



# NEBANews

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Summer 2016 Edition

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## President's Message

As we move into the summer, it's been an incredible election year so far. Between the daily happenings at the national level and the various machinations at the local level with candidates switching party affiliations, this promises to certainly be the strangest election year that we've ever witnessed in our lives.

As usual, NEBA has done an excellent job of bringing candidates to the table to discuss their respective races from the election for State Attorney, Sheriff, City Commission to School Superintendent and we have more to come.

The NEBA board is working hard to grow our organization and through the efforts of Hugh Tomlinson, Membership Chair, we've just surpassed 250 members for the first time ever!


But most importantly, NEBA has stood tall and proud in expressing our memberships deep concern about the Tallahassee City Commission and the property tax increase from last year. Despite the fact that there was a \$17.6 million surplus from last year and concrete suggestions from NEBA, Budget Hawks and Citizens for Responsible Spending members, our collective efforts to date have fallen on deaf ears.

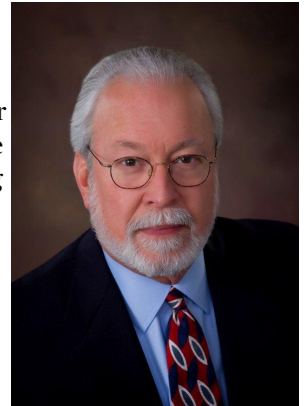
This is indeed unfortunate because one would hope that our elected officials would be keen to hear from those that represent a different philosophy than the tax and spend mantra that has enveloped the City Commission, save for Commissioner Scott Maddox.

Suffice to say that we won't give up. That's why NEBA is the only business organization in Leon County that's willing to take on the establishment when we believe they're wrong.

And when we met at City Hall in our 'counter' Budget Workshop on June 20th, we had more citizens at our meeting than the Commissioners had at theirs at Walker Ford!

Also for the first time NEBA PAC, which was established in 2014, is endorsing and contributing to candidates that win the straw ballot votes at our monthly candidate forums. No other general business group in town supports candidates that represent our views and we're proud to once again be leading the way.

Thank you for your continuing support of NEBA! 



Barney Bishop,  
NEBA President

**IMPORTANT: Since our monthly membership meetings will be Candidate Forums, please note that lunch will start being served at 11:15 am and our program will start at 11:45 to ensure that we're finished by 1 pm**

# Sheriff Candidate Forum: Candidates Focus on Crime

By Emily Fritz

Leon County Sheriff candidates Walt McNeil, Tommy Mills, Charlie Strickland, and incumbent Mike Wood faced off on May 24. All candidates spoke of their lengthy law enforcement careers.

Strickland, who holds bachelor's and master's degrees from FSU, retired from the sheriff's office after 25 years. He spoke of the county's 15 percent increase in crime last year and asked the audience to judge the incumbent's performance by this statistic. He said the high crime rate indicates the need for new leadership in the sheriff's office. Strickland owns Talon Training gun range and told the audience he is the only candidate who is a business owner.

Wood's entire 35 year law enforcement career has been at the Leon County Sheriff's Office, where he has served in every capacity. He acknowledged the high crime rate is unacceptable and spoke of programs that focus on the high crime areas. He said we "can't arrest our way to success." Wood stated that previous administrations, including that of deceased Sheriff



Sheriff Candidates (L-R): Charlie Strickland, Sheriff Mike Wood, Tommy Mills, and Walt McNeil. Photo by Catherine Baer.


Larry Campbell, were not successful at reducing crime in these areas.

Former Tallahassee Police Chief Walt McNeil criticized Wood for implying Campbell was a failure, eliciting a quick apology from Wood. McNeil pointed to his ten years as police chief and how his work with Campbell resulted in a reduction in crime. He stated that Wood does not work well with other law enforcement agencies, citing Wood's rollout of body cameras without coordinating it with the police department as an example.

Mills grew up in Tallahassee and said he never envisioned the crime rate in his home town would be as high as it is. He said Leon County has a crisis,

and he wants to create a Renaissance by having deputies entrenched in the high crime areas to work with potential violators. He said the community distrusts law enforcement, and the people want a leader.

All candidates oppose unionization of the office. Strickland said no CEO supports unionization if he/she believes in his/her ability to lead. McNeil said unions are born when leadership fails. Mills believes that employees who trust their boss will not want it. Wood said this issue has arisen in the past and employees rejected it.

Straw poll results: (1) Wood, (2) Strickland, (3) McNeil, (4) Mills. 

# Leon County School Superintendent Forum

By Emily Fritz

The Leon County School Superintendent forum was held on June 28. Former Lively Technical Center principal Woody Hildebrandt is challenging incumbent Jackie Pons in the August 30 Democratic primary. The winner of that race will face off against NPA candidates Rocky Hanna and Patricia Sunday and Republican Forrest

Van Camp on November 8. All five candidates were in attendance.

Pons, Hildebrandt, Hanna, and Van Camp all stressed their many years of experience in the Leon County school system. Sunday served on the Leon County School Board twenty years ago and has worked for the state, authored four books, and served as a minister.

Pons touted the district's increased graduation rates and high rankings by

the Florida Department of Education among his accomplishments. Hanna said the district needs a change in leadership, and he would eliminate wasteful spending. Hildebrandt claimed he was responsible for the district's cleaning up of contracting processes and accused Pons of skirting state laws in construction bidding. Hildebrandt and Hanna became whistleblowers on the district's awarding of construction contracts, claiming that Pons rewarded campaign

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contributors. Van Camp stressed his experience in every part of every department and said he is worried about the school district he helped build. He considers school safety a high priority. Sunday said the district needs a person with an outside perspective, not a well-financed politician.

The subject of the whistleblower claims by Hanna and Hildebrandt arose several times, resulting in strong swipes by the Pons challengers. Pons said their accusations were false and were done for political reasons. He reminded the audience that the FBI investigation has not resulted in any charges against him.

Van Camp said the district needs to heal from the discord and his maturity and patience would facilitate the healing. He denied the suggestion that he was coaxed into running by Pons to siphon votes from Hanna.

Pons and Sunday support a new Southside high school. Hildebrandt believes a new school is needed but is concerned about funding. Van



School Superintendent Candidates (L-R): Forrest Van Camp, Superintendent Jackie Pons, Patricia Sundry, Woody Hildebrandt, Rocky Hanna. Photo by Catherine Baer.

Camp believes a new school is not needed, since Rickards is only at 70% of capacity. Hanna said the Florida Department of Education did not approve a new school proposal and until there is a need, one will not be approved.

All candidates agreed that students must use the bathrooms that coincide

with their gender at birth, but students with special needs should be accommodated.

Straw poll results: (1) Hanna, (2) Pons, (3) Van Camp, (4) Hildebrandt and Sunday tied.

# City Commission Candidate Forum

By Emily Fritz

Candidates for Tallahassee City Commission seats 1 and 2 participated in an April 26 forum.

Several weeks after the forum, seat 1 incumbent Scott Maddox switched races to run for re-election, and candidates Gloria Pugh and Rick Minor withdrew from the race. Seat 1 candidates Luther Lee and Bruce Strouble remain in the race. Steve Houglan is challenging incumbent Curtis Richardson for seat two.

Strouble supports greater transparency and greater business development in the community. He believes that development in the community is not

equitable and we should lift up the troubled areas. He opposes higher taxes and said we need to prepare people for the workforce.

Lee believes government should get out of the way of business and reduce taxes. He supports bringing new businesses to town that do not compete with existing businesses. He emphasized his experience at making government more efficient through his current position at the Department of Revenue.

Richardson emphasized his many years of public service, including the school board, legislature, and as the incumbent commissioner. He served on

the committee that drafted Blueprint 2000 and was Vice Chair of the sales tax committee.

Houglan spent 29 years as an Orange County law enforcement officer and holds a Ph.D. in public affairs. He opposes the 13 percent property tax increase levied by the city commission last year and supports body cameras for police officers.

Lee would not support the mobility fee outright and objects to the \$300,000 price tag of the study.

Strouble agrees the price tag for the study is high but believes we should not

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discard the consideration of a mobility fee.

Richardson supports the mobility fee study, stating developers say the current system is unfair. He said the mobility fee does not monitor people's driving habits.

Houglan said the mobility fee is in effect in some communities in the state, including Tampa. He said we are different from Tampa and should gather a lot of feedback from the community before moving forward.

Steve Houglan won the straw poll for seat two. Because of the change in candidates for seat one, the straw poll results for that race are moot.

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### Upcoming Meetings

July 26 - Candidate Forum  
for Leon County Commission,  
District 2

August 23 - Congressional  
District 2

September 27 - Property  
Appraiser and Supervisor of  
Elections

October 25 - Florida House of  
Representatives, District 9

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