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Sell running for Campbell judge-executive

By Amanda Van Benschoten • avanbenschoten@nky.com • October 24, 2009

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ALEXANDRIA - Kevin Sell, who resigned this week as chairman of the Fourth Congressional District Republican Party, has filed a letter of intent to run against Campbell County Judge-executive Steve Pendery in the May primary.

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All three Northern Kentucky counties are now expected to have contested Republican primaries for judge-executive: Boone Judge-executive Gary Moore faces County Commissioner Cathy Flaig, and Kenton Deputy Judge-executive Scott Kimmich faces former county commissioner Steve Arlinghaus.

Sell, 45, of Alexandria, said he's making his first bid for elected office because he believes the county needs to further cut taxes and spending. He said he was spurred to run by recent property tax increases and the new \$13.5 million county administration building.

"For me, it's quite clear: We don't have to, as Campbell County citizens, see tax increase after tax increase, and that's what we've seen for 12 years. Aside from that, we have seen questionable spending on the courthouse and courthouse furniture," he said. "It became evident to me after the last tax increase and the courthouse spending that something needed to be done."

The county will spend \$590,000 to furnish the 52,000-square-foot facility, which replaces the current 70-year-old administration building. It is expected to open Nov. 23 in Newport.

Pendery, 55, of Fort Thomas, said the county has held off on purchasing new furniture for several years in anticipation of moving into the new building, which was planned before he took office in 1999.

He also said increases in the property tax rate in recent years were needed to keep up with inflation, but both the tax rate and property assessments remain low.

"The amount a resident actually pays in Campbell County is similar to Boone County and is considerably less than in Kenton County," he said.

He defended the county's spending record. He said employees are going without raises and paying more for their health care this year, and jobs have gone unfilled in every department and at the county jail.

"What we've had to do, like everyone else, is tighten our belts as tight as we can stand it, while still trying to provide the high-quality services that are needed more now than while times are good," he said.

Pendery is seeking a fourth term as judge-executive. He was first elected in November 1998. He was previously the mayor of Fort Thomas for eight years and a city councilman for six years. He co-owns an insurance firm.

"Once you're elected, you have to serve the community as a whole, you have to use the best ideas and the best talent available, and you have to look at all the options and do what's right, and that's what I try to do," he said.

Sell was chairman of the Fourth District GOP for nearly four years. He is vice president of corporate development at United Group Services in Cincinnati, an industrial mechanical firm. He is also a retired firefighter for the Cincinnati/Northern Kentucky International Airport Fire Department.

He said the county needs to expand its tax base through economic development. His goal is to draw more industrial companies, which could include creating an industrial zone around Sara Lee in the southern end of the county.

"We can't be a county of buyers, we need to be a county of producers if we want to grow," he said. "...We as a county have to develop a strategy ourselves to be going out and getting that (business)."

Pendery said the county has helped foster economic development along the riverfront during his tenure, and future developments are planned once the economy rebounds.

Sell said the county also needs to lead the way in merging services to save money, and said he would support a feasibility study on merging the county police and sheriff's departments.

Pendery agrees the county needs to look at more consolidation of services, but doubts merging the sheriff and police would save money.

"Everything would be on the table, but that's not an area I expect to be fruitful, because there is no overlap of services there," he said.

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