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Illegal immigration among questions asked at candidate forum

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Illegal immigration was a key topic for Lewisville city council candidates during Thursday's forum hosted by the Denton County Republican Men's Club, while the future widening of Morriss Road was discussed by Flower Mound candidates.

The forum, which took place at the Lewisville City Annex, was the first official forum of the year for the candidates running for office in the May 9 election.

Candidates for mayor, as well as Place 4 in Lewisville were in attendance to make opening and closing statements, as well as answer a small list of questions presented on index cards by the audience and read by moderator judge Jim Crouch, president of the Denton County Republican Men's Club. Place 2 candidate David Thornhill is running unopposed.

The same procedure was followed for Flower Mound candidates for places 1, 3 and 5.

For Highland Village, Jeannetta Collier, who is running for Place 3, gave opening statements but was not asked questions since her opponent, Charlotte Wilcox, was unable to attend because of a family issue. Place 5 candidate Patrick Davis is running unopposed. Bill Meek, Place 7 candidate, also gave opening comments. His opponent, Bill Towe, did not attend.

The following are some of the questions asked to the Lewisville candidates, followed by excerpts from their responses.

Mayor's race: Dean Ueckert, Winston Edmondson, Jr., Brandon Bertrand

What are the issues Lewisville has with immigration, and what would you do to solve those issues?

Ueckert: "I am totally against illegal immigration. I've always said that I am, and I've always been proactive. I've been working with our police department, with our state officials and with our federal officials. Yes, we are enforcing laws. We are using the CAP (Criminal Alien Program) program and the ICE (Immigration and Customs Enforcement) program. In the last little over a year, we have detained 680 people, and ICE has detained 80 percent of them. The program is working. The same program that is working in Irving is working here also."

Bertrand: "Everyone wants to view this as one problem, one solution. Illegal immigration? Turn to the police force. But, we also have to address all the other facets. It's also an economic issue. If we started a roundup, for example, Lewisville just doesn't have the resources financially to do that. We also have to look at it from a social standpoint. In order to do that, I suggest we work with surrounding cities and ask, 'How much is it costing you? What can we do to get the residents involved to learn and translate the government's concerns to the residents?'"

Edmondson: "If you look at the schools in Flower Mound and Highland Village, they're great schools. But, schools in Lewisville are deteriorating. Why is that? It's a number of things, like Dean supporting day labor sites and not having the courage to talk about English as the official language. These are things that a true conservative will have no issue, no shame and not be afraid to do. Farmers Branch (mayor) Tim O'Hare, has endorsed me. Why? Because I will do things to take care of the problem. Take care of the zoning. If it's hard for them to work and they can't mull around all day, they'll move to cities where it's easier."

What is your assessment of multi-mobile transportation programs, and how would you improve it?

Edmonson: "A number of police officers have told me that instead of three stations, they wish we had none and that it went all the way through because they're talking about crime. It's going to create some challenges. I'm fully confident in our police force. If they need additional officers, hopefully we can provide that. As far as improving it, I think making sure those stations we have have enough policemen who can monitor that and that any additional crime coming through, that we can handle it."

Ueckert: "I'm all for it. I was born and raised in Texas. I drive everywhere, and it's hard to give that up. But, we are living in a world where we're starting to burn through our energy too fast. We do need to start having some mass transportation. The DCTA is already on top of the security. They're not only working with our police force but the police forces of all the cities that go through there. And they're hiring enforcement to make sure that this provides quality transportation for you and I without us having to sit on the freeway all day long."

Bertrand: "I think it will add a touch to Lewisville and will draw in businesses. What I would like to do is exploit that a little bit more. There are several things that I like about the rail program, so let's mimic that same policy. Nobody knows where we will be economically a year from now, both statewide or nationally. So we need to make sure we're securing every ounce of revenue so we can maintain city services to the highest standard. All this talk about utilizing technology, resources, training ... none of this can happen without economic development. We need to make sure we use it appropriately, and when we do have an opportunity like the light rail, to redefine Lewisville a little bit."

In the closing statements, Bertrand said he can't agree with a day labor site. He urged creativity in coming up with solutions and not throwing money at the problem. He warned about the potential image problem the city would face if the illegal immigration issue isn't handled properly.

Edmondson's closing comments questioned Ueckert, saying he supports day labor sites and that he didn't vote on the issue of English being the official language in Lewisville. He also questioned the city spending \$8,000 on last year's council retreat.

Ueckert rebutted some of the claims, saying he no longer supports a day labor site and that the reason it was originally favored was because it was believed to be easier to confine illegal immigrants to one location to run them through the ICE program. He also said he believes English is the official language but that passing a resolution making it that way accomplishes nothing. He said two of the three cities in Texas that have done that have since regretted it.

Place 4: **John Gorena**, Thomas Gilmore, Margie Rochelle

What is the No. 1 issue facing Lewisville?

Rochelle: "I do not see any one issue being the No. 1 priority because what is a priority today may not be tomorrow's priority. So we have to handle things as they come in. People talk about illegal immigration, they talk about crime, but I don't see a No. 1 problem. All issues are important, and they deserve as much attention as everyone else's issues."

Gorena: "A lot of people talk to me, and I'm not a one-issue guy and I try to bring up other things, but it's always about illegal immigration. Why are we moving DeLay (Middle School) up north? What about this overcrowding? How come we have what's going on on the east side of town? We have crime rising by 20 percent in some areas. The No. 1 issue, I believe ... illegal immigration is going to hurt the city more than anything. There are a lot of things we can do, like code enforcement. Let's find out from other cities what they've done."

Gilmore: "We have a lot of short-term, individual things to deal with, like commuter rail. It's a big concern, development opportunity. I-35 ... big concern, development opportunity. Immigration ... concern, opportunity. But long run ... seniors and veterans are going to be two of our biggest issues in our city. In 10 years, we are going to have more than 73,000 people in our county over the age of 60. I've seen what our social services is doing today, and they've done a wonderful job. But, they won't be able to take care of those folks. We have to find ways to be creative and get our seniors and veterans involved with our community so they can have a positive and bright future in Denton County."

How would you compensate for the loss in revenue to the city, and what expenses would you cut?

Gorena: "Things I wouldn't cut would be fire and police. In fact, I think we need more officers. Things that we might need to cut ... well, definitely not go to Fort Worth for a retreat when we could

do it for free here. We can cut in all sorts of areas, and as we cut, we can redirect funds to where we need them. Maybe we don't need to have a festival this year because we can't afford it. We need to find other ways to increase revenue. That could be more code enforcement and block grant programs."

Gilmore: "One of the ways we can get through this rough patch is to slow down re-development, slow down some of those things where we are spending on capital expenses. Another thing we can do is not step into large litigious problems."

Rochelle: "We can't cut emergency services. We would like to have more police officers, and we need more police officers and more firefighters. How we can increase revenue is by the things we are doing right now. The building of the Railroad Street Athletic Complex will bring in tourism. The light railway is coming through, and people will come and visit. And, there are other places that are being made to bring in tourism, like hotels."

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