Pickens County Council hopefuls talk taxes, tourism, economic development

BY GREG OLIVER
THE JOURNAL

SIX MILE — Four candidates vying for two Pickens County Council seats addressed topics ranging from taxes to tourism to bringing in additional jobs during a forum Tuesday night at the Six Mile Community Building.

Incumbent Republican Randy Crenshaw and Republican challenger Trey Whitehurst joined Democrat Jeff Martin and his Republican opponent Bill Reid. Crenshaw is seeking re-election to the District 2 seat representing the Central area, while Martin and Reid are seeking Jim London's seat in the Clemson area of District 1.

During the event sponsored by the Pickens County Taxpayers Association, the candidates said they oppose tax increases and any countywide zoning regulations. They also say it is important to

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From left: Jeff Martin, Democratic candidate for Pickens County Council District 1; Bill Reid, Republican candidate for Pickens County Council District 1; and Republicans Trey Whitehurst and Incumbent Randy Crenshaw for District 2 listen to one of the questions posed during the forum Tuesday night in Six Mile.

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bring in additional jobs to spur employment.

"We've got a good workforce here with people that want to work," Reid said. "We also have a good educational system, and businesses should want to come here."

Martin said jobs would be the result of Pickens County's ability to plan and collaborate.

"We need to think about our infrastructure — roads, schools and things that are going to generate jobs and invest in jobs," Martin said.

Crenshaw said the county has brought 400 to 450 jobs to Pickens County in recent years, due primarily to the Commerce Park. But he said competition is stiff, as neighboring counties and other states are vying for those same industries and companies.

"We have the people and the workforce," Crenshaw said. "The tough question is what does it take to bring them here."

The candidates also addressed the need of spending $85,000 on a tourism director. Whitehurst said he believes now is not the time to "add additional government," and Reid said he would never support taxpayers funding the position and questioned its benefit.

"I guarantee you — our taxes will not go down with more people living in this county," Reid said.

But Martin said tourism could be the engine used to spur economic development.

"In 47 of 50 states, tourism is the No. 1 or No. 2 economic driver," Martin said. "Last year, South Carolina did $11 billion worth of tourism, and plans are under way to grow it to $40 billion. We could grow our tourism base in Pickens County, but we're not going to get this for nothing — we have to invest, and we could get a substantial amount of return on our investment."

When it comes to partnering with Clemson University, similar to what Anderson County is doing, Whitehurst said he favors a closer look at their partnership initiatives.

Reid said a business recruited by Clemson University that wants to be near Clemson must have a reason to move to Pickens County, rather than Oconee or Anderson counties. Crenshaw said he favors working with Clemson University and Tri-County Technical College.

In their closing statements, Martin said he is seeking election in order to provide leadership in enhancing the county's quality of life. Crenshaw wants to maintain the same course council began four years ago that, among other things, included downsizing government while merging positions.

Whitehurst said he wants better communication between the county and its municipalities as well as less taxes, limited government and more individual freedom. Reid said he wants to be a part of the solution, adding that if citizens don't wake up to the things that are taking place "we're going to be in trouble."

The primary is June 8.

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