

EDITORIAL

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Commissioner race a study in contrasts

Cody Davis is the incumbent Mesa County commissioner up for re-election this year. Like all incumbents, he has the benefit of having a record that voters can weigh as they contemplate giving him another four-year term.

It's a solid record. Davis has learned the ins and outs of public-private partnerships to expand broadband infrastructure in Mesa County. He's supported the county's efforts to expand behavioral health and substance abuse services and played an instrumental role in updating land use development codes to provide certainty on solar development and support agriculture.

We were especially impressed by Davis' efforts to make Mesa County competitive in a bid to land a federal "tech hub" grant. He facilitated the coming together of a Mesa County brain trust to form an idea — modernizing the Colorado River infrastructure and hardening it against cyberattacks — that may yet pay longterm dividends for this community.

He's big on community collaborations to address challenges. He's pro-growth. He's clearly familiar with the usual litany of county business basics: roads, bridges, sewer, budgeting and the like.

Because Janet Rowland did not survive a primary challenge earlier this year, Davis stands to be the senior member of the Board of Commissioners if voters choose to return him to office.

We think it's wise for voters to retain a level of experience on the board. Davis hasn't shied away from defending his record, having attended multiple forums to debate his opponent, Democrat Tom Acker.

Acker, a retired Spanish professor who taught at Colorado Mesa University, is best known for his advocacy on behalf of causes linked to the Spanish-speaking community.

Our conversation with Acker revolved around his advocacy for social justice. He emphasized the need for better housing, health care and childcare services in Mesa County, highlighting the severe housing stress and low wages.

Therein lies the biggest distinction between the candidates. The 29 Road project is a good example of their competing approaches to local governance.

Where Davis sees an opportunity to stimulate the economy and alleviate traffic pressure by completing a "loop" around Grand Junction, Acker says there are more pressing community needs.

"If you read the community health study that was conducted and published just this year, we have housing stress, the lack of affordable housing, health care, we're in effect a mental health

care desert — a childcare desert," he said. "We're also really thin on those services to our community. Wages are very low and housing is difficult to access with wages that low, and all of those issues, obviously are not the same as building bridges and roads. It doesn't mean you can't

do both ... If we're going to tout our community as a great place to live, then we cannot ignore that a third of the people in our community are suffering.”

But his ideas seem a bit far-fetched — increasing the minimum wage to improve community welfare and attract industries that offer living wages. He also stressed the importance of multimodal transportation and creative zoning to address housing shortages, which sound like challenges more suited to a city government response.

For voters who want more of a human services focus in county governance, Acker is their man. But he may find it difficult to find room in the budget for such a serious deviation from traditional priorities — especially if he's in the minority.

Our endorsement of Davis in this race is not without reservation, however. Our impression is that Janet Rowland has run Mesa County through a small group of acolytes, Davis included.

Voters chose not to re-elect Rowland for reasons that aren't entirely clear. Was it the Jeff Kuhr episode? Or alienating election deniers by not being more supportive of Tina Peters? Or was it simply her abrasive leadership style? Perhaps a combination of all three, with the Kuhr sacking as the coup de grace?

If Davis has been somewhat deferential to Rowland's agenda, he did show he's his own man in one critical area. Let's not forget that he was one of the first elected Republicans to say that Lauren Boebert had lost his support, a stance that snowballed into her decision not to seek a third term in the 3rd Congressional District.

We give the nod to Cody Davis in this race on his experience and the hope that he can forge a good path for Mesa County free of anyone's influence.