

State house candidates

Norton lawyer takes second shot at house

By VERONICA MONIER
Doug Sebelius knows if he's elected, he'll have some major problems to face in the state House of Representatives, but he thinks he's up for the challenge.

The Norton lawyer will meet incumbent John Faber in the Republican primary on Tuesday, Aug. 3, for the House seat in District 120. The winner will face Democrat Bob Strevey of Norcat in the general election Tuesday, Nov. 2. Although there are many problems in state government, Mr. Sebelius said the biggest issues for the 120th district are school finance, economic development and protecting and conserving water.

Mr. Sebelius said school finance shouldn't be left to the Kansas Supreme Court to figure out when the Legislature already knows what needs to be done.

"We need to do something fair for everyone," he said. "This is the state's responsibility, not local government's."

He said to solve the school finance problem, the state needed to enhance revenue, not borrow money. To do that, he said, the state needed to look at eliminating a few sales tax exemptions, raising the tax on cigarettes and alcohol, or putting in a higher top-end income tax bracket.

"I'm 100 percent dead set against raising property taxes," Mr. Sebelius said.

He said the school problem isn't going to go away overnight, because it wasn't created overnight, but a permanent solution needs to be found as soon as possible.

"The time for commissioning studies and sitting on our hands is at an end," he said. "The people are not happy with the lack of progress."

"We put a lot of demands on education and to meet that demand, the cost goes up. We haven't kept up with funding as inflation rises, and we need to."

Mr. Sebelius said schools are a big part of economic development.

"Schools are high on the list of what attracts people to small towns," he said. "We want world-class education, and people go where that good education can be found."

"Education is one of the best economic development ideas there is. Businesses want highly educated high school graduates who also have gone through higher learning programs."

He said the state needs to do more to promote and market Kansas products and destination tourism and get all of the departments working together to see that state resources is put to good use.

Western Kansas needs to make sure to keep up with telecommunications, he said, because that might be the way to snare some state jobs. Jobs that are done in Topeka can be done in western



Doug Sebelius

Kansas with the right resources, he said, and telecommunications also helps small businesses to stay on top.

"We need to promote industry out here and not over-regulate small businesses," he said. "We need to keep small towns attractive, and we can certainly help local communities on the state level by giving them the resources that they need — good education, training and bringing an idea out into reality."

Mr. Sebelius said the state needs to be concerned with water policy. He said a good, sound, long-term water policy is critical, because nothing will kill a rural area like not having water.

Because irrigation rights have been seriously over-appropriated, the state is going to have to begin to retire some water rights, and at the same time, help farmers to adjust.

He said the underground aquifer is going to disappear if something isn't done to start conserving water. Cities, in addition to farmers, will suffer for the lack as it gets more expensive to find water.

"You can't make water," he said. "The aquifer is a tremendous resource, but we have to realize that we've allowed overusage of it and it isn't being replaced. If we lose that, we lose out on all counts, including keeping western Kansas an attractive place to live."

"I don't want to act when there is a crisis. The Legislature can facilitate this. Water policy has got to have top priority, like public education."

Mr. Sebelius said the state also needs to fight the antitrust battle to keep small farmers in business, look into alternative sources of energy such as solar and wind power, stop passing problems down to local governments, and be more efficient with spending. He said he would not vote to raise speed limits, because he feels higher limits would cause problems.

Mr. Sebelius is an attorney in private practice as a partner in Sebelius and Griffiths in Norton and is serving his 24th year as Norton County attorney.

He and his wife Nancy have two children.

Incumbent puts school at top of list

By KAREN KRIEN

Rep. John Faber says school finance is among his top priorities.

Faber, a former member of the Brewster School Board, said he has found the whole "school finance mess" to be frustrating, especially in the last few years of his four terms serving the 120th District in the Kansas House of Representatives.

During the last legislative session, he said, there were three plans proposed to boost school money, including a last-minute proposal to borrow \$94 million from the state's Transportation Fund which would have to be paid back. It would have given schools some money, he said, but that plan, along with the others, did not pass. When the session ended, there was no more money going to schools, though there were no cuts in school money either.

Following the May 7 end of the session, he said, legislators learned of a \$65 million windfall of taxes paid to the state. He said that Gov. Kathleen Sebelius said she had not known about it until then, but Rep. Faber said he thought that it should have been reported earlier. It would have certainly helped fund schools, he said.

He thinks that, in the fall, the governor might call a special session to discuss school finance.

Rep. Faber said he worries that if legislators are required to come up with a new school finance formula, it could be devastating for small rural schools like those in his district.

"Right now, sales, income and other taxes from Johnson County are funding schools across the state," he said. "In a new formula, they will want counties to fund their own schools and, in northwest Kansas, there are not the property and sales tax dollars."

Rep. Faber said he wants to keep the rural schools open.

"When schools are closed, the community dries up and blows away," he said.

A fifth-generation farmer in southwest Rawlins County, Rep. Faber said he is concerned about the farming economy, realizing how important it is to this area. One problem he sees is the increasing dominance of big corporations.

"There needs to be more competition in the marketplace," he said. "We need to break up big corporations like the Cargills and IBPs and go back to the smaller corporations. There just isn't the competition."

He also sees the rising costs of gasoline in much the same light.

Rep. Faber said he supports ethanol-blended gasoline, where a type of alcohol made from grain is mixed with gasoline.

He thinks the wind farms would do well in northwest Kansas, where the wind generally blows every day. Unfortunately, he said,



John Faber

there are no adequate transmission lines to carry power out of this area. If a company would come to this area to install the wind farms, he said, they would expect to be subsidized and, not being a member of the Utilities Committee, Rep. Faber was not sure just how they would accomplish this.

He said there are several on the Utilities Committee from western Kansas, but losing Sen. Clark, who was killed in a traffic accident in May, could be a big loss.

He said he sees the population dwindling and businesses dying throughout much of northwest Kansas, and the area has an older population.

"We need to get small manufacturing and other businesses to come to this area," he said. "In southwest Kansas, there are packing plants, but we don't have those in northwest Kansas. We need small manufacturing businesses like the gasket place in Goodland, which may grow into a larger business. These types of businesses can attract other such businesses."

Rep. Faber said he would like to see the speed limit on Interstate highways go up.

Health insurance is a main concern of people across the United States, as well as Kansas. Rep. Faber said that it is a federal problem as well as state and, if the bills for Medicaid insurance (which covers welfare clients) keep going up, "it is going to gobble up the whole state's budget!"

"We need to start by lowering the malpractice insurance that doctors pay," he said, "and we need competition to drive the prices down."

"I am against socialized health medicine. Instead of paying for insurance and medicine, we will be paying higher taxes to pay for the health care."

He suggested that Kansas could organize an insurance pool, but to do that, they would have to fight the insurance industry.

"There is just no 'free lunch,'" he said.

John and his wife Renee live south of McDonald. They have three sons, Josh, Jerry and Jake, and four grandchildren. The Fabers are members of the Lutheran Church.

Democrat offers voters a third choice

By KIMBERLY BRANDT

Hoping to give people a choice, Bob Strevey, a retired teacher and military man, has pitched his hat into the ring for the 120th District state representative seat once again.

Mr. Strevey, 61, a registered Democrat, said he believes in the two-party system. By running, he said, he would like to help strengthen the Democratic Party in the area.

He said he has always been interested in state government, and that is part of the reason he is running. Mr. Strevey ran for the seat two years ago, but lost to the Republican incumbent, John Faber, who is running again this year.

Mr. Faber will meet Republican Doug Sebelius of Norton in the primary on Tuesday, Aug. 3, then Mr. Strevey will go against the winner.

Mr. Strevey said he is in good health, with several retirements under his belt, and time to take part in the Legislature.

The candidate serves on the board of the U.S. 36 Highway Association and is president of the Norcat Citizens Alliance.

As a retired teacher — he worked the last year as a volunteer at the Norton Correctional Facility — Mr. Strevey said he feels the school system is missing an important part — the responsibility of the child. People talk about "leaving no child behind," he said, but until the responsibility is put on the child to learn, and kids accept that and want to be educated, things can't change.

As far as money for education goes the problem needs to be solved in Topeka. He said he agrees with Mr. Faber when he said the Legislature had failed.

People in office in Topeka didn't get the job done, he said.

The school money issue lies with the Legislature, said Mr. Strevey. A judge should not be able to come in and put requirements for spending on the school system.

Education, said Mr. Strevey, is a service industry. He said he thinks some of his fellow educators have forgotten that they need to provide what the public can afford.

Mr. Strevey said he would favor raising taxes to pay for education, but only if it was necessary.

Another issue the area is dealing with is economic development, which Mr. Strevey said isn't a new problem. He said he can remember, when he was a high school student in Norcat, drawing a chart on the population trends. Decatur County has been going down since 1900, he said.

"This is a long-term problem," said Mr. Strevey, "and it needs a long-term solution."

What is happening in smaller communities in western Kansas is a reflection of what is happening in larger towns, he said. Big agriculture is running out the small



Bob Strevey

farmers, he said.

The government farm program was meant to help keep small farmers on the land, said Mr. Strevey, but government policy has changed. Now government is helping run out the small farmers.

In the city, he said, businesses get breaks and aren't paying property tax, yet farmers are having to pay property tax even when they aren't making any money off their crops.

"We have to restore health to the agricultural area to remain growing," he said.

If the drought continues, he added, he would like to see a property tax moratorium or a suspension of it.

Mr. Strevey said he is in favor of anything that will bring additional industry to the area, including developing wind farms.

Three steps need to be taken, he said. The first is that they need to work on improving the highway system, second, promote tourism and third, put in place a program to help young farmers get started.

Mr. Strevey said niche farming, growing specialty crops such as organic produce, could be important.

He said people need to be convinced to conserve our water.

There needs to be a sense of priority of where water should go, Mr. Strevey said. It needs to be protected. One thing the state could do is help irrigation farmers get back to dry land farming.

Mr. Strevey lives outside of Norcat on the family farm. He and his wife Kay have three daughters, Trudi, Wendy and Hollie.

He served in the Army and reserves, retiring in 1992 as a lieutenant colonel. He also taught for 31 years in area towns including Norcat, New Almelo, Selden, Park and the Norton Correctional Facility and he still farms and works as a volunteer at the prison.

He said he plans to get out and shake hands and campaign before the election. Depending on who wins the primary, he said, he may have to change his strategy a little.

In the end, though, Mr. Strevey said, all the candidates are all winners because they are getting people involved in the political process.

Cynthia Joan Linner
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Pd. Political Adv. Deena Wentz, Treasurer

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•Lifelong Norton Resident
•Married to Laquita (Wilson) Smith; Father of Makayla, 8 and Jaden, 3
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Readily available to the public; An effective office administrator; Develop a department interested in community involvement; Promote the safety and well being of all Norton County citizens; Develop community based programs for the youth in our county; Maintain a good working relationship with all county commissioners and city councils
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Ivan Kingham
Republican Candidate for Norton County Commissioner District Two
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• Airport Board 20 years — Past President
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Your support on August 3 will be greatly appreciated.
Pd. Adv. by Ivan Kingham for District 2, Norton Co. Comm., Craig Renner, Treas.