

Town and Country

• The Center for Local Innovation will conduct the Innovate 2002 Conference at the Washington Duke Inn on the Duke University campus.

Topics at the conference will include the top issues of the day and those that are challenging in the day-to-day operation of modern local government.

In particular, there will be panels on annexation, budgeting, and the role of local governments in homeland security. Rep. Walter Jones, R-N.C., will be the luncheon speaker.

The panels will feature both local elected officials and nationally recognized scholars. Among the scholarly representatives will be William Eggers, a senior fellow of the Manhattan Institute. Eggers is working on a book on how the Internet and related technologies are transforming government. He is the former manager of the Texas Performance Review and Project Director for e-Texas, a state initiative charged with developing recommendations to save tax dollars, increase the use of technology, improve customer service and inject private-sector competition into state services.

Also on the panel is Randall O'Toole, author of a new book, *The Vanishing Automobile*. O'Toole teaches at the University of California at Berkeley and is also a senior economist at the Thoreau Institute.

Some of the local officials participating in the event are Wilmington Mayor David Jones, New Hanover County Commissioner Bill Caster, and Winston-Salem City Councilman Vernon Robinson.

The third panel will discuss "Homeland defense: how local governments should respond to terrorist threats." Among invited panelists is Greensboro Mayor Keith Halliday, Charlotte Mayor, and *Shallow Hal* movie star Pat McCrory will be joining the Center for Local Innovation on a panel as well.

The event is scheduled for Jan. 19 and will conclude at 3pm that day. Please direct all correspondence and/or questions to: Erik Root, 919-828-3876 or you may e-mail him at eroot@johnlocke.org

• In our ongoing debate with the City of Wilmington, Deputy City Manager Bill Whisnant sent to CJ material on annexation that the city mailed to residents. He said the city's fee forcing residents in newly annexed areas to hook up to water services is \$1,250. However, this does not count the fees residents are forced to pay for hiring a plumber to hook up their homes to the line.

Whisnant said Wilmington's tax rate is lower than the county's (47 cents compared to 69 cents) and so is not the sole cause for the increased taxes of forcibly annexed residents. The taxes of some individuals have doubled because of additional taxes and fees imposed on them. Many of these taxes are retroactive. That's right; it is not enough for the city to simply institute a tax, but they must charge residents extra. And all of these bills come due around the holidays.

What a particularly nice gift from the city. Kinda makes one warm all over doesn't it? CJ

Big Government Takes a Hit in Two Cities

Voters turn out to oppose forced annexation and higher taxes in local races

By ERIK ROOT
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WILMINGTON

Voters turned out in numbers higher than usual in Wilmington's primary Oct. 9 and general election Nov. 6. Not surprisingly, the issues bringing people to the polls: forced annexation and property rights.

In the primary, Katherine Moore barely avoided a run-off and was re-elected to the city council by opposing forced annexation.

Two of the three vote-getters in the mayoral primary race publicly committed opposition to forced annexation and favored government consolidation between the county and city.

Anti-annexation, pro-property rights candidate Harper Peterson ended up handing tax and annex candidate Charlie Rivenbark a loss for the mayor's seat. Though some think Peterson is largely a tax- and-spend liberal (he is a registered Democrat), he campaigned on the twin themes of consolidation and property rights. It appears that Peterson received the votes primary mayoral candidate Bill Caster received. The affable Caster received the third most votes in the primary and was a supporter of consolidation and property rights.

Rivenbark has a long history of voting for tax increases and for supporting city endeavors to tax people outside the city limits who have no voice in the electoral process. He remains boldly on the side of involuntary annexation, but he was on the fence concerning consolidation.

According to reports in the *Morning Star* of Wilmington, Peterson also ran on a fiscal restraint platform. He appears to oppose such high-cost and high-tax endeavors as a new convention center. "It takes money to run and grow a city" and the voters want to know that their money is being properly spent, Peterson told the *Star*.

Peterson was definitely the beneficiary of the newly annexed areas of the city as voters from those places turned out in great numbers to vote. For most of them, annexation and high taxes were their major concerns. The grass-roots organizations have elected one of the most conservative city governments in recent memory.

They were responsible for the primary election of pro-property rights Councilwoman Katherine Moore. Moore opposes annexation.

Newcomer Jason Thompson scored a huge upset over incumbent Jack Watkins. Thompson quadrupled his primary vote Nov. 6. The more people that heard Thompson's message, the more votes he got. Watkins was the pro-annexation candidate and a tax-and-spend proponent.

Nevertheless, local Republicans did not support Thompson despite the Citadel graduate's solid conservative message. Even though the city races are nonpartisan, the parties do recruit and get involved.

The Republican Party's refusal and, some say, downright hostility to Thompson prompted at least one conservative voter in the city to say that "Republicans in Wilmington have not seen a tax increase or forced annexation they did not like." The vice chairman of the county Republican Party, Chris Bolles, quarreled with party members over what he called a lack of principle and even stepped down for a spell. He continually supported the conservative Jason Thompson.

The victories of Thompson, Peterson, and Moore owe their success most likely to the highly organized and active group Good Neighbors of New Hanover County. While their annexation case remains before the 4th Circuit Court of Appeals, they did not sit back and do nothing. They wanted to make sure that the Wilmington city government would not take the land of others. They ultimately hope the city will deannex. It remains to be seen what the anti-annexation majority will do now that they are elected.

The city council race, as well as the mayoral campaign, offered a clear choice and the conservative message won handily. According to many voters, they are not through. They have vowed to fight for the removal of council members who, residents say, don't support property rights.

Such a message does not bode well for the remaining liberal council members such as Jack Conlin and Laura Padgett. City Manager and forced annexation supporter Mary Gornto has already been terminated.

Asheville's lurch to the right?

On the other side of the state, in Asheville a city council incumbent, Barbara Field, lost in a primary. During a city council session to draft a resolution responding to the Sept. 11 terrorist attacks she said that the hijackers were not cowards but rather, that they were "brave," the *Asheville Citizen Times* reported. Even though she apologized for her comments and tried to explain herself, the voters sent her packing.

Another city council incumbent, vice mayor Chuck Cloninger, gave up his seat when he failed to garner enough votes to make the mayoral runoff election. Cloninger's major campaign theme was to rid the area of billboards that he said polluted the sky and the daily commute.

The key fact in this mayoral primary election is that the candidates who spent the most money failed miserably.

The primary left two city council incumbents to battle Nov. 6 for the mayor's seat. The election focused on development and "smart growth" issues. Candidate Brian Peterson labeled the other mayoral candidate, Charles Worley, as "pro-business, not pro-neighborhood." Worley has supported both the multimillion-dollar convention

center plan and the building of a Wal-Mart Supercenter. He was the more conservative member of the two. Peterson was the self-proclaimed spokesman for the neighborhoods group, actually a not-in-my-backyard (NIMBY) group. He was campaigning on a theme to deter the growth and development of Asheville. A pro-business political action committee called Citizens for New Leadership backed Worley and other city council campaigns. In the end, he defeated Peterson to become Asheville's new mayor.

The city council race also provided voters with a stark choice. Joe Dunn received the most votes in the primary and continued that trend in November. He was the most conservative, business-friendly candidate on the list. He campaigned on the twin themes of jobs and tax relief. "Without jobs, we can't have the kind of neighborhoods we want," Dunn said in the *Citizen Times*.

However, the second most popular vote-getter, Holly Jones, is anything but conservative and campaigned on affordable housing. She favors taxpayer investment in housing programs and downtown development.

Jones and another like-minded but unsuccessful candidate, Brownie Newman, co-opted the looks of successful County Commissioner Nathan Ramsay. Ramsay upset a long-term incumbent. His campaign colors were red and white. Jones and Newman (who were running together in what looked like a slate) printed their campaign material (like bumper stickers) with the same colors and look as Ramsay did in hopes of capturing enough votes to win. It only half-worked.

Another pro-business candidate that won a council seat was the somewhat understated conservative Charles Mumpower. Another pro-market advocate, retired business administrator Jim Ellis, did not win election, placing fourth. However, he is rumored to be in line for appointment to Worley's seat when the new mayor takes office in December. If so, that would make Asheville's city council decidedly more right-leaning than it was under the leadership of outgoing mayor Leni Sitnik.

Voter turnout was higher than normal.

New mayor in Fayetteville

Four of five incumbents held their council seats in Fayetteville's council primary while the mayor's race headed for runoff.

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The victories of several Wilmington candidates owe their success to a highly organized and active group against annexation.

