

Opponents Adams, Bailes differ on county education

By Ian Berry Staff Writer

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Curtis Adams and John Bailes offered differing views on education Monday, with Mr. Adams touting his past support of education and Mr. Bailes saying District 8 can't wait another four years for change.

Mr. Adams, the current commissioner who voted against proposed tax increases during the past two years, said he wouldn't rule out future increases now that Superintendent Jesse Register is leaving his post.

Mr. Adams, a Republican, told the Times Free Press editorial board that he looks forward to sitting down with the new superintendent, Jim Scales, and would listen to his proposals with an open mind.

Mr. Bailes, a Democrat challenging Mr. Adams, took issue in a separate meeting Monday with Mr. Adams' claim that he "can't think of anything progressive I haven't voted for."

Mr. Bailes said a proposed 55 cent property tax increase two years ago that stemmed from Hamilton County Mayor Claude Ramsey's Education Summit offered evidence to the contrary.

"He voted no on that and fought it tooth and nail," Mr. Bailes said. "I honestly cannot think of a more progressive agenda than that."

The two men are running for the District 8 seat that includes East Ridge and parts of the Brainerd Road area in Chattanooga.

Mr. Adams also voted against a 26 cent increase that passed by a 5-4 vote last year. He said the county may have to consider steps such as paying bonuses and moving expenses to recruit good teachers to some of the county's lower-performing schools.

"We're going to have to do some drastic things," Mr. Adams said.

Mr. Bailes said he wants to focus on getting more education funding from the state, strengthening private partnerships and boosting accountability with the school system.

"I will also bring a new energy I don't think he has right now," Mr. Bailes said.

School board leadership has been "weak," Mr. Adams said. He said that when school board members pushed for a large tax increase, three of them had trouble paying their own taxes. Mr. Adams also criticized Dr. Register's recent reassignment of 21 principals as "very, very bad management."

"We don't give them time to learn the neighborhood," Mr. Adams said. "We don't give them time to learn the parents."

While Mr. Adams has said he was impressed with Dr. Scales and planned to give him full support, Mr. Bailes said he would be better suited to deal with the changing environment Dr. Scales would bring.

"The change factor has been difficult for my opponent," Mr. Bailes said. "And I don't hold that against him. Change is difficult for everybody."

Mr. Adams, who spent 40 years working for local newspapers, has been a county commissioner since 1988.

Mr. Bailes, who teaches English at Chattanooga State Technical Community College, said he moved back to the area in 2000 after spending time in Sarasota, Fla., and Sacramento, Calif.

The county general election is Aug. 3 and will be Mr. Adams' first as a Republican after he switched parties in 2005.

Mr. Bailes said he considered himself more of an independent but was running as a Democrat because they "care about ordinary men and women."

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