

Midlothian supervisor candidates are endorsed

Dear Editor,

On Nov. 7, voters in the Midlothian District will choose their next representative to the Chesterfield County Board of Supervisors.

After examining the platforms of both Mr. [Don] Sowder and Mr. [Dan] Gecker, as well as researching their prior service on behalf of the citizens in the Midlothian District and the range of experience each gentleman has had in matters of local government, I have concluded that Dan Gecker possesses the necessary mix of experience, education, expertise and knowledge to effectively and equitably represent our district and our Midlothian values on the Chesterfield County Board of Supervisors.

I am supporting Dan Gecker because the issues and challenges facing the Midlothian District, as well as Chesterfield County, requires a supervisor who can hit the ground running. Dan Gecker, due to his considerable experience with planning and zoning matters, will not need on-the-job training. He will not need to master the special language that accompanies planning, zoning and land use matters.

Dan Gecker knows the set of findings

a local governing body must make when deciding whether a parcel of land should be rezoned from one use to another. Dan Gecker knows firsthand the important role a vision driven comprehensive land use plan must and should play in guiding community change. Dan Gecker knows planning and zoning. Mr. Sowder does not.

Dan Gecker is a successful businessman. He knows what it means to meet a payroll. He understands how county government is supposed to work from a financial point of view. Dan Gecker knows that government, just as a well run business, must live within its means.

Dan Gecker knows that future growth must be managed and guided rather than haphazardly permitted anywhere, anytime, next to anything at any cost.

Dan Gecker will work to ensure that future growth in Chesterfield County will be consonant with the efficient and economical use of public funds so as not to overburden taxpayers or existing county services such as schools and roads.

As I see it, the future must be a matter of choice. Dan Gecker will be my choice on Nov. 7. I encourage all voters who believe that a better tomorrow is possible to support Dan Gecker.

With Dan's leadership we can be sure

that Chesterfield County's future will be sustainable as well as cost effective.

**Michael Chandler
Stonehenge**

Dear Editor,

Will the "real" Dan Gecker please stand?

After reading his comments in the newspaper [Oct. 4], it doesn't seem like the words [are] from the same man who has been on the Chesterfield County Planning Commission for the past seven years. Gecker is suddenly critical of all the cases he has supported and passed for years.

Gecker has served in a leadership role on the planning commission, as chairman and vice chairman several times each. He has headed up planning commission committees and has been in a position of power for a long time. He has apparently received a vision to make such a big turn in direction, almost overnight, on the eve of the election.

A liberal lawyer who has made a bundle on re-developments and growth [outside of Chesterfield County], Gecker is the Democratic candidate for the Midlothian board seat. He apparently wants to move on to bigger and better things.

Go back and check his record for the past seven years, and count the thousands of new homes and lots he has voted to approve.

While he has been critical of small business growth, just bring on the big boys. Turn down the little 50 lot subdivisions, but approve the big boys, who have deep political pockets.

Now that he has already cashed in many times over, Gecker says he will turn down Political Action Committee money, and represents the people. Where has he been for the past seven years?

The best answer is forget Gecker and move on to better times with conservative Republican Don Sowder, a man of courage and conviction, who will work for the citizens and business interests in Midlothian.

**S.M. Jordan
Beach Road**

Letters to the editor can be e-mailed to letters@chesterfieldobserver.com, mailed to P.O. Box 1616, Midlothian, VA 23113, or faxed to 744-3269. Letters should include the writer's phone number and home address, but neither will be printed. All letters may be edited for clarity or space. For complete guidelines, visit www.chesterfieldobserver.com and click on "letters policy."

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

Forums aren't the most effective forum for voters

Any opportunity that engages voters in the political process is a good thing. But arguably, some are not as good as others. This holds true for "candidate forums" that give candidates a place to tout their platforms without having to expose themselves to the uncertainty and spontaneity of an actual debate. While they may offer a safer alternative for candidates to spread their message, forums do a real disservice to voters who want more than canned answers and two minute, pre-written campaign speeches.

That was the case on Oct. 19 when the

Chesterfield Council of PTAs/PTSAs, the Chesterfield County Chamber of Commerce, the Responsible Growth Alliance of Chesterfield and the Meadowbrook Community Council co-sponsored a forum for

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the five candidates running for school board in the Dale District. In case you missed it – and over 99.9 percent of the district did as evidenced by the 30 or so folks who actually attended the event – it was a chance for candidates to introduce themselves to constituents and talk about the top issues

facing Chesterfield County Public Schools.

The candidates were asked about 15 questions by panelists on topics ranging from classroom overcrowding to how they plan to secure funding for educational initiatives. The questions were thoughtful, but so were the responses. And that was the problem.

The candidates were provided with a list of questions long before the event, so they had time to compose their answers, and compose them they did. One candidate, David Wyman, wrote his responses down on note cards and then proceeded to actually read some of his answers to the audience.

Toward the end of the forum, when the audience was invited to ask questions, he literally shuffled through his stack of cards, trying to find the appropriate answer to a question about continuing education for teachers.

At one point, one of the panelists began to ask a question that didn't appear on the pre-approved question list. Audience members snickered when Wyman interrupted her, saying the rules of the forum required panelists to stick with the agreed upon questions.

Don't voters deserve someone who can think on their feet and answer questions without having to refer to note cards in order to know his/her position?

Then there were the typical, passé answers that voters have come to expect, but still cause them to cringe – like when candidate Verena McCall said, "We have to look at what's best for our children." Who doesn't support that?

Or, when each candidate listed "school safety" as a top priority. They all probably read the national news a few days previously and knew about the school shootings in

Colorado and Pennsylvania and thought, "Oh, that's a perfect concept to add to my campaign! After all, who can argue with school safety? It's...safe."

Worse still, the forum rules prevented the candidates from even engaging each other. Each candidate answered each question in the same order each time, so that by the time the last candidate seated, Janet Stephens, gave her response, half of the time, she just said, "I agree with David..." or "I agree with Mr. Maxwell..." She didn't even have to compose her own position. She could just ride someone else's predetermined coattails.

It was so predictable and, at times, downright painful. Many sitting in the Meadowbrook High School auditorium that night must have wondered if it would all be over in time to arrive home and watch "Grey's Anatomy." (It wasn't.)

That being said, we can be envious of the Dale District voters next week when they head to the polls. With five candidates, there's somebody on the ballot for everybody. If you're looking for a candidate who is more polished and well-spoken, there's Wyman. If you like the grandmotherly type who will lead with her heart, there's McCall. Jim Holland offers a rounded background in both business and education, and his calm personality seems to be a good match with current School Board members. Art Maxwell is the wildcard – ex-military, more outspoken, less predictable, but definitely more fun to watch – and Stephens is the champion of teachers, since she works as a teacher herself.

Having this many choices is a very good thing for voters. Hopefully, we'll all be as lucky as Dale District constituents next year when all of the School Board and Board of Supervisors seats are up for grabs. Only next year, hopefully, candidates will start serving the voters early by agreeing to actual debates instead of playing it safe.

— Donna C. Gregory

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