

Cobey Ledford

Lee County 4-H

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I gave a survey to commissioners from different counties on some key topics. I picked counties diverse in size and needs. The commissioners were Frank Williams (Brunswick), Joe Belcher (Buncombe), Kirk Smith (Lee) and Anna Baucom (Anson).

Why did you run?

Anna Baucom said “Once I was in West Berlin and needed to go to live in West Germany. To do that I had to go through East Germany. This was in 1966 when Germany was divided -- democratic in the West and socialist in the East. My driver thought I could travel through East Germany because he had a pass to go through. He was wrong and we were held at Check Point Charlie for a couple of hours. They finally allowed us to go back to the West where I took a plane to Hanover in West Germany and my driver drove to meet me at the Hanover airport. While I was waiting for him, I thought how wrong governments could go and decided that I would never take freedom for granted. So when the opportunities to serve in local government came to me, I did it.”

Joe Belcher said “My decision to run for office was part of wanting to serve and be a mission work for my faith in government.” Frank Williams said “I have always had an interest in the political process..” Kirk Smith “I was tired of Republicans voting to support "corporate welfare"

What was the hardest thing about campaigning for commissioner?

Frank Williams said “In our case, the geographic size of our county. It is an hour drive from one side to the other going 55 miles per hour. There is a lot of territory to cover, and that makes it challenging communicating your message to the voters. The other difficult thing was raising the money needed to reach the voters.” Joe Belcher said “The schedule and pace is very difficult on your family. Also you have to spend \$\$ in marketing etc and raising money is something that you are never comfortable doing.” Kirk Smith said “It wasn't hard, it was fun!”

What is the hardest decision you have made as commissioner?

Anna Baucom said “We had a landfill issue when I went on the board in 1993. There was loud, hateful, malicious opposition to having a landfill here in Anson County. A previous commissioner board has signed a contract with a landfill company and our board had to approve a franchise agreement. That is what we had to vote on. I voted for the landfill franchise (which passed 5 to 2) and the "environmentalists" freaked out. They made signs about the five who voted for the agreement and put them up along the highways. Mine said "Anna Baucom, queen of garbage." The decision itself was not so hard but the public pressure was difficult to suck up.” Joe Belcher said “The amount of \$\$\$\$ in any budget is very hard to comprehend and voting for any budget is difficult. You can second guess your decision every year. I would say voting for or against any budget is the hardest decision because there is always things you do not like.”.

What is your plan for your county?

Frank Williams “My vision, in a nutshell, is for Brunswick County to be a safe, friendly place to raise a family or build a business; one where the government respects the taxpayer, protects private property rights, supports the business community and allows our county's diversity to grow on its own.” Joe Belcher said “I want people to spread a message that our children can come back here and work. “

Will you run for commissioner again?

Frank Williams said “I am currently planning to seek re-election in 2016. Our board has seen significant turnover, with two consecutive board chairmen not seeking re-election to their seats. I believe we need some stability and consistency, and I hope to offer that.” Joe Belcher said “Yes, I still have work to do. I believe the country needs people of faith to stick it out in government.” Kirk Smith “Most likely, as I want to continue working to improve Lee County's future.”

Are you planing on running for a higher office?

Frank Williams said “While I will never say never, at this point I am focused on running for county commissioner again.” Anna Baucom said “No, I was asked several times to consider a run for the NC House but I refused with thanks. I would not be a good representative because I could not function in that chaos in Raleigh”.

What was the most important issue you have handled as a commissioner?

Frank Williams said “I believe the most important single vote I've cast as a

commissioner was my vote to hire Ann Hardy as our county manager in mid-2013. The previous county manager left after 12 years to take the same job in a larger county. This vote was so important because it touches every aspect of county government. Our county manager is, in effect, our CEO, and I believe this was not only the most important vote I've cast, but the smartest.” Joe Belcher said “There were many, I believe not extending incentive money to the beer and alcohol industry was a bold move. Also not supporting extending benefits outside of marriage was an easy vote for me but highly political. My support of our school safety and improvement was an honor too.”

What do you think the biggest problem your County faces currently?

Frank Williams said about the biggest problem in his county “Maintaining our character as we continue to grow. Additionally, recruiting stable jobs to our county.” Kirk Smith said 'High taxes deter businesses from locating here and impact residents with fixed incomes. The resulting high unemployment contributes to less income flowing into our local economy. Our students graduating from high school requiring remedial training in order to continue in our Community Colleges.'

From this survey I found all counties may have similar issues in their counties but they also have unique ones. The one thing in common of all commissioners was they all wanted to make their county better. The difference was how to accomplish this. This activity along with the two weeks I spent as a Young Commissioner has given me insight to the role and challenges of being a commissioner. I look forward to learning more at Youth Voice.