

Decisions, Decisions, Decisions

...who should I vote for...

by Kat Rowoldt



It has been a very interesting experience to sit-in on seven or eight candidate forums. The majority of the candidates have developed their presentations and worked on defining their platforms. A few still do not seem to be enjoying the experience, or at least that's what their facial expression is conveying to the audience.

The candidates still have some big forums ahead of them, including a couple that will be live-streamed and/or televised. For those of you who are just tuning in to this upcoming election, let me share my impression of what the Mayoral candidates have been saying over the last month of presentations. I'll touch on the Council Candidates next week.

Mayoral

Candidates: Charlotte Farmer, Brenda Gunter, Zach Taylor, and Tony Villarreal.

A seasoned twelve-year Council member, a successful business woman, an outspoken 24-year old, and the man who rumors are swirling about from his time in Ft. Stockton - make up this group. An interesting group of candidates, indeed.

Charlotte Farmer - a comfortable speaker who has learned over her years of experience to adapt her presentation to her audience. She does these with ease, while she brags a bit on her family. When she gets into talking issues, she can surprise you. Faces reacted at the Concho Valley Republican Women's forum when she stated that "they" (current council) had completed the purchase of the Ford Ranch and we could rest assured "they" had protected our water rights. Really?

At another forum, she stated that the city was going to take on more debt. She even sounded a bit proud of the fact. That's concerning for many of us, since San Angelo is one of four cities in West Texas being blamed for Texas rating second highest state in per capita debt, as referenced by Anna Bartosh, candidate for SMD 1, in her presentations [source www.TexasScorecard.com]. Can we afford the additional tax load? Shouldn't we be looking at cutting expenses?

We must remember that Ms. Farmer was a part of the Republic Trash contract and other issues that haven't met with great approval from citizens. I must add, Charlotte has been a friend of mine for several years now. She has served our city well for many years.

Brenda Gunter - was a shock to my brain when I first heard her speak on behalf of her campaign. I did not know Ms. Gunter. I knew who she was, but my knowledge of her really fell back to City Council meetings. I would see her quarterly giving a report to Council on the Downtown Association. My impression of her wasn't the greatest. I only saw her, via the organization, as someone who reported to Council to get money. Not the best first impression - but that soon changed.

She came as a guest to a San Angelo Pachyderm Club lunch meeting and very briefly introduced herself to the group. She spoke briefly, but wow! I learned later in the meeting that she would be the guest speaker at the John Birch Society the next evening, so I decided to go. By the end of her presentation that night, she had totally changed my opinion of who she was.

From the very first forum at the San Angelo TEA Party, Gunter has talked issues, needed changes, reduced regulations and suggested things that would help get our city moving in a better direction. It's not unusual to hear her fellow candidates commenting in their presentations that they agree with Ms. Gunter. Hmm...

Zach Taylor - sounds like a libertarian at heart. He does pull the interest of the more conservative crowds, but his lack of life experience and knowledge in some areas has worked against him several times. When he didn't denounce Sharia law at the TEA Party meeting due to his lack of knowledge of what it is, the crowd turned on him.

I do like his courage to take a bold stand and to run for office, but maybe the Mayoral position might not have been the best choice to start. Not understanding the issues that other cities are having to deal with in Texas having to do with Islam, mosques, and Sharia law, could put our city in potential jeopardy if he was to be elected. West Texas is not an island. We will have to deal with these issues in due time.

I do hope this young man will continue to be involved in politics. I'd like to see him get plugged in locally to some organizations and give of his talents over the coming years and mature a bit before running for office again. I think he may have a good future in local politics.

Tony Villarreal – tends to give the same speech everywhere he goes. He talks about his family and then fills most of his time with all the ways he has always “served,” listing all the various organizations, clubs, etc. that he has ever been a member. His platform seems to be his “experience,” but being a part of a group does not tell us what he is going to do for San Angelo. Additionally, the whispered remarks before and after the forums amongst the attendees follows the same lines too. People are asking questions about him, quietly, not openly. That seemed very odd to me.

Side bar of Note: People have been questioning the unique “coincidence” or “not” of Tony Villarreal and Daniel Valenzuela both being from Ft. Stockton. Plus, you can add one additional candidate to that equation too. Steve Hampton, candidate for SMD 6, moved to San Angelo from there as well. So, what’s up with all this? That is an uncanny coincidence.

Most people typically are open to giving their opinions of someone, sharing what they know, even recounting a mutual experience with pride when talking about a mutual acquaintance. That was not my experience when people approached me about Tony, or I, reaching out to any of them. People did not want their identity known. I have never had this experience before.

When I was investigating voter fraud in Bell County (Belton, Temple) last year, even election clerks and judges shared their concerns on video with me. I was surprised with their boldness. Here I have the complete opposite. Not only did they (people who lived in Ft. Stockton when he was there too) not want a video of their statements, they did not want their names used at all. Without going into why everyone I spoke with about Tony did not want to go on the record, I feel it is important to share the general consensus of what was told to me for this reason. Totally unrelated people, from various circles of influence and lifestyles, all had the same thing to say about Villarreal.

While Valenzuela and Hampton’s names were pulled into the coincidence, it was Villarreal that most people wanted to talk about. Valenzuela was the only hometown boy of this lot, with Villarreal being from Rocksprings, and Hampton from somewhere else too. When inquiring about Hampton, surprisingly people spoke very highly of him. I say surprisingly simply because they would bring up Steve and brag a bit on him without me even asking about him. It seems they appreciated him in the way he served his community with his business, the offices he held, his civic work, and personally. So, the focus always ended up centered on Tony.

I am surprised at the number of people who have moved away from Ft. Stockton and chose San Angelo as their future destination. Hampton ended up here when his funeral home in Ft. Stockton was struck by lightning and burned to the ground. He took his insurance proceeds and moved to the big city of San

Angelo. Others have come this way for various reasons, but those I've spoken with all felt compelled to reach out and talk about Villarreal.

In the forums, Villarreal touts his experience as a County Commissioner, School Board member and Mayor. At one of the forums, he left Hampton stunned when he said he left the City Council in better financial shape, and that Steve could confirm it. When I later asked Hampton to confirm it, he simply stated, "I don't remember it that way."

So, what did the Ft. Stockton people have to say about Villarreal, without getting into the muck and mire? They talked about a man, that while he served, seemed to divide the community racially. How he started a Hispanic Chamber there and other things which created a division in a community that had always worked hand-in-hand with one another. Interesting - I hear Tony has been instrumental in that same type of discussions here - creating a Hispanic chamber. Aren't we better together?

One of the prominent leaders there, and several retired ones, discussed the financial mess that happened during the time Villarreal was in elected office. One commented that "it has taken years for us to recover and get things stabilized again." He went on to say that he hoped the same things wouldn't happen in San Angelo. He liked San Angelo.

Back to Tony Villarreal: Villarreal is quick to tag onto what his competitors are saying. I would like to hear his own original ideas. If he is going to tout Ft. Stockton as being his experience needed for San Angelo's City Council, then he needs to bring some solid and verifiable stats to the table.

Did Ft. Stockton / Pecos County's debt increase or decrease while he served in the capacity of Commissioner and Mayor? Why did he feel it necessary to create a Hispanic Chamber of Commerce? How did that benefit the community? Since Hispanics have been some key leaders in San Angelo's Chamber here, why would duplicating, or dividing, our Chamber benefit either group?

Mayoral Candidates: We know Charlotte Farmer's track record in service to our community. We need to know Tony Villarreal's record too. Zach Taylor has yet to create a record. Brenda Gunter can put on the table her track record in her work to revitalize downtown San Angelo. The downtown restoration statistics speak for themselves. The new businesses and restored buildings do as well. What looked like a hopeless cause a few years ago, downtown San Angelo, has surely done a one-eighty.

Mayoral Choices:

- **Villarreal** didn't leave a good impression of his "service" in Ft. Stockton. His presentation in forums weighs his worthiness for the office on this past experience. Show us the stats.
- **Taylor** probably has a great future in politics, but lacks even experience and knowledge in some of today's current issues to successfully lead our community today. Maybe he should run for a Council seat before jumping in as Mayor.
- **Farmer** has given twelve years of service to our community. She has served us well over the years. There are some issues that have people very concerned today. She was part of the Republic contract, she is part of the Ford Ranch contract, etc. that have been handled mostly behind closed doors. In today's climate, is this how our community wants to continue to be run?
- **Gunter!** She seems pretty solid to me. If she does have the backbone and guts to do what she is talking about, our city is in for a delightful refreshing new approach. She talks smaller government, better management, fiscal responsibility, economic growth, maximized priorities, and stabilized development. She does bring business experience and success to the table. Is she our Donald Trump?

This is a vitally important election for our city. Virtually the whole balance of the Council could be new faces, with only Lane Carter and Harry Thomas remaining for another two years.

San Angelo has a history of voting for "nice people." Nice people aren't what we need right now. We need people who are willing to make hard decisions that are necessary to financially bring our city back from the potential brink of financial disaster. That means we need conservative voices, with backbones. It's time to weed out the liberals who like to spend our hard-earned money. Our money isn't for their pleasure; it's for our protection, our infrastructure, and our water. It's time for change.

We must get out the vote! Early voting begins on April 24th. Be one of the first in line!

Until next time...

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