causes extra financial demands on the sheriff’s office, county attorney’s office, county courts, public defender costs, housing and mandated treatment costs, on and on. The county has already begun to invest in a program which attacks this problem on the front end; through education, awareness and prevention. I believe that if we can achieve a reduction in these problems by investing in prevention, it will be less expensive than dealing with the after effects. I would be involved in this issue.”

What are your goals for the county board in one year and four years?

“My fiscal goal is to keep the county tax levy at or below its current rate. I will be diligent in looking for ways to save taxpayer dollars without reducing vital services.”

“We want to do the best job possible in maintaining and protecting county roads and bridges. Nemaha County is primarily a farming community. Roads are important to everyone, but they are absolutely vital to our farmers. We need to plan ahead of pending problems and supply needs. (For example, we could consider stockpiling certain materials for a short time when there is evidence of pending short supply and possible higher cost during the season).”

“My personal goals are to always be responsive to the needs of the people I would be serving, and to always exercise responsibility and integrity in the use of taxpayer dollars.”

Is there an area(s) in which you believe the county board should direct more finances?

“As mentioned earlier, I would plan to explore the area of economic development improvement in the county. More resources might be productive in this area.”

Is there an area(s) where you believe the county board should direct less finances?

“I’ll be looking at every piece of the county’s budget through the campaign. I’ll always be on the lookout for any signs of waste or excess to be eliminated. The costs of dealing with the effects of substance abuse represent a significant financial burden for the county.”