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(Neb.)-Statements From School Board Candidates Hoffman, Haynes and Spencer



By: Roxie Graham-Marski Posted at: 11/05/2012 11:29 AM

Photo: School board incumbent candidate Terri Haynes (center) answers a question at the KCSR/KBPY and Chadron Record Political Forum. She is flanked by candidates Gary Hoffman (left) and Andrew Spencer (right). (Photo by KCSR-Roxie Graham-Marski)

(Information by KCSR's Chris Fankhauser)

(Chadron)-Three of the four Chadron Public Schools Board of Education candidates were available recently for the political forum. Gary Hoffman, Terri Haynes and Andy Spencer were on hand to answer questions to offer insight to their views, and Keith Drinkwalter was unable to make the event. There are three open seats.

Opening Statements:

Hoffman: He likes the idea of the forum to help people decide who to vote for. All three of his children are Chadron City Schools graduates, and the schools have a good education system. Originally from Rushville. Went to college at CSC. Over 30 years in probation business. Served in local area. Feels education very important. Wouldn't be where he is now without it. Still studies and reads every day. Believes the schools have a quality product, and would like to help run and maintain that project. Education is important as far as people. Brother is a retired teacher. Wife is a teacher. Two of three children are teachers.

Haynes: Resides in Whitney, has two children. Daughter senior at CHS. Served a four-year term on Chadron school board. Prior to Chadron schools, served on Whitney School Board. You become more effective the longer you are on the board. It is a huge commitment. 205 appointments in last 2.5 years. Academic Advisor at CSC. Prior was airport supervisor, and has been flight instructor. Involved in Rotary and Chamber Ambassadors. Believes in giving back to the community.

Spencer: Raised in Chadron. Computer programmer, currently working over the internet. Could have worked anywhere, but decided to work in Chadron to raise children in his hometown and a small town where there can be more benefits to his children. Excited to have a chance to be part of the board.

Would you represent yourself, board or administration?

Haynes: Proper position is what is in best interest of the district. Has nothing to gain by decisions ever made, some very difficult. Have to look at as a whole.

Spencer: Working with administration, but not for administration. Mostly work for constituents. Important to hear what they have to say. Wherever possible you need to follow. Not all things open you can do that.

Hoffman: Bottom line is what is best for education product for students. Can work with people. Fair minded, open minded, and willing to listen to ideas.

Building maintenance projects, voters rejected bonding. How would you identify projects and complete them?

Spencer: Government entity with only taxpayer income, if grant income is available, it should be considered a bonus, but not counted on. Small, annual renewed consumption based tax. Can't keep ignoring impending expense of systems that need replaced. Need to earmark present budget. Bond does need approval from public. Doesn't think a board approved bond is responsible. Other opportunities they can try to come up with funds. Should look at administration in comparison to comparable districts to compare admin costs.

Hoffman: Very difficult, complex question. Board spent a lot of time preparing the bond proposal which was defeated. Knows there are roof and structure problems. Proves the board is still continuing to plan and do some things. The reason he thinks the bond failed is just that it was too much for constituents at that time. Have to keep working on it and come up with a plan. Would only support board approved bond if it wasn't a big bond. Doesn't have all the specific information. Need to have safe and dry schools for our children.

Haynes: Probably the most difficult issue before us. Not an easy answer when you don't have funding to do such things. Working on short term and long term planning to plan ahead as best they can to earmark for repairs. Save what allowed to save through state funding process. Schools are not allowed to have a big savings account for emergency funding. Things that make sense for a household, such as saving for a roof, you don't have that luxury in schools. Costs change. You have to prioritize. Looking for energy grants. Continually looking for solutions.

Reduce costs of running district? How?

Hoffman: All for cost effectiveness and accountability. Conservative in Western Nebraska. Keep in mind we want a quality education program for children. Board members need to keep cost in mind, but product is important. Case by case call that has to be closely examined.

Haynes: Have been through some major cost reductions. Like turning around Queen Mary, takes time to absorb \$1.8 million loss from a couple of years ago. Apparently it didn't hurt test scores. Able to do that without compromising reason there, which is student education. Look for ways to make savings happen. Working with legislators and locals for distance learning meetings. Every step of the way, "Do we really need to do that? Will it compromise education if we reduce the cost in that area?"

Spencer: Several years ago with the big budget cut, was on one of the committees to try to figure out where it should go, specifically rural schools. Thinks administration needs to have a critical look at costs. Agrees with distance learning. Including in the classroom. To be able to offer more classes. Not privy to all things in budget.

New technology in schools, including iPads. Favor?

Haynes: Yes, so students are prepared to compete in worldly environment. Substitute textbook funds into technology. Will likely be nice cost savings. Help teachers advance use of technology. Looking forward to deployment of iPads. Board needs to be good examples so they have gone to e-meetings, and get board packets electronically.

Spencer: Ipad, wasn't sure at first, but knowing more is in favor. Only issue is other schools are starving for computers, so maybe some of the money went to iPads. Great for high school. Kids take off on technology. Worried about iPads everywhere. Confident in technology administrator and teachers. The more technology the better.

Hoffman: Kinda of an anti-tech guy. Worked on typewriters. But there is no stopping technology. Have to proceed with it. Have to have it if there is a way to get it to the students, it will enhance their education.

Hi-tech society, cell phone skills. Etiquette classes?

Spencer: Concerns with how kids spell with texting. Some validity to that. Need to know how to communicate and how to write. Kids turning in papers with different punctuation. Can't let go. Do need to require when they write, they don't write in

short form. Very important skill. Might not realize now, but in college they will. Not a good place to start bad habits.

Hoffman: Teachers and educators will continue to stress it is important to know how to spell. Spell checking limitation on computers. Need to learn the basic skills. As far as etiquette, will stick up for kids. Do not agree young kids today not mannerly, or any worse than we were. Just a generational thing. Kids are kids and they will learn and mature.

Haynes: I don't know they have impaired, but changed things, and students can get into lax habits. Doesn't mean schools aren't requiring them to turn in English papers that are top quality. Other departments have high standards as well, some even ask parents to do homework. No impairment in the assignments I have seen. Taught in many of the classrooms. Impressed with quality of assignments teachers impose on students.

Limiting size of staff/course in fine arts/music. Restore?

Hoffman: Might need more information, but agree with using distance learning in arts and humanities. Sure they looked at every option available. Money is tight, economy isn't good. Sure that was looked at.

Haynes: Still are offering, just maybe a little different. Need to continue to be more creative. Might have to share teachers more, but subjects still in school system and students still doing fabulous things in those areas. Hope we don't have to diminish that. Still a very important part of learning in our schools. Would have to find a way to continue a way to offer those things.

Spencer: Due to budget cuts, sure it was looked at hard. These areas are important to hold on to. If they do fall off, should always be on the table to come back. But need to look where they need to cut. Represent the whole school population. Might find something that affects a smaller group. Important, as much as he hated doing them. Produces a more rounded student.

Qualified funds bond that does not need public vote?

Haynes: Not ready to commit, but any time can involve patrons in decision, hope to do so. Need input from public as to whether they find it acceptable for board to do. Need more information.

Spencer: Public has spoken very much so. Defeated bond proposal 70% to 30. Would be more in favor if something was done on annual budget to save money. Without that, should not raise property taxes by board voting for it. The public has already voted they would not be in favor of such a bond passing. Would not be in favor.

Hoffman: If it was significant amount, could not vote for it. If it were smaller amount and didn't jeopardize property taxes going sky high and was a real need, would support if it was an emergency.

Idea of multi-grade classrooms for lower grades?

Spencer: Not necessarily bad idea. Big advantages to rural schools, unfortunately it went away. When came up, more of an appeasement than a plan. What resources would be needed to get it and keep it going? If it was something that could be done with same budget and same number of teachers, would be in favor, but would need to see more detailed plans. Not for entire student population however.

Hoffman: Would certainly hear out what the plan would be. Having difficulty imagining this could be accomplished without pulling resources from other parts of the school. Never been a part of this experience. Would need to have more info.

Haynes: Personally, thinks they are awesome. Parents that were asked about the multi-grade room to come in during restructuring, but not enough commitment to do this, so it did not move forward. If there would be a group that would desire that again, wouldn't be opposed to trying again. No additional funding, just different assignment of teachers.

What qualities make for an excellent teacher?

Hoffman: A good teacher is one that instills a burning desire to learn in people, children or adults. Teacher challenges in a supportive way and tries to get the best learning effort out of every student. Motivators, cheerleaders, counselors, they wear a lot of hats. Likes teachers that are intelligent and know subject matter well. Dedicated. Career people. Dependable. Steady.

Hardworking.

Haynes: Same qualities that make a good person, in addition, someone who challenges students, commands respect from students, and respects students. Lifelong learner. Team player. Takes pride in entire school system. Would like to have long term teachers. Strong work ethic. Very prepared. Good background. Knows their stuff.

Spencer: Any or almost all teachers want to be there to educate kids. Enthusiastic year after year. Fairness with the kids. Keep everybody busy and learning.

Non-performing teachers and improve results?

Haynes: You always want to help employees improve. There are trainings. Allow your principal do their job to help teachers be the best they can be. Principals are to be active evaluators of their teachers. Set up action plans for teachers. Might just need a little more nurturing. Good documentation by supervisor.

Spencer: With students themselves. Problem is when it is communicated to a parent. Would like to see somehow where a parent or student would be able to bring to the attention of someone where the student would not be identified. Good to have benchmarks. National organizations can text teachers. Show progress year after year. Testing needs to be done more consistently to be able to evaluate a teacher and subject.

Hoffman: Complicated to rely on student test scores. Students can change. Not sure it would be fair to a teacher. Agrees principals are a good source of that. They are well paid, and supervisors need to step up and be supervisors and earn their money. Actual testing of teachers for methodology or knowledge would be good as opposed to student scores. Complicated matter, but can be handled fairly. Could be a can of worms.

Conclusion:

Spencer: Thank those involved in the forum. Feels he is qualified and would help improve the relationship between the public and the board. Board has been doing a good job, and superintendent working to give bigger voice in Lincoln. And she has a good eye on what it takes to prepare our kids for the future. Would be fiscally responsible with tax money. Does not shy away from discussing tough issues board would face. Would work to bring any expertise he has to discussion.

Hoffman: By running, doesn't mean present board members aren't doing good job. Remembers hearing Charlie Kuskie saying there were no challengers when he ran, and that struck a chord. Wants to see Chadron maintain quality schools, and it's a worthwhile effort. Ran three probation offices on small budget. Honest, straightforward guy. Willing to listen and open to others ideas. Not a "yes" person. Wants quality education for students of Chadron.

Haynes: Academically, students in district doing great things. We are doing a lot of things right. Bright students. Top notch teachers and support staff. Administration are leaders. School has reputation for being a place when students can obtain a quality education. Can get through tough times and lead students into the future. Will attend trainings to serve district as best she can.