

# 2020 Primary Report on Local Candidates



Submitted by the Candidate Recruitment and Encouragement Committee of the WCRCC.

## INTRODUCTION

The Candidate Recruitment and Encouragement (“CRE”) Committee was established by former WCRCC Chair Jan Klaas. She appointed then Vice-Chair Jim Thompson chair the committee.

The purpose of the committee was to recruit, vet, and provide information about Republican candidates on the ballot in Winnebago County. The Committee began with a written questionnaire and candidacy evaluation, as well as candidate interviews and review of voting records. The CRE Committee has interviewed local candidates for municipal, county and township government, as well as candidates for State Representative in the 69<sup>th</sup> District (including the current Representative, Joe Sosnowski).

Today’s Committee Chair, John Guevara, began with a mandate from WCRCC Chair Thompson to increase participation, especially survey utilization, and to actively recruit Republican candidates for partisan and non-partisan races. Guevara first recruited Committee members Jan Klaas, Gloria Cudia, Martha McLaughlin, Ron Esser, and Richard Pollack; all the Committee members have either served in local government or as WCRCC Precinct Committeemen, and all have actively volunteered for Republican candidates.

The Committee recommended that the WCRCC endorse in the 2019 non-partisan race for Rock Valley College Trustee, and the endorsed candidates won. The Committee recommended converting the candidate questionnaire and evaluation into separate online forms, a candidate evaluation and a candidate survey. WCRCC Secretary Eli Nicolosi completed both for the Committee at the end of 2019.

The survey link was shared with the 11 candidates for the March Republican Primary, the second week of January 2020 to be completed by January 19<sup>th</sup>; the period for two candidates who had

not responded or submitted surveys was extended by Guevara. The Committee interviewed eight candidates on January 25<sup>th</sup><sup>1</sup>, and two candidates February 2<sup>nd</sup><sup>2</sup>.

## OBJECTIVE

The purpose was for the Committee to determine whether the candidates running for office as Republican can be recommended to the WCRCC and Republican primary voters as Republicans and to increase participation in the written survey **and** interview.

## METHOD

The candidate survey, comprised of 37 questions, was reviewed and tested by the Committee members including ad hoc members (Chair Thompson and Secretary Nicolosi). The survey is designed to measure a candidate's values and generate a corresponding score. The scoring was

0 - .9 – Strong Democrat

1 – 1.9 – Democrat

2 - 2.9 – Moderate Democrat

3 - 3.9 – Party Neutral

4 -4.9 – Moderate Republican

5 -5.9 – Republican

6 -7 – Strong Republican

The online survey cannot be submitted without checking a box marked “Honor Commitment,” through which the candidates affirm that their survey and future interview responses are accurate and will serve as a template for how they will govern if elected to office. Candidates also pledge or affirm that they are of “high moral character,” and are advised the Committee will revisit their

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<sup>1</sup> Committee Members present – Chair John Guevara, Vice Chair Jan Klaas, Gloria Cudia, Martha McLaughlin, and Richard Pollack. Ron Esser attended via proxy. Candidates interviewed were J Hanley, Kevin McCarthy, John Penney, Joe Chiarelli, David Gill, Jean Crosby, David Kelley, and Kyle Vail.

<sup>2</sup> Committee Members present – Chair Guevara, Vice Chair Klaas, Martha McLaughlin, and Ron Esser. Candidates interviewed were Pam Connell and Jim Webster.

responses if a candidate has gone back on their word. The purpose of the “Honor Commitment” is to ensure candidates tell the truth about their values and to provide the Committee with consequences if a candidate lies - the Committee reserves the right to rescind any recommendation if it finds a violation of the "Honor Commitment."

To encourage participation, candidates would not be interviewed by the Committee unless they submitted a survey; failure to participate in the process could trigger a “Do Not Recommend.” Interviews were 25 minutes in length; candidates had three minutes to discuss their bio and candidacy, followed by up to two questions from each committee member present (or via proxy). Chair Guevara did not ask questions except to clarify a candidate answer or as a proxy.

The Committee evaluated four things about participating candidates: 1. Voting Record, 2. Survey Results, 3. Interview Results, and 4. Recommendation to primary voters using printed evaluation forms. Voting Record was obtained from GOP DataCenter (in one case via local election authorities). The Survey Results and answers were reported to the Committee two full days before the first scheduled interviews. The options for Committee members to choose in evaluating candidates was Republican or not Republican for item 3, and Yes, No or No recommendation for item 4. A candidate would qualify for actual endorsement by vote of the Executive Committee of the WCRCC only if they were unanimously recommended by the Committee. Committee members who formally endorsed candidates prior to this process abstained from evaluating candidates in those respective races.

Evaluation sheets were completed and submitted for each candidate with discussion prior to submission.

The Committee would report the Voting Record only for candidates who declined to participate, along with the option to suggest a “Do Not Recommend” to be voted on by the Executive Committee of the WCRCC.

All Committee meetings are conducted according to the WCRCC bylaws and Robert’s Rules of Order.

## RESULTS

As previously mentioned, 10 of the 11 Republican primary candidates participated. Nine candidates submitted the web survey. One candidate requested and submitted a written survey, while one candidate did not participate.

The results are listed below with comment from the Committee by office, and by candidate alphabetically.<sup>3</sup>

### *Winnebago County Board Chair*

Joe Chiarelli

- Voting Record – Hard Republican
- Survey Results – Strong Republican
- Interview Results – Republican
- Recommend - Yes<sup>4</sup>

Joe Chiarelli expressed strong conservative values in both his survey and his interview. He has trade union support and detailed how he’s “stood up to the trades” when he disagreed with them.

He exhibited an even temperament and discussed his experience bringing people with differing views and intentions together to achieve common goals.

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<sup>3</sup> All of the candidates expressed support for President Trump’s policies. Some clarified things they are reported to have said about the President at rallies or events during the campaign. All candidates except one expressed support of the Republican platform. Some disagreed with single points in the platform. Details are in the respective candidate reports below.

<sup>4</sup> Chiarelli was unanimously recommended by the Committee.

## **Jim Webster**

- Voting Record – Hard Republican
- Survey Results – Strong Republican
- Interview Results – Republican
- Recommend - Yes

Jim Webster has significant experience on the County Board and with the Republican Party. He did not submit his survey by the deadline; he said he submitted the survey already and the problem must be on our end, yet the survey had been extensively tested on desktop and cell phone platforms and that every other candidate was able to submit their online survey by the deadline. He then asked to complete a written survey and was sent a pdf version to be completed and scanned and sent by email or text to Chair Guevara; he completed the survey, drove to WCRCC HQ and left it in the mail slot.

Webster said he will emulate the leadership style of former Board Chair Scott Christiansen if elected. He made two incorrect statements during his interview; discussing trade unions, he referenced a Local 150 magazine endorsing Frank Haney for County Board Chair and Barack Obama for President in 2016, which he reiterated several times (Obama did not run for President in 2016).<sup>5</sup>

He said the Chair's job doesn't have to be changed because the County Board did not change the Chair's job - the Board only made it so the County Administrator reports to the County Board and is hired or fired with Board approval. These changes he asserted were made in January of 2019; however, c. Changes to the Chair's job were made in March 2019 and included deleting language making the Chair the "Chief Administrative officer of the County," stripping the Chair

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<sup>5</sup> Chair Guevara and Ron Esser met with Jim to clarify. He said it's possible it wasn't the same magazine and he doesn't keep track of dates very well.

of the power to “monitor, review and recommend an annual budget,” and “negotiate leases, contracts and other agreements for goods or services on behalf of the county.”<sup>6</sup>

***Winnebago County State’s Attorney***

David Gill

- Voting Record – Hard Republican
- Survey Result – Strong Republican
- Interview Result – Republican
- Recommend – Yes

David Gill has worked in the Winnebago County Criminal Courts for 19 years and sent over 300 criminals to the Department of Corrections. He has served on (sometimes chairing) local boards and contributed to the community. He currently works primarily as a criminal defense attorney. He explicitly disagreed with one point of the platform in both his survey and interview.

Joseph “J” Hanley

- Voting Record – Hard Republican
- Survey Result – Strong Republican
- Interview Result – Republican
- Recommend – Yes

J Hanley has prosecuted felonies as an Assistant State’s Attorney and Assistant United States Attorney for the District of Arizona. After his time as a US Attorney, he practiced law at Hinshaw & Culbertson in business litigation. He currently serves as the General Counsel for the Rock River Water Reclamation District. He has been involved in the local community and is a foster parent. At an earlier event, J had expressed concern about President Trump. He clarified

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<sup>6</sup> When asked about this by Guevara and Esser, he said he misspoke when he said the Board didn’t change the Chair’s authority and he believes the changes were good and should remain in place.

this during his Committee interview to mean that he has some issues with the President personally, the biggest being Twitter, and he fully supports the President's policies.

### ***Winnebago County Board District 9***

Pam Connell

- Voting Record – Hard Republican
- Survey Score – Strong Republican
- Interview Results – Republican
- Recommend - Yes<sup>7</sup>

Pam Connell has been a City of Rockford Republican Alderman, elected Precinct Committee Person, Precinct Captain, and Republican candidate for Mayor of Rockford. She holds a Master of Science in Management and a PhD in Business. In her words, "I live the (Republican) party platform."

David Kelley

- Voting Record – Hard Republican
- Survey Score – Republican
- Interview Results – Republican
- Recommend –

David Kelley is the incumbent County Board member in District 9, winning his first Republican primary in 2012. He opposed the changes to Board Chair Haney's authority, though he voted two times to support David Boomer for Caucus Leader. When asked about his position on abortion he said, "I'm not rabid either way because I can see both sides of it." When asked if there was anything in the Republican platform that he disagrees with he answered, "Can't say that I've read

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<sup>7</sup> Connell was unanimously recommended by the Committee.

the whole thing. My history is Libertarian.” He then said he has, “...kind of given up on the Libertarian Party, the last time between Hillary and Trump and we get 3%? That was pathetic.”

### ***County Board District 11***

Dave Fiduccia

- Voting Record – Hard Republican
- Survey Results –
- Interview Results –
- Recommend – No

Dave Fiduccia declined to participate in any way with this process, despite several requests. He chaired the Committee on the Winnebago County Board that stripped the Chair’s authority in 2019.

Kevin McCarthy

- Voting Record – Hard Republican
- Survey Results – Strong Republican
- Interview Results – Republican
- Recommend - Yes<sup>8</sup>

Kevin McCarthy is a current Cherry Valley Township Trustee and has consistently supported Republican candidates over the years. He is employed by the Catholic Diocese, and also hosts a radio program.

John Penney

- Voting Record – Hard Democrat
- Survey Results – Republican

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<sup>8</sup> McCarthy was unanimously recommended by the Committee.

- Interview Results – ~~Republican~~<sup>9</sup>
- Recommend - ~~Yes~~<sup>10</sup>-NO<sup>11</sup>

John Penney has supported Republican candidates for office including John Cabello, Dave Syverson, Adam Kinzinger and Scott Christiansen. He has been a union member his entire career and currently serves as a union Business Agent. He has contributed to the local community as a volunteer and fundraiser; when asked why he pulled Democrat primary ballots he replied that he voted in primaries to support the trades. He expressed surprise when told that, in the event of a vacancy in this position, he could not be appointed because Fiduccia can only be replaced by a Republican -- state law defines party membership by the most recent primary ballot cast. Mr. Esser corroborated to Chair Guevara that his union has instructed its members how to vote in primary elections without disclosing that pulling a party's primary ballot means the voter has become a member of that respective party.

Penney was then asked why he endorsed and financially supported Jake Castanza over John Cabello in 2018. He explained that he believes Representative Cabello made a commitment to him that he did not uphold - honesty matters. Committee members understood why he made this decision, though we do not agree it was the right thing to do.

### ***County Board District 16***

Jean Crosby

- Voting Record – Hard Republican

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<sup>9</sup> The Committee voted on 2/12/2020 to strike the interview results. See footnote 11.

<sup>10</sup> Less than a majority of the Committee members voted whether to recommend John Penney due to abstentions by other members who had endorsement conflicts. One voting member does not believe his being naive negates his values.

<sup>11</sup> Since the meeting, the Committee was informed of a possible discrepancy in Mr. Penney's interview and reported it would investigate the matter to the WCRCC. The WCRCC voted to Not Recommend Mr. Penney at its Executive Committee Meeting on 2/11/2020 because of his voting record.

- Survey Results – Strong Republican
- Interview Results – Republican
- Recommend –

Jean Crosby is the incumbent Board member in District 16, winning her first primary in 2016. She is a local business owner and contributes to the community by serving on local boards (including the Rockford Chamber of Commerce). She has contributed to local Republican candidates including Kris Cohn, Frank Gambino, and Mike Hakanson; however, she has also donated to the International Union of Operating Engineers Local 150 Area PAC and the Committee to Elect Dan Fellars. She is endorsed by Democrat Rockford Mayor Tom McNamara. She informed the Committee that she hasn't been very effective because "they haven't given her anything to do," and she doesn't see that changing any time soon. She voted for David Boomer as Caucus Leader in 2016 and voted for him again in 2018. David Boomer negotiates committee assignments and organized the changes to the Chair's responsibilities in 2019.

Kyle Vail

- Voting Record – Soft Republican
- Survey Results – Strong Republican
- Interview Results – Republican
- Recommend – Yes

Kyle Vail is a US Army veteran who specialized in interrogations. He has worked in military procurement sales, and now works in military and local government procurement sales. He has supported local candidates including Jas Bilich and Joe Chiarelli. He explicitly disagreed with one point in the party platform in both his survey and his interview.

DISCUSSION

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### *Methodology - Survey*

The Committee, including ad hoc members, acknowledged that the survey was a strong online compilation of the questionnaire used previously. It identified three challenges to be investigated and perhaps resolved for future elections. The first was technological - it took 300% more time to build the survey than originally estimated, so candidates did not complete the process until after petitions had been filed. In the future, the Committee would like to complete the entire review process before petition filing.

Also, the WCRCC website experienced security issues on some computer web browsers at some point during the survey process. This issue did not prevent 9 of the 10 participating candidates from submitting the survey; the last candidate to submit the survey claimed he had submitted the survey from his phone after the survey period ended and when he attempted to complete via a desktop, he received the error message (the Committee made an accommodation so he could participate). The issue was resolved before he submitted his written survey, and the Committee does not anticipate this being an ongoing issue.

Second, during the review and testing period of the online draft survey, members expressed a desire to put the platform on our website and include Yes or No responses to each section. This was widely accepted as preferable and will be investigated for future elections. The timing was the primary issue with implementing the concept for this election.

Lastly, was whether the survey could accurately ascertain a candidate's values. For example, in the case of John Penney, the candidate has a Democrat voting record. Some committee members wondered whether the survey would be able to flush out any corresponding Democrat values.

While the survey does score a candidate's answers accurately, it cannot determine whether the candidate is telling the truth. The Committee was made aware of evidence that required further investigation and is confident it would have conducted a fair and thorough investigation.

The survey also differentiated David Kelley, who scored Republican rather than Strong Republican. This result could be because he is a more moderate Republican than the rest of the field, or because he is, or at least was, a member of the Libertarian Party.

The "Honor Commitment" was the mechanism to hold candidates accountable for their survey and interview responses. If a candidate lied on the survey or in the interview, the Committee could consider rescinding a recommendation. If a candidate governs in a way that contradicts the values they expressed in the survey and interview, the Committee will have the option to investigate and make a recommendation to the WCRCC Executive Committee according to the bylaws. As previously stated, the Committee retains the right to rescind recommendations it has made if a candidate violates the "Honor Commitment.", while the WCRCC Executive Committee maintains the authority to disregard the Committee and take separate action.

The Committee will explore solutions to these issues for future elections. One solution could be to increase the number of survey responses per platform issue, including multiple responses for each issue; this may be the way to generate better survey predictability but will need to be tested.

Also, if the end goal is to generate a survey with the party platform on the left and survey responses on the right, the build process could be a challenge. It will also be important to maintain the process from start to finish.

#### *Methodology – Interview*

The interview process was commended by **all** candidates who were interviewed. Committee members supported and appreciated the process, who also expressed a desire to revisit Interview

Results scoring in the future. The absolute Republican or Not Republican value was described as extreme; the rationale for making a change is because it would offer committee members more options when evaluating a candidate.

The Committee agreed that the absolute Republican or Not Republican options did help remove as much subjectivity from the interview evaluation process as possible. The question the Committee members were trying to answer was, based on the voting history, survey results, and interview responses does the member believe the candidate is Republican, Yes or No? The Committee agreed to revisit the evaluation process after the primary in preparation for future elections.

Discussion was limited due to time constraints. Endorsement conflicts impacted recommendation in a few cases. The Committee will discuss tweaks as we prepare for the City and Township elections next year.

### *Results*

The process designed and implemented by the Committee achieved its objective. 10 of the 11 primary candidates completed the survey and interview. All but one of the candidates scored Strong Republican on the survey; all candidates agreed to the “Honor Commitment.” The interview process clarified important aspects about each candidate for the Committee to relay to the WCRCC and Republican voters. We believe the process has delivered a fair picture of the candidates, their values, and their qualifications while adequately differentiating the candidates. The WCRCC Executive Committee deviated from the Committee recommendations regarding only one candidate. It is unlikely that future elections will require intervention or deviation because the process will begin prior to the submission of candidate petitions and include at least a five-week review of the surveys submitted by prospective candidates.

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