

## Contested supervisor candidates discuss issues

By Chris Welch and Lydia Statz, Union staff writers | Posted: Thursday, March 13, 2014 10:22 am

JEFFERSON — Candidates for the Jefferson County Board of Supervisors squared off in a debate Wednesday night, with five of the six contested district races represented.

In an event sponsored by the Fort Atkinson and Jefferson Chambers of Commerce, WFAW Radio and the Daily Jefferson County Union, candidates for the board squared off in the Puerner Room at the Fort Community Credit Union in Jefferson on what they believed to be the major issues facing the county and what they bring to the leadership.

Invited candidates included candidates Kirk Lund and Rex Weston from District 14; incumbent John Molinaro and Laura Payne from District 16; incumbent Jim Mode and Frankie Fuller from District 20; incumbent George Jaeckel and Tim Griep from District 23; incumbent Carlton Zentner and James Jorgenson from District 26; and incumbent Glen Borland and Robert Bennett from District 27.

Jaeckel was unable to attend the event, and Griep did not respond to the invitation, leaving District 23 unrepresented Wednesday evening. Zentner was sick and unable to attend.

WFAW news director Michael Clish served as moderator, and Jefferson County Circuit Court judicial candidates David Wambach and Joann Miller also offered their views during the event.

### District 14

Current supervisor Pam Rogers is not running for re-election this term, leaving the election in this district wide open for challengers.

Candidate Kirk Lund, an attorney from Lake Mills, said he is running to make a positive difference in the community. He feels his experience in a wide variety of areas uniquely qualifies him for the position.

“My experience of representing low-income clients at a free legal clinic that I helped to found, my work on election integrity issues, and my international work and experience makes me well-equipped to handle the challenges facing Jefferson County,” Lund said. “I have worked as a Habitat for Humanity supervisor with a nonprofit in Mexico, as a election integrity supervisor in El Salvador, a public service lawyer, as well as a law clerk in the Waukesha County Clerk of Courts and Texas Legal Aid, and at the Rain Forest Foundation during law school.”

He said that if elected, he would work toward sustainable economic development, advocate for fiscal responsibility, and promote tourism and county parks and recreation.

“We need leaders who will work for the middle class in our community,” Lund said. “With a strong middle class, everyone does better. I look forward to finding common ground on the county board.”

He said he believes the most pressing issues facing the county are natural preservation and maintaining government services.

“I think two of the most pressing issues is working to preserve our natural open spaces, and continue to strike a balance between keeping taxes down and services up,” Lund said. “On the second issue, I don’t like paying taxes more than anyone else, but the services the county provides cost money and paying taxes is the price of a civilized society. We need to have the conversation focus on what we need to do to keep the services we need.”

The first question put to the candidates was, “What should be done with the old highway facility?”

The county currently is working to construct a new highway department facility on the former Countryside property west of Jefferson to replace the current facility on West Woolcock Street. Lund said he believed the facility should be torn down and the property cleaned up, but the future use of the property should be examined carefully.

“I think we need to put some study and thought into what use it should be,” Lund said. “It could be sold, it could be turned into public park space, or something else. I think it needs to be studied.”

On the question of whether city residents should be exempted from paying county taxes because they do not utilize as many county services, such as county roads and Sheriff’s Office services, the candidate replied simply “No.”

In his closing statement, he said he believes county government should work for the county’s middle class.

“The policies that we implement should allow government to maximize opportunities for all people to show the best that is in them,” Lund said. “This means implementing policies that take the financial stress off working people, as well as policies that help protect and lift up the most vulnerable people in our county.

“It means the policies we implement should maintain a strong middle class because small, locally owned businesses as well as everyone that buys goods and service is every bit a job creator as big corporations and wealthy individuals, if not more so,” he added. “Support for workers, including collective bargaining rights, needs to be an integral part of our approach.

“On the county board I will work for sustainable economic development, fiscal responsibility, and open, honest and accountable government,” Lund concluded. “I will be a leader on small business and tourism development, farmland preservation, and support for parks, trails, and other community resources.”

Meanwhile, the other district candidate, Rex Weston, previously served on the board from 2003-07, resigning when he moved outside of his district. He said he currently is running because he feels compelled to offer his services when he feels strongly about the issues.

“Like many of you, I have been watching the state of our government — not just county board but government across the spectrum — and I feel pretty frustrated with the way I am seeing things done,” Weston said. “I know for a fact I can bring some very good attributes; I have done it in the past and I can do it again.

“I just felt compelled to run for this seat,” he said. “It is difficult for me to sit at home and watch things the way they are and not offer my services, to get involved with the county.”

However, the candidate said, he did not plan to campaign very hard because he felt his challenger would represent the district well.

“I think Kirk would do a good job, but I really can’t sit back and not offer my services, not offer being involved,” Weston said. “It does not seem right to complain about things and not put yourself forward and offer to do something.”

He said the biggest issue facing the county would be the budget challenges that might force some tough choices.

“I think what we are facing here and across the spectrum is that we need to start getting realistic about what we can and cannot do,” Weston stated. “Everybody talks about stretching the budget and we have budget problems — and no doubt that’s true — but I think there is a point in time where we simply no longer can do things.

“As long as people take what I think of as a short-term vision, and they keep wanting to say ‘yes, yes, yes,’ and make people happy, we will just be going around in circles,” he added. “I think we are reaching a time where we have to say no to people and get people to understand there are some things we simply cannot do.”

Weston agreed with his opponent on both questions that the county should sell the current highway site to go back on the county tax rolls, and that all county residents should be liable to pay all county taxes.

For his closing statements, he reiterated that he was running out of a sense of duty to get involved, and that it was time for the county to get realistic about its financial situation.

“When I was on the county board, I had the opportunity to work really closely with some of the departments; I was involved with the highway department, the human services department, and, more recently, I was involved with the sheriff’s department through the citizens police academy, a program I recommend to everybody,” Weston said. “I am telling you from my heart that the people who work at the county do a fabulous job and we are lucky to have them.

“I don’t think we can squeeze a whole lot more out of the budget,” he added. “I don’t think we can raise taxes. I don’t think the people that live here have a whole lot of money, so we need to be realistic about the situation. We, as citizens, need to recognize we cannot have everything we want.”

## **District 16**

Incumbent candidate John Molinaro serves as the current county board chair, and said he wants to stay on the county board to build on what he has accomplished in his 10 years on the county board.

“As county board chair I have had the unique opportunity to attend all the different committees, and really I learn the unique challenges and problems that are facing Jefferson County,” Molinaro said. “I think the question we keep asking at election times like this are what are the challenges ahead for the county. I think the real question we should be asking is what have we accomplished and what are we doing right in Jefferson County.

“Some of those examples are easy to find,” he added. “We have a heroin epidemic in Jefferson County. Yet the Human Services Department, although their staffing is at a minimum, has been able to form a taskforce, work with the judiciary, work with the court system, and attack the source of where drug addiction comes from.”

The candidate also said the Jefferson County Fair posted a profit for the first time in history, thanks to creative solutions.

He cited the state law that caps the amount the county can raise the tax levy as the greatest issue facing the county, and the one that most constrains the services the county can provide.

“We have a zero-levy capped economy, we have reduced income from our tax revenues, we have reduced income from sales tax, and we have reduced interest income,” Molinaro said. “Those are really the basis for where we get the income for Jefferson County.

“The things we need to deal with extend all over the county,” he added. “We need to deal with software and upgraded computer systems; as I said, deal with the heroin problem; we need to meet staff needs ... It all goes back to where funding comes from.

“We need to be creative, and over the last four years, I have been able to raise over \$100,000 in grants or donations for the county outside the budget levy,” Molinaro noted.

He said he believes the old highway property should be sold to the City of Jefferson since it lies within city limits, and city officials are the best to decide what to do with it. He also said he did not believe anyone in the county should be exempt from paying county taxes.

In closing, the candidate emphasized the progress he has made during his tenure in improving communication within the county, and the work that still needs to be done on improving local control.

“We have a county Facebook page which reaches nearly 1,600 residents; we’ve established a speaker’s bureau for supervisors to speak to organizations, and we have done an in-house newsletter so that employees of the county get to know what is going on in other departments as well learning about their own supervisors,” Molinaro said.

“The second item is local control,” he said. “More and more we see on a statewide level that we are losing local control in our counties and I think that is a mistake. I think locally we know our problems, and locally we know what our solutions should be. We should be working with the state to solve those problems — not having the state tell us how we solve them.”

Molinaro said a representative from Green Bay does not necessarily know the problems of Fort Atkinson or Jefferson or Lake Mills.

“I am a strong advocate for local control and have been lobbying with our state legislators to make sure local control remains here in Jefferson County,” he said. “I hope to continue doing the work I have done over the last 10 years.”

His challenger, Laura Payne, an environmental engineer, said she hoped to earn a place on the board to bring her environmental expertise and experience in project management to the county government.

“First, I am an environmental advocate and I believe in preserving parks and expanding our trails for everyone to enjoy,” Payne said. “With my technical background, I can help ensure our beautiful natural resources in our county will be protected properly.

“I also have experience in stormwater management, and I can use this knowledge to find solutions to the devastating flooding we have seen throughout our county in the last few years,” she said. “In my daily life duties, I work with both businesses and government. For my clients I finish projects on time and on budget. I will bring this experience to better manage the taxpayer’s money.”

The candidate also said she planned to bring a type of “listening leadership” to the board, and serve the great diversity of constituents in her district by taking all of their feedback into consideration. She said she also agreed that the county’s biggest concern was its financial security during the hard budgeting times, and that she would work to find creative solutions.

“We need to figure out the best way to spend our money — where we can reduce our spending and where we need to increase our spending, like with our employees and making sure they are getting a fair wage,” Payne said. “I think we have had some funding in our government that has not been spent properly, and we need to address that. We need to see where we can cut our budgets, and with my background I think I can help with that, and find good solutions for it.”

She agreed with Molinaro that the county highway property on West Woolcock Street should be cleaned up and sold for a future development, and that city-dwelling residents should be liable for county taxes.

As a closer, the candidate again emphasized her project management experience and technical skills as her greatest asset in helping lead the county in the coming years.

“I have many years experience working with both government and businesses,” Payne said. “I work with businesses to make sure they are properly following regulations while meeting their operational and financial goals. For them I am able to provide realistic budgets that we are able to stick with, and I can easily transfer this to my work on the county board.

“As I said before, I am an environmental advocate with the ability to protect the beautiful resources we have in the county, and want to expand our parks and trails,” she concluded. “I also have the technical background to help with other environmental issues such as flooding in our county.”

## **District 20**

Jim Mode, the incumbent candidate for district 20, made a case for his re-election because of his 10 years of experience serving on the board. He also currently chairs the county’s human services committee, and sits on the finance and administration and rules committees.

“I also have experience in the private sector. I spent over 30 years operating my own dairy farm, and I presently serve on the board of directors of Badger Bank and the vice president of an insurance company,” Mode said. “I see the relationship between government regulations, government activities, and how they affect the private sector.”

He said he hopes to continue serving the county in this position as he sees the potential for some tough budgeting years ahead.

“With the zero levy limits and increased costs from inflation and increased dependence on our various services, it’s going to take some thought to figure out how we’re going to make the dollars reach,” Mode said.

The incumbent cited the county’s heroin epidemic and the challenges facing the human services department — the county’s largest department — as the biggest issue facing the county, and said he is proud of the progress the department has made while he has chaired the board.

“The Human Services department has a budget of about \$20 million — approximately \$8 million of that is county levy, the rest is other sources ... But I’m really proud of what the department has done the last four, five years,” said Mode. “We’ve got basically the same staff we had before that, and we’re serving over twice as many people, especially in the mental health area. Between the heroin epidemic and the recession, it’s been a big problem. We’ve handled it without spending a lot of money.”

When asked what the county should do with the old highway shop on West Woolcock Street once the new complex is constructed on the former Countryside property, he said he believes the county’s plan to demolish, clean up and sell the property is the best course.

He also said he would not support a plan to exempt city residents from county taxes.

“In Jefferson County, many times the sheriff’s department backs up the city police, and sometimes vice versa, so there’s an overlap,” Mode said. “And if I remember my statistics right, almost half the people that live in the county go to work outside the county, and half that work in the county come from outside the county. So they’re using all the county and state roads, and it wouldn’t work to have them in separate tax funds.”

In closing, he said he would like to continue serving the people of Jefferson County in order to build on the relationships he has forged in serving on a state human services board.

“We’ve worked with the state departments to try to encourage more funding for human services, and this last year Governor Walker’s budgets put in a substantial funding for mental health, and this was a step in the right direction,” Mode said. “I think a lot of that came from the fact that we had influence with the legislature and with the governor.

“I also would like to continue serving on our finance committee, he insisted. “I’m a fiscal conservative. I’m not going to spend money foolishly, and I’m also interested in finding alternative sources of funding, whether they be grants, partnerships or sponsorship program,” he said. “I think we have to continue to look for more of those sources of funding because it just isn’t available with the property tax dollars.”

Meanwhile, Frankie Fuller, the district’s challenger, said she is running to further citizens’ say in government and to create a stronger, community government.

“I believe in citizen government and a government that gives everyone a voice,” Fuller said. “I believe that a strong government supports and builds strong communities and strong families. I want to speak with the people in the district to find out what’s important to them, and to represent their voice as best as I can.

“I believe in nonpartisan civic government, in which everyone shares a stake in successful outcomes,” she said, “and to solicit feedback on the issues which affect you — like roads, and the building of a new highway building, public health and human services, privacy and land use.”

Fuller, involved in the Fort Atkinson chapter of the American Association of University Women and Friends of the Glacial Heritage Area, said one of her main goals would be to keep in touch with constituents on a regular basis by sharing what is going on in the county.

She cited the need for greater strategic planning due to a changing climate — socially and meteorologically — as the biggest issue facing the county.

“I think that overall we need to start thinking differently about things,” Fuller said. “We no longer live in the world in which we grew up. Our younger people are faced with a lot of different life situations that many of us would never have imagined ... There are climate changes that are going on, there are social changes that are going on, and there are a lot of things that we need to be rethinking.”

She agreed with Mode that the county’s current highway shop site should be demolished and sold to go back on the county tax rolls as a new development, and that every resident living in the county, city dweller or not, should be liable for county taxes.

“I do the police blotter for the Daily Union, and I can’t tell you how many times I see cooperation between the sheriff’s office and the police departments, and other police departments with each other,” Fuller said.

In closing, she said she did not see the issues facing the county as black and white, but that she planned to take information from all different perspectives into account to form her positions.

“If I am elected, I will promise to work hard to keep the county safe, secure and fiscally sound, to see input from the residents who are affected by the decisions that are made; to research answers and develop nonpartisan, common sense, creative solutions to the many issues that will arise,” Fuller said. “And to promote the many interesting families, businesses and activities that are here at home in Jefferson County.”

## **District 26**

Incumbent candidate Carlton Zentner was invited to the debate, but was sick and unable to make it.

Challenger James Jorgenson, however, offered remarks showcasing himself as a relative newcomer to the area who seeks to bring fresh ideas to the board.

“I am from Oconomowoc, and my family has been in Waukesha County for a very long time,” Jorgenson said. “I met and fell in love with my wife, and we came here six years ago, and have made Fort Atkinson my home. I am a small business owner and have been for over 20 years.

“I think it is important to contribute to the county level because good communities do not just happen — they happen because a lot of good people put the time and energy into it, and there are a lot of good people on this board,” he added. “I would echo the concerns of economic development. We have a new director for the economic consortium, and I look forward to working with her and that group. I would like to see us improve business growth in the county.”

The candidate deflected the question concerning the major issue facing the county, and instead chose to focus on what he could bring to the board.

“I think the major issues have been touched on here, and the current board members have worked through a lot of these issues,” Jorgenson said. “I think they have information that we don’t; we are kind of outsiders here.

“I think economic development and the drug problem we have here, the human services issues, are all very important,” he stressed. “I think what I can bring to the board is a practical approach and I educate myself on a given problem. I think that allows me to reach best decisions in the end.”

The newcomer agreed with other candidates on the panel that the current highway property should be slated for future development, and that county taxes should extend to all county residents.

He emphasized his love of the area as his greatest asset in his closing statement, and vowed to work hard to ensure this area is well-represented.

“There are a lot of issues that have to come to the board, and it is really difficult to develop a political philosophy that answers everyone’s questions; it is just not possible,” Jorgenson said. “What I bring is a practical approach. I have come to love the city of Fort Atkinson and its people, and I love this county. I will work as hard as I possibly can to bring different ideas together and that have the best interests of everybody.”

## **District 27**

Glen Borland, the incumbent candidate in district 27, has served on the County Board of Supervisors since being appointed to his position upon his retirement from the School District of Fort Atkinson in 1996. He said he took the position out of a sense of duty to the area that has “been so good” to him.

“Well, a long time later, I’m still here. I want you to know I’m not a politician,” Borland stated. “I believe in nonpartisan county work. It’s the only way it can work. But I took it (position) to help in the best way I could, and I have no other reason but that for seeking re-election.”

Borland, who served as a football coach for many years, said county government works best when all supervisors work as a team.

“I have no great magical ideas for how we can handle our funding for the next year,” Borland said. “But I think we work well together. We work from a team approach in county government, and I’m currently serving on the Parks and UW-Extension committees ... but the team works and serves Jefferson County well, and we have good leadership in our county administrators.”

He cited budgeting issues as the county’s biggest challenge in the coming term, and said he has worked on the board to search for creative solutions when it comes time to tighten the belt.

“It’s not easy to maintain the level of government that we are used to here,” said Borland. “We need to keep the doors open. We have to be proactive in our work, in our outlook for Jefferson County — we just can’t shut down.

“In my experience with the Parks, we’ve relied very heavily on volunteers, on the Friends of our parks systems, on patience, and also on grants,” he added, “and I think we’ll have to be very proactive in these areas to help us get the job done.”

The candidate agreed that the county should sell the current highway shop site for a future development, and that city dwellers should be as liable for county taxes as rural residents.

“I live in the city of Fort Atkinson, but I use county roads, and I depend on the sheriff’s (office) and the men there, and the help that they give,” Borland said. “I don’t separate all these things.”

In closing, he said he looks forward to maintaining his open approach to government that has served him well over his past terms.

“I have enjoyed and appreciated the opportunity to serve Fort Atkinson and Jefferson County over these years, and I’m looking forward to more opportunity to do so,” Borland said. “I will reiterate again that I come with an open mind, I come with no prejudices toward anyone or any one item. “I want to do what I perceive to be in the best interest of Jefferson County, regardless of what it is. I would appreciate, and I would enjoy, being a part of the team. We do a good job.”

Challenger Robert Bennett said he sought public office to bring a fresh and open-minded approach to the board.

“One of the reasons that I wanted to seek the supervisor’s office was to bring some open-minded ideas and take a fresh look at some of the services that we have for recreation and how can we best serve all the county residents out there,” Bennett said. “One of the things that I think is top

priority is to look carefully at all the departments' priority spending list and determine what their actual needs are in relation to cost and benefits for our constituents out there."

Bennett, president of the Jefferson County Snowmobile Alliance, said he also believes there are ways for the county to support greater recreational opportunities that can help support the county tax revenue.

"And I think there's a place to be proactive with the reallocation of some of the county taxpayer dollars, rather than spend the money just for the sake of the budget," he said. "I spent over 40 years in sales and marketing, so I can relate in talking to constituents out there. I also started a small business, built it up and sold it, so I know what it's like to meet a budget and meet payroll."

Like Borland, he also cited the rising challenge of meeting the county's needs on an ever-restricted budget as the greatest issue facing the county.

"As some have already talked about, the needs go up, but we still only have the same dollars available," Bennett said. "I think one of the ways we can help increase the money available out there ... one of the winter activities this year brought in \$20,000 worth of sales tax into the county. We could probably do a lot in the future to help increase that. We have to balance our budget just like every homeowner."

He agreed with Borland that the old highway shop property should be cleaned up and sold to go back onto the county tax rolls, and that every Jefferson County citizen should pay county taxes, regardless of their zip code.

"Currently everyone is used to the sheriff's department and local departments working as a cohesive unit, and not stopping at a city limit line to carry out their business," he said, "so I don't think we should do it."

The candidate concluded by saying he is running for a seat on county board to help make the county a better place, and he believes his experience in sales and marketing, as well as serving on the board of directors for the Concrete Foundation Association, will give him the experience to help lead the county.

"It's given me the opportunity, and I want to bring some of those (ideas) to the county, to bring some fresh, open-minded ideas, to look at the spending that goes on and make sure it's in the places that's going to give us the best benefits for the cost expended," Bennett said.

"Yes, there is an opportunity to create some additional recreational avenues out there, and do that within departmental dollars," he said. "I think it's also important that we listen to the constituents, take their feedback and use that as part of their planning as we go down the road in the future. I look forward to serving you and our county in the years to come."