

By Jan Rahn

Managing Editor

The commissioner race in Perkins County seems to be evoking the most attention in this year's primary election.

On May 11, voters will elect a commissioner in both District 2 and District 3.

Each commissioner district has four candidates who have filed.

They include: *District 2*: Leon Pankonin (incumbent), Matt Waitley, James Vak, and Kelvin Kurkowski. *District 3*: James Deaver (incumbent), Ted Deaver, John Woodmancy, and Darrell Pierce.

Each of the eight candidates in the race was given a list of questions to answer. Voters are hereby given the opportunity to view the profiles of the candidates prior to the 2010 Primary Election on Tuesday, May 11 .

Candidates answering questions pertaining to the election are listed alphabetically:

—**District 2 Candidates**—

- ***Why did you become interested in this position for the election?***

Kurkowski: (unavailable for a photo): I see a need for effective, efficient management at all levels of government. My opinion is that tax/spend/control does not provide the positive incentive needed for improvement at all levels. □

Pankonin: I would like to serve another four years. I have worked with federal, state and local governments.

Vak: As a resident, I see issues that do not seem to get addressed. I have concerns with the increasing taxes and sometimes questionable expenditures. I am also concerned with the increasing deterioration of the county roads.

Waitley: My interest in this position began to emerge about a year ago. I saw that there were some obvious changes that could be made in our local government and wanted to take action. Being the grandson of a federal politician and businessman, I have always considered that someday I would also enter the political arena.

• *What background or qualifications do you have that you feel makes you a good candidate?*

Kurkowski: Lifetime resident of second district Perkins County. I have always been interested in history and civics. My life's history and experience as consumer on the farming side and service provider on equipment service side provides me with a more "broad" understanding of the community. My struggles, successes and failures in business and personal life, along with my traditional values and my innovative nature will help me with decisions on controlling costs and returning maximum benefit for the resources invested. I have respect for those who can admit they were wrong.

Pankonin: Having been a commissioner for four years, experience in working within budget, learning of federal and state hoops that are in place that you have to deal with.

Vak: Current businessman in Perkins County, family has been in Perkins County for 92-plus years, former county fair board vice president. I have experience in operating and repairing

heavy equipment, including those used in road development and maintenance.

Waitley: I have a Bachelors Degree from Chadron State College and am a successful business owner. I started my business from scratch and am aware of what it takes to handle finances in a responsible way. Being involved with agriculture for most of my life, I understand what it takes to succeed in this very tough economic climate.

I have also been the president of Perkins County Fair Board for three years. I am proud of the success of the fair. Our attendance to last summer's fair was very good because we as a board decided to cut our costs, and therefore we were then able to charge little to nothing for gate fees. This in turn helped our vendors because it allowed people to spend their money with them rather than the fair, which is taxpayer funded anyway. Our vendors did well and were pleased with last year's fair.

I will faithfully apply this same principle as county commissioner—give people back their hard earned money, and they will make the economy work, not government.

• *What do you think you can contribute to this board or office?*

Kurkowski: My experiences of struggling to control costs, enhance production and using simple innovation to save resources, long term, should provide insights to benefit our county government. I have experimented with and utilized alternative energy systems, such as solar heating, hydrogen generation, biodiesel production. Our home has no conventional furnace or air conditioner. Solar (passive) and heavy insulation, together with overall design, is key to success.

Pankonin: Experience. Willingness to have open mind.

Vak: I am willing to listen and address the issues of concern. I will use common sense and be fiscally conservative in my decision making.

Waitley: I feel that I can bring good solid leadership to the office. I am not afraid of confrontation and will do the right thing in the face of opposition.

• ***What important or immediate goals will you address at this time?***

Kurkowski: It has become obvious that mismanagement and poor financial condition of most governments at all levels in our country has been key to inability to withstand financial crisis. Good management keeps budgets on track by controlling spending and accountability.

Pankonin: Roads are still a big concern. Even though the valuations have risen that we can keep levy lowering to maintain the tax rate at its current level.

Vak: Taxes, spending and road maintenance.

Waitley: My first goal will be to make sure that we are not wasting money at the local level. My concern is that money is being spent on some things that are really not all that necessary.

Secondly, I will take a hard look at our taxes and see where they can be cut. I would like to make sure that the tax levy reflects the ever-increasing land valuations. As the valuations go up, the levy should go down in turn. Just because more money is coming in does not mean that more money should be spent. Let's find a way to put the money back into the hands of the people who earned it.

Last, but certainly not least, I will take a good hard look at how the county roads can be improved. My basic plan is to concentrate first on the high traffic roads with more manpower on a more consistent basis and then have them continue working on the other roads the rest of the time. If we can get the main roads fixed, people will have better access to our county and our locals will have better access to their property. We must remember that agriculture is our number one industry here and that our county roads are the life veins of that industry.

• ***Are there other issues or ideas you wish to share?***

Kurkowski: The overall condition of the rural roads in District 2 have been a source of frustration for my family and most patrons of our district. I have taken the time to research, both in the past and at the present time, and communicate with personnel of other counties and districts with more successful maintenance systems. This would be one of my highest priorities.

Pankonin: To be able to work with planning and zoning to enable us to look at wind energy; to find ways to keep youth coming back to Perkins County; ways to keep our health care system and to recruit young doctors who will stay in small communities; to maintain and recruit new business.

Vak: If elected I ask the constituents of District 2 for input on their major concerns so that I may put together a list of priorities that need addressed.

Waitley: One thing that I want people to know up front is that my Christian beliefs and values are very important to me and they are a compass for my life. I gauge every decision by these values and even though I may mess up at times, my desire is to always do the right thing.

• ***What is your current occupation?***

Kurkowski: Farm/ranch/equipment service, modification, repair. Self employed.

Pankonin: Farmer, 52 years.

Vak: Farmer/rancher, nine years.

Waitley: I have two businesses. I have a crop consulting business and a cattle business. I am

proud of the fact that I started both businesses from the ground up in a new area and with very little money. I am living proof that you don't need anything but honesty, determination and hard work to be successful in this country.

It has never been easy; there was opposition to what I was doing at times and there were slow times just like in any business, but it never stopped me. It only made me more determined to succeed. I understand that businesses are built on relationships and I believe that I have the best clients in the world. All are honest hardworking people and without them, my businesses would not exist.

• ***Personal: Wife, children:***

Kurkowski: Wife Judy, teacher at Perkins County Schools. Children: Nikelle, personnel management, Stuart, Va.; Max, Cornhusker Ag in Grant; Ross, diesel tech at Central Community College; Kye, senior Perkins County High; Zak, seventh grade Perkins County Middle School; Jaclyn, fourth grade Perkins County Elementary.

Pankonin: Lisa—grain clerk at Frenchman Valley Co-op; children Amy, Tad, CJ, Ben, Max; four grandchildren, Cole-12, Brody-9, Haley-9, Heidi-1; parents Gerry and Elmer Pankonin.

Vak: Sharon—insurance clerk at Perkins County Hospital; children, Jesse-19, auto technician, Hunter-18, Wyoming National Guard, Kaleb-13.

Waitley: My wife has been an elementary school teacher in the Perkins County system ever since we moved here 10 years ago. She loves her job. Having a wife employed there and two kids attending, I am convinced that we have one of the best school systems in the state. Our two children are Carlie, who is 14 and Caden, who is nine. Both are involved heavily in sports, church and 4-H. They keep us busy and we are blessed to have them. My desire for them is to someday see Perkins County as a possible place for their future. A place where they too can be successful and raise a family.

—**District 3 Candidates**—

• ***Why did you become interested in this position for the election?***

Deaver (James): It is important to me as a lifelong resident of the county, a property owner and taxpayer. I also have the time and experience for the position.

Deaver (Ted): I plan on living here the rest of my life and want my children to come back here in the future. I want to make sure that taxes don't get so high that you can't afford to live here, and make sure tax money stays in the county as much as possible. I want to be the voice of the people and do what is best for the taxpayers and reinvest in Perkins County.

Pierce: I have been interested in government for many years. My wife and I have voted every election and special election since turning 21 years of age. When I was working full time and had children at home, it was not possible to devote the time necessary to serve on an elected board. I feel I have the necessary time and four years ago decided I would like to be more involved in local government.

Woodmancy: I was drawn to running for this position because I've always been interested in county government since first being elected to the Perkins County Hospital Board. I have served for several years on various boards in the community, but lately have taken some time off. I felt that I needed to get involved again and decided that this would be the best place for me to give back to my community.

• ***What background or qualifications do you have that you feel make you a good candidate?***

Deaver (James): I have attended many county board workshops, legislative meetings that have an impact on county government, and other meetings that affect the county. I completed safety training sponsored by the Nebraska Intergovernmental Risk Management Association, received a certificate of achievement from the Nebraska Association of County Officials for completing a course of study of county government, had a gubernatorial appointment to the Mental Health and Evaluation Council, and am a past president of the Nebraska Association of County Officials which holds informative meetings, provides legal advice when necessary for counties,

has an insurance pool for the county, keeps officials informed of important dates, and is the center for any information an official may need.

Deaver (Ted): Business owner, resident for 34 years, good common sense, honesty.

Pierce: I have been on the Grant City Council the past three-and-a-half years. Prior to that I worked 38 years in banking. I have served on various boards at my church the past 30 years. There is information that needs to be read and studied before each meeting. I read the agenda and enclosed information before each meeting. You don't just show up at the meeting and go through the agenda not prepared.

Woodmancy: I have a Bachelor's Degree in business with an emphasis in finance from the University of Nebraska- Lincoln, 17 years of banking experience, I served for 12 years on the Perkins County Hospital Board, and eight years on the Perkins County Hospital Foundation Board. I've also served on numerous other boards such as Perkins County Senior Center, Grant Golf Club, and the Perkins County High School Alumni. All this helps provide a solid background and foundation to be a good candidate for Perkins County Commissioner.

• *What do you think you can contribute to this board or office?*

Deaver (James): I have experience in all areas of county government, such as budgets, roads, appointments, the open meeting laws, bidding (purchases), insurance, state and federal mandates, etc. I also represent Perkins County on three other boards that provide services for 17 counties. I have a good working relationship with other county officials.

Deaver (Ted): Serve the taxpayers and listen to the people of Perkins County at all times, make sure property taxes are figured correctly.

Pierce: I can contribute to this board by visiting with people and listening to their concerns. The past years on city council, I have learned to work with a budget, learned to work with fellow council persons, employees and citizens. The private sector also works with customers and co-workers to keep the business operating. I realize there are two sides to most discussions

and you are not able to please everyone. I would hope to benefit the majority of our county residents and have good local government.

Woodmancy: I've spent the majority of my career dealing with finances so initially this is where I would be most comfortable and hopefully be able to help out.

• ***What important or immediate goals will you address at this time?***

Deaver (James): Budgets and roads are a continuing item. These things have to be addressed on an ongoing basis. It is always necessary to be informed of any change in law or statutes that affect the county.

Deaver (Ted): Will work to lower taxes, make sure that they are spent wisely, will bid all major expenses, will keep tax money in the county, will get as much public input at all times, will make sure county is working for the people of the county.

Pierce: The comment I hear most often from a large number of people is the condition of the rural roads compared to roads in bordering counties. There are less complaints from residents in district three for which I am a candidate. A problem in any part of the county makes the whole county sound like a less desirable place to live.

Woodmancy: I am going into this with an open mind. I don't have any agenda. My only objective at this time would be to help manage the county in the most efficient way possible while promoting our area as a great place to live and raise a family.

• ***Are there other issues or ideas you wish to share?***

Deaver (James): The roads in District 3 are well maintained and I will continue working with the road crew to keep it that way. It is important to take advantage of continuing education available to elected officials and employees. It is also necessary to have safety meetings for county

employees. If anyone has any questions they are welcome to call me.

Deaver (Ted): After seeing the house, senate and president going against the public recently, I want to make sure that we the people have control of our county and that elected officials work for what the people want.

Deaver was asked one further question regarding some charges against him in late 2009 for speeding, no proof of insurance, and carrying a concealed weapon. Even though the charges were dropped (he did pay a fine for speeding), because he is a candidate for election, the issue must be addressed. The question was: Do you think this will have a bearing on the election, yes or no, and why?

“I wouldn’t assume so, because they were dropped,” said Deaver. “If you have a reason to do so (carry a weapon) it can be done legally, but you have to prove there’s a reason to do so.”

He explained he was moving grain bins between Grant and Dickens, carrying a pistol because of the rattlesnakes. He indicated he killed three snakes.

Pierce: I do not have an agenda or an ax to grind and hope if elected to take the position with an open mind. There are several other issues that the public has brought to my attention but involves a small amount of individuals. I would need to gather more information before forming an opinion.

Woodmancy: I have spent all my life in Perkins County with the exception of being away for a few years while attending college. I grew up on the family farm northwest of Grant. I take a lot of pride in our county and believe we live in the best part of Nebraska. I would like a chance to work for the people of the county to continue our traditions of family values and fiscal conservatism.

• ***What is your current occupation?***

Deaver (James): I am semi-retired. I still have an active interest in farming southwest of Grant and am presently the Perkins County Commissioner in District 3, which takes much of my time. I have been a volunteer substitute driver for the Perkins County Transit Bus for the past seven years.

Deaver (Ted): Business owner for 10 years.

Pierce: I currently work for Aurora Coop (Cornhusker Ag Aviation) in the warehouse and will be starting my sixth year this summer.

Woodmancy: I work for Adams Bank and Trust as the regional senior banker for the South Region which includes Grant, Madrid, Imperial and Indianola. I've been employed with Adams Bank and Trust since October 2001.

• ***Personal: Wife/children:***

Deaver (James): My wife, Virginia and I have been married over 50 years. She volunteers in the senior center kitchen and Thrift Shoppe. Our children are Bernard, who lives near Grant, Steve lives in Holyoke, Colo., Julie lives in Aurora, Colo., and Loyd who is deceased. We also have 10 grandchildren and six great-grandchildren. □

Deaver (Ted): □ One son, 17; one daughter, 20.

Pierce: I am married to Catherine (Kurkowski) Pierce who grew up northeast of Grant in Perkins County and graduated from Perkins County High School. She works for Perkins County Schools as a sub with the hot lunch program. We have two sons and one grandson.

Woodmancy: My wife Kathy works for the State Supreme Court Administrator's office in Lincoln and is the clerk magistrate in Perkins County. I have three children, Kayla 13, Peyton nine, and Jacob eight.

