

District 8 County Commission Candidate John Bailes talks about education with Rob Sexton

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On Education and Funding

Rob

John, many people think of the county commission in relation to education and school funding. How will you deal with education and school funding?

John

People are right to think of the county commission's job as dealing with school funding, but of course the school board decides where that funding goes. That's why we have to bring the county commission and the school board together.

As next county commissioner, I would demand accountability, cut waste, and put dollars in the classroom.

Rob

Could you give me some specifics?

John

On accountability, what I'm proposing is a Responsibility Agreement. A Responsibility Agreement is where you bring two groups of governing bodies together, in this case the county commission and the school board. See, they've been fighting for a long time. I want to get beyond that. We need to agree in writing that the schools will achieve certain goals and that funding will be attached to those goals.

Cutting waste, well, that's a little tougher. We'll need audits, fiscal discipline and vigilance. We'll have to look at the county budget and put some pressure on the schools to look at their budgets. Some people might want a school-by-school audit.

Dollars to the classroom requires putting money in the classroom in specific ways, such as textbooks, supplies for students, and teachers. Obviously salaries for teachers are really low here compared to those counties that border us. These counties tend to grab teachers away from us, especially veteran teachers. If we're going to keep those teachers, we're going to have to put money into the classroom. Right now we spend a little over 60% of the school budget in the classroom. I think that should go up. I'd like it to go up to 90%.

On Educational Experience

Rob

What is your experience in education?

John

I teach at Chattanooga State. I've been a teacher for 20 years. I've taught at the middle school level and the high school level. So I've been in the trenches where I had to deal with discipline issues every day. You're there seven or eight hours a day. And I've taught at the community college level and the university level. I also coach my son's basketball team. I know you coach, Rob.

Rob

So you're part of the community as well?

John

Absolutely.

On the Issue of the Next Schools Superintendent

Rob

How would you have handled this situation with finalists for superintendent by the selection committee?

John

That's an interesting question. You're talking about the episode this week where Mr. Adams, my opponent in District 8, called for the school board to (basically) ignore what the selection committee had decided and choose Mr. Rick Smith [currently Deputy Superintendent of Schools in Hamilton County] anyway. Unfortunately, Mr. Smith got put into a difficult position, between a rock and a hard place. Then he chose to withdraw his name from the entire process. He had not been selected as one of the finalists, and Mr. Adams put him in a difficult situation.

I would have handled this very differently. The first thing you have to do is respect the process, in this case the selection process. This is kind of like being at work where you've been given a job and you've done that job, and then someone comes behind you, maybe a supervisor or someone, and says, "Well, I'm not going to accept what you've done." Yet you've done a good job. Nobody likes that.

Maintaining integrity in the process and the way we do things in organizations is really important. That's the first thing I'd do. I'd always be a team player. And by being a team player, I think you'd get more done. You know, this is very American to be a team player. And it's smart business.

George Washington, our founding father and first president, put it this way in his book on rules for a gentleman that you never confront someone or a group in public. You always go to that person or to that group in private. The idea is that Washington was saying that the people who confront others in public really aren't interested in solving a problem. Instead, they're interested in having their way. So if our founding father George Washington could do it this way, it's good enough for me.

Rob

Absolutely. Not a bad role model.

John

No, not a bad role model at all.

Rob

I appreciate you talking with me tonight. I look forward to more discussions, probably once a week maybe.

John

Yeah, that would be great.