

WHERE THEY STAND

SECTION B

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Johnson County Board of Commissioners

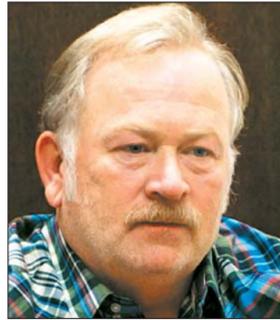
Republican primary

Primary election day: May 6 ■ Voting hours: 6 a.m. to 6 p.m.

District 1 (vote for one)



Troy DeHart



Gary Young

On May 6, voters will pick candidates to represent the Republican Party as county commissioner candidates on the November ballot. Reporters Annie Goeller and Joseph S. Pete interviewed the candidates on a wide range of issues. Voters have a right to know where the candidates stand on the issues. Use these pages as a guide to help you make your voting decision.



John L. Price



Mitch Ripley



Gary "Pete" Sims

DeHart

Is incumbent commissioner. Obviously a very busy task to fulfill in a county where there's a lot going on. Has had opportunity to deal with some of these needs head-on as commissioner. Has lived in the county all his life and knows wants, needs, desires and growth issues the county is faced with.

Young

Managed a corporate metrology lab at Cummins for a number of years, where he worked with engineers and salesman and managed the budget. Was a volunteer firefighter and a fire chief for the Nineveh Fire Department who was in charge of equipment, employees and operations. Was a master sergeant in the Indiana National Guard who served as senior instructor in the military academy at Camp Atterbury, where he was in charge of the noncommissioned officer training programs. Devised programs of instruction and evaluated instructors on a monthly basis. Served in management of some sort for at least 30 years. Feels qualified to sit on the board that manages the county.



What about your background or experience makes you the most qualified candidate to serve as Johnson County commissioner?

Price

His enthusiasm today is just as great as it was when he started working in county government. Has 30 years experience, doing some of the biggest budgets in county in the sheriff's office, highway department, planning and zoning department. Has vast amount of knowledge of those departments, many of which fall under the commissioners. Has a good working relationship with other elected officials.

Ripley

Learning and performing the job for the past three years and three months provides him with most experience of any of the candidates. One of the things he trains in is communication, team building and cooperation. Those have come in heavy use over past three years, such as with developing communication with different groups.

Sims

Lived in Johnson County all his life and knows history of what's happened. Has a business degree. Other commissioner candidates have more experience, but problem is they have the same philosophy. Wants to be commissioner for the people. Lot of things are on the table, roads are terrible, county is discussing a new jail, firing range and animal shelter. "Someone has to pay for these, and it's the taxpayers. As commissioner, your job is to oversee the money that's spent in the county, and I think they can do a better job, and I think I can do a better job."

DeHart

Top issue is roads. Would say most roads in the unincorporated area need some attention. County is addressing that in other areas soon. Would work diligently with council to make cuts without having to raise taxes on people so county can pay for roads. County needs to have safe roads to avoid blowouts and accidents that could be caused by swerving to miss a pothole.

Young

Believes it's probably annexation of unincorporated areas. The cities and towns want to grab these properties and expand, yet, if you look years later, they're still farms. They don't need this property to expand. They should plan to develop their cities and leave the farm ground alone. Greenwood and Bargersville will lay claim to all the unincorporated land in White River Township. Greenwood will run all the way across the north of the county. The people of White River Township have been talking about incorporating as a city, but there won't be any property left because it's slowly disappearing.



What is the top issue facing Johnson County? How will you address it?

Price

Commissioners need to work with all elected officials in the county, find ways to be fiscally responsible and prioritize and set goals. Would set goals and try to meet them when he was at the highway department and sheriff's office. Sees lack of that now. County must be proactive and transparent. He has seen a lot of reactive action from commissioners. Would look at having ongoing meetings with elected officials and learned the goals they wanted to see and implement. Commissioners need to set those goals and set a plan for county government. Is no different than a business. Keeping up with infrastructure and growth will be challenges.

Ripley

Current top issue is beginning to look at how the county streamlines expenses in the budget instead of waiting for 2010 to get here and the budget be cut with changes the state made. Look proactively at how the county can reduce costs, change things to not have to go to the taxpayer and say the county needs additional funds. Over the next three years, will look at how to cut to meet what finances are going to be in a couple years.

Sims

Top issue is the new jail and firing range. County is paying \$300,000 for a drawing of what they think it will take. Have to start with the court system. County says a new firing range is needed, but what about the one in Greenwood? If county can show him a reason why the facilities are needed, he might go along with them. What about the roads in this county? Roads are the worst he has ever seen them since he has been in the county.

DeHart

Has to fall back on putting good department heads in place to handle day-to-day operations. Sometimes it's just making a phone call and asking how things are going. Commissioners need to make sure progress is being made, but the day-to-day operations should be managed by department heads. The commissioners have to make sure residents have their needs fulfilled by the county.

Young

Would manage assets of the county and make sure employees are doing functions they're supposed to do. Would make sure operations run as smoothly and efficiently as possible. Doesn't want employees just filling out their time cards; wants to know they're doing their jobs.



What is the role of a county commissioner? What role does a commissioner play in the day-to-day functions of the county?

Price

Job of commissioner is the executive body similar to the mayor of a city. The position calls for a daily commitment to the job, which he plans to do. He is at county facilities nearly every day and tries to talk to someone from the county daily. A commissioner must be available, present and on the scene of major incidents. County needs a spirit of cooperation with cities and towns. County also should work with schools. Commissioners could bring better government if they make those commitments. "You can make a commitment, but if you don't follow through with it, then it's nothing other than talk, and we need more than talk at this point for Johnson County's future."

Ripley

The role of the county commissioner is to create ordinances and legislation that helps the county operate on a daily basis. With the different areas commissioners are in charge of, including highway, planning, stormwater utilities, building maintenance, most of what public sees is under control of county commissioners. Outside of taxes and fees, everything else is under our control. By having quality individuals in those roles, he doesn't have to do the day-to-day work. People the county hires have direct connection to day-to-day operations. He doesn't believe in micro-managing department heads. He allows them to do the job they were hired to do with guidance and direction from commissioners.

Sims

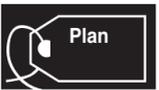
A county commissioner's job is the executive branch of county government. Job is to oversee funds of county taxpayers, raises for county employees, insurance, medical, everything. They oversee the county employees. "That's very important, it's how they are using (tax) money."

DeHart

Such issues are reason behind new comprehensive plan. Concerned residents are serving on a steering committee that's been formed for long-term planning.

Young

Agrees with that statement. Commissioners, council members and department heads need to have at least an annual meeting where they sit and discuss those issues. That should prevent county from overlooking those issues, which should be nipped in the bud.



Government at all levels often has a difficult time doing long-term planning and usually is reacting to crisis situations instead of anticipating them. Failure to project future needs and funding can result in unplanned growth and a strain on services, infrastructure and funding. How do you propose that county government embark on long-range planning?

Price

County must establish goals for growth and smart planning for zoning. Set those goals and do due diligence on goals so work, planning and preparation are done and then county has a better chance of staying within budgets. Then the county won't have all the overruns he's seen. Have to have a vision and be proactive, but also have to set some goals and do more planning. County should have quarterly meetings with various departments. County needs more cooperation with other jurisdictions. There needs to be a dialogue on the county's comprehensive plan and other governments' comprehensive plans. If there is more communication than there has been in the past, the county can do better.

Ripley

Started when he came into office and is exactly what commissioners have been doing. Have asked department heads if they have a wish list and what that would be. Wants to be proactive, not reactive. One reason why the county updated the phone system. Ask is there a way to do what the county is doing and do it better, move Johnson County into the 21st century and down the road. Part of the planned jail expansion is that. Instead of waiting and being reactive until the county is ordered to build a bigger jail like last time, start planning for it now. All these things are what he ran on when he was elected and they have to continue.

Sims

Have to sit down with people who are appointed to local boards, go to state legislature. Something has to be done. Long term, wants to know who's going to pay for it. County has to look within system, run it as a business. Long term, county has to have rainy-day fund and look to other sources for money, not all on taxpayers. County has to think outside the box.

DeHart

Need to consider what Bill Barrett has saved the county. Lawsuits can be a costly, and Bill has helped. He has been fair and worked to cut bills when he can. By using qualified people, in the end it saves the taxpayers. Can't predict the number of lawsuits filed. Commissioners don't get Barrett involved on the clock unless it's important. After he's been on the board of commissioners for a year, will be able to better evaluate how the county handles legal affairs. County coordinator Kathleen Hash handles simple day-to-day operations, does a good job and saves the county attorneys' fees.

Young

One of the issues of his campaign is to consolidate services to save tax dollars. Doesn't want to pay for services that county doesn't need and always asks for the attorneys' advice when the county would be charged. Doesn't know how the billing has taken place, but would consider cutting down on expenses by limiting fees to one attorney, possibly. Doesn't have a way of judging how often they go for legal advice that they're being charged for, so doesn't necessarily know the answer.



In 2006, the county spent \$138,000 on legal services to county litigation attorney Bill Barrett. In 2007, the amount was \$120,798, and claims are consistently coming in at more than \$10,000 per month. In addition, the county pays attorney Jeff Eggers \$65,000 per year. Is this the most cost-effective way to pay for legal services? What could be done to save money in this area? Are the commissioners relying on the attorneys for matters that don't necessarily require a legal opinion?

Price

Whole system needs to be overhauled. County should look at consolidating the positions of county coordinator and attorney. Commissioners must have time to deal with those issues, which would reduce attorney fees and save money. Need to look at ways to save money, have better accountability and have commissioners do the work they need to be doing. County must have a litigation attorney, but that attorney can be used sparingly only when dealing with litigation. County is paying an attorney to come in a half-day a week at \$65,000 and then a lot of the work that is occurring is going to litigation attorney.

Ripley

Thinks there is a misconception. The concept was set to save money. When the county became self-insured, it needed to have an attorney. Some issues the county coordinator is capable of handling and that will lower litigation attorney bills. County attorney Jeff Eggers' responsibilities represent different areas of government. People are being held accountable. County has been sued over over people getting into accidents on county roads. Eggers is paid a flat salary so the county is not being billed additional money for questions put to him. Commissioners asked Barrett to get involved in the jail expansion to make sure is legal even though litigation was not involved.

Sims

Thinks they do rely on attorneys. There is a better way to do that. Doesn't think public should pay that kind of money for legal services. Thought their job was to make decisions. Would like to know where the other money went. "If that's what they want, there's plenty of legal students that probably could get them the same information." Wants to find a better way to save money and wants to know where money is going.

DeHart

Not opposed to having them get involved. Not opposed to anyone's input. Would first have to bring it up for discussion with school board and planning and zoning to make sure there's not any form of conflict. Should be open for discussion before anything is committed to.

Young

Yes, the commissioners need to at least touch base with them and ask if the school corporation can handle that many more students.



The county plan commission makes advisory recommendations on approving or denying new housing developments, but the county board of commissioners has the final say. Should the commissioners solicit input from local school boards — Center Grove in White River Township, for example — before approving a large new subdivision that would significantly affect the schools?

Price

Yes. County and schools have been lacking that communication. County should communicate more with superintendents from Center Grove and Clark-Pleasant schools. He has had similar dialogue with the Clark-Pleasant superintendent. Would make better government if governments know what each other is doing and can plan in unison. Is important to have the communication to achieve savings for taxpayers and most smart growth for cost. If a development is coming with 300 homes, can project out number of children and the effect on the school corporation. Is imperative county improves communication.

Ripley

At least one commissioner has already been doing that with Center Grove school board member Jim Copp and a mathematical program created to know what the ramifications are for the school district when a new subdivision is proposed.

Sims

Thinks they should. Process should be open to public. Process should involve schools because when a new subdivision is built, people want to know about the kind of schools in the area. Wants to know who's going to pay for the added students, and would like schools' input.

DeHart

With the exception of the environmental aspect of the east-west corridor study, just waiting on money to come in at this point. Would seek federal funds, but can't speculate whether anything would happen until after presidential election. The study's the initial step.

Young

The corridor has been an idea for at least 30 years, yet county is no closer today than it was then. The study will tell the county where to put the road, and the county has paid \$1 million to a company, but they want to run a study again saying where is best to put the road. The county needs to get to pouring blacktop. The town of Whiteland doesn't want it through the town, Center Grove doesn't want it near any of their schools — everybody wants it but nobody wants it in their back yard. It would be paid for through taxes. Even with grants, that's tax money going to Washington or Indianapolis and coming back as grants.



If elected, what would you want to accomplish in the next four years in regard to building an east-west thoroughfare or making improvements to east-west roads? Where will the money come from?

Price

Believes he has more knowledge than all three commissioners on roads and funding. He has been saying for years the county needs an east-west road. He worked with the Leadership Johnson County class that came up with plans for the road. Also has to look at existing roads. County has wheel tax money, but is it too little too late? Have to weigh out what is best. Need to plan to be proactive and have a vision, but county can't forget the existing roads. County can apply to get additional funding and work collectively with Greenwood on a new interchange at Interstate 65 and County Road 750N.

Ripley

Is one of the goals he wants to continue in the next three to four years. County needs to take the next step in the process, which is building roads. Wants to look at how to improve Stones Crossing Road as an east-west road. County needs to continue seeking funds outside of Johnson County as commissioners did with the first \$1 million. Does not want to put more taxes and fees onto taxpayers to build these roads. Look at how the county can partner with residents, different groups and development companies to assist in the east-west corridor and other future developments. Wants to start looking at creative funding.

Sims

County is using wheel tax for roads. Would work with state, governor and legislature. Roads are terrible. For money, county needs to look to state for a grant or money from other areas, such as lottery. In the next four years, county has to tighten down across the board. Commissioners' job is to save money as executive branch.

DeHart

Loves parks and trails and supports them, but believes county needs to prioritize how it spends its money. County can create bicycle trails or have potholes. Doesn't want to sound like he's against trails or parks but believes in fixing what has to be fixed first.

Young

Doesn't believe that county parks are a high priority of the commissioners. All of the cities and towns in the county have parks, and people can go and play in the parks in White River Township and Camp Atterbury if people want to drive to them. The county has to spend money on the things that need to be fixed — namely roads. Believes county needs to maintain its parks so they're functional but doesn't need a park in everyone's back yard. Believes county doesn't need to spend money buying the ground and paying for cost of maintenance when people have access to parks.



The Johnson County government currently operates two parks in the unincorporated area: a large park adjacent to Camp Atterbury near Edinburgh and the small Independence Park near Center Grove High School. Center Grove residents have indicated a desire for more parkland and trails. What role does county government have in making that happen?

Price

Officials have a responsibility to residents in all nine townships. Parks and trails are part of quality of life, for exercise, nature and time with family. Commissioners have some obligation and commitment to that. The county can work with cities and towns that have parks and look at ways to achieve this goal, such as buying trees together and working on trails. County can work with developers to get trails implemented so there is connectivity. County needs to address that want, and in the recent past, the county hasn't fulfilled some of that commitment. County can't implement everything, but officials need to be open-minded.

Ripley

Is part of county's responsibility. Not sure where funds are going to come from. Can ask developers to assist when they build in White River Township. Developers of Riverwalk on State Road 37 were willing to put in parks and trails that connected to the area and other areas within reach. Not all of it has to come from Johnson County, but officials help by working with and convincing people that this can be done. Wants the planning department to assist community groups in getting more money, such as grants. Wants trails to Johnson County Park, so people can get there without driving.

Sims

One thing county government can do is ask for a grant for parks and for greenspace. Parks and greenspace are worthwhile projects. Commissioners oversee that. Everybody needs that greenspace. County can look to the federal and state governments. County officials say they will do things, but nothing gets done. Commissioners' job is to oversee executive branch, which includes greenspace and grants. Center Grove has a park, but he thinks they need more than that. "The money has to come (from) somewhere, and I don't think it should be always just the taxpayers. There's other options."

DeHart

All jobs are posted, then narrowed down to a few candidates who come in for interviews. Looks for someone with common sense, then looks for qualifications, whether that's an engineering or bachelor's degree. Also wants someone with a people-person attitude. Believes candidates are good if they have those two traits and the proper education.

Young

Thinks it's important to make those positions known. Has been to a lot of commissioners' meetings and seen people appointed to boards when the positions were never publicized for interested parties. Too many times candidates are selected from a good-old-boys list. Applicants should be interested in the position, qualified and selected through interview process.



The county commissioners appoint a number of unelected department heads to lead various county government agencies. How would you go about seeking qualified candidates to fill vacancies? In general, what qualities would you look for in a job applicant when you fill a department head position?

Price

Look at their knowledge, on-the-job experience and education in the position's field. County needs to look at what is being paid in other counties and jurisdictions and what is being paid in the private sector and come to a compromise so the county can keep people. Doesn't want to micromanage. "We have to look at people that are going to bring innovative ideas, not be afraid to face the challenge or the workload." Once they are here, commissioners need to work with them on issues in their departments and issues facing the public. They need someone there to support them and help guide them. That makes for better government.

Ripley

Wants to continue what he helped institute in county government: doing real searches outside and inside the county to get most qualified candidates. Continuing to seek individuals who meet job descriptions and backgrounds prior to interviewing. They also need a passion about what they do, to develop employees, continue training, getting them to understand continued growth and not be lackadaisical in jobs. County needs people who have the ability to build a team around them. Having worked in human resources for 30 years, he believes you find people who can teach their people, build them up and grow them, so they don't have to spend 150 hours a week on work.

Sims

Would look for younger person and someone who thinks outside the box. That's what county should look for, like an internship, look at the college level. Whoever is appointed, must appoint younger people with new ideas and somebody that knows more than officials do.

DeHart

The county's role in economic development is to progressively move county forward with new jobs and businesses, further development and building at a controlled rate where services aren't being over-taxed. Police, fire and roads have to stay caught up to meet pace of development. Would like corporation to show some accountability in what it's bringing to the table as long as it can make the investment worthwhile to the county and taxpayers. Hitting them with a higher fee or rate is a burden then thrown onto the consumer, but we need development at a controlled and managed rate.

Young

Thinks commissioners' job is to be involved with a business that comes into town. Should tell them what county has to offer but doesn't agree with tax incentives. If a company wants to make widgets, commissioners should tell them the county will supply them with workers but not with tax abatements. Development corporation works to bring paying jobs to your area, which is fine so long as they're just giving advertisements to prospective company. Doesn't want them to sell companies on tax abatements, because he believes county should invest its money in infrastructure and not enticements for businesses.



What is the county's role in economic development? Should the county give money to the Johnson County Development Corp.? Why or why not? Should the tax charged to new developments be continued for the development corporation?

Price

Has been active in speaking with the development corporation's executive director on economic development. Has been supportive of their endeavors and trying to bring more business to county. Would like to see more economic development in the unincorporated areas, but still is important in Greenwood and Franklin. Is important to continue that support. The county definitely gets its money's worth for the amount going to the development corporation. Commissioners could have a lot stronger involvement.

Ripley

County plays major role in economic development and that is a major reason he supported the plat fees two years ago. He didn't believe the development corporation was being supported enough and now county is assisting in that, contributing nearly \$200,000 per year. Next step is getting development corporation involved in planning and development of the county and in the comprehensive plan. They can give guidance and direction to people in the county. Is commissioners' responsibility to do more about bringing them in and walking hand in hand. Fee should continue, county needs to do it because the county needs economic development.

Sims

Should not continue. Would be against it. County has to come up with a different approach. If they can show him as commissioner that what they're doing is worth funding, then he would go along with it. But there's other options, and he would look at other options.

DeHart

As an example, if one of his family members worked in the highway department and got an 8 percent raise while other workers got a 3 percent raise, it would be favoritism and a conflict of interest. Using a position to give a family member a raise would be a conflict of interest. Would disclose if faced with it in a meeting and would abstain from voting.

Young

As an example, said a county commissioner who owned a lawn and garden shop shouldn't sell the county flowers for something because it would be a conflict of interest because he's giving himself business because of his position. Said any conflict should be disclosed in a meeting as soon as it came up. If something were determined to be a conflict of something that would be questioned later, it should be brought up as soon as it's known. Anyone with a conflict should abstain.



Define conflict of interest. When is it appropriate for a county official to disclose a conflict of interest? If a conflict of interest occurs, what should the official do about it?

Price

Conflict of interest would have anything to do with an elected official getting a personal or monetary gain. If that is the case, it is wrong. If an official had business doing work for county, that has to be disclosed. If the official has any vested interest or gain in any venture, they should abstain and recuse themselves from any vote. He knows of no conflicts currently, but if a conflict were to occur, he would abstain from voting and identify the conflict. Official should say they have an interest, and excuse themselves from voting. Need to make conflicts public and transparent.

Ripley

When outside circumstances interfere or conflict with job duties of an elected official, where the two cross bounds where the official has a say in something that may have an effect on their livelihood or family outside of county government. When an official's outside life crosses paths with government, those two should be separated. Official should disclose the conflict as early and as soon as they find out there is a conflict. Issue should be brought out into the public immediately, at a meeting or wherever the official might be when the conflict is brought to their attention.

Sims

A conflict of interest is if he was commissioner and he knew and was friends with the dump truck company doing work in downtown Franklin or Edinburgh. Wouldn't give them the business. Conflict is one of biggest problems of county government. The public wants people in office with integrity. Commissioners' job is to represent the people who elected them, not take care of friends. If he thinks he has a conflict, he will ask legal people and news people. He won't hide behind others. In the county, he sees people moving from position to position, and he wants to bring something different.

DeHart

What he understands is that it's part of the health-care package. Believes it's fine as long as they're putting in the work to justify it. Must see the work to justify it.

Young

Believes it's fine for county council and county commissioners. Said attorney shouldn't get health insurance because they run their own businesses.



Should part-time officials — such as county commissioners, county council members and attorneys — receive health benefits through the county government health plan for full-time, unelected employees?

Price

No. Understands people have felt that was a supplement to income because the position is underpaid. He hasn't taken the benefit since he became an elected official, but knows there are some that use it. County is in enough of a financial strap with insurance and cost, officials owe it to taxpayers to be cognizant of that cost and evaluate and adjust it. County should focus on full-time employees, and that is a strain enough. Elected officials should take the oath for the job, not for benefits or pay. Four years ago, officials said that would be looked into, and he hasn't seen any action taken.

Ripley

The pay for a county commissioner is low. Position may only be slotted for part-time, but commissioners do as much work as full-time employees. Doesn't believe cost is that much to carry the benefits and is an incentive for some people to continue with service to county. Does not personally take benefits because he doesn't need them.

Sims

Doesn't think they should. Isn't fair to county employees that commissioners work part time and are fully benefited and others are not. Is for it if it is across the board. Health care is a big issue for people. A lot of people work part time. Is for it if it is across the board, but should be for everybody that works for county no matter if part-time or not.

DeHart

Has let everyone who's given him a contribution know he doesn't show favoritism to anybody. By donating to him, you're saying that he's your candidate and nothing more. Doesn't give business to any contributors, and all they can expect is that he'll be a fair and good county commissioner. Gives the check back if they can't live by those terms.

Young

Hasn't accepted any contribution, so there wouldn't be any reason for it to affect his decision.



How will you ensure that, if elected, the campaign contributions you have accepted will not affect your ability to do your job as commissioner?

Price

Anyone that makes a contribution is making it to you for your knowledge and a belief in what you can do. Told anyone who contributed that might do business with the county, there is no commitment other than the good of the county. He will evaluate everything on merits. Any contribution would not affect his job. No one asked for a commitment, he has not given any and that would not happen. He will do what he feels is best for the county and not necessarily that individual or business.

Ripley

Contributions haven't affected him. At this point, only contributions he has received are from a golf outing a year ago and friends of the family who contributed. Go back through his voting records and every time American Structurepoint has been part of commissioners' decisions, he abstained. Not necessarily because they contributed to his campaign, but more because one of the vice presidents is married to a family member. Has no hidden secrets as to who contributes to his campaign. Doesn't play games or favorites. Makes decisions based on what is best for the county, not on friendship or who gave money.

Sims

Can assure voters he won't be bought. People are tired of political contributions. He wants to be a person with integrity. Has obligation to serve people of the county.

DeHart

Wasn't a commissioner when county executive discussion was taking place, and doesn't know of any executive session discussion he took part in on the stormwater utility. Does not recall that he was in any closed stormwater meeting to the best of his knowledge. Believes commissioners are open and honest with the public and thinks they will continue to keep matters of interest to the public open. Being open with the public is important.

Young

Open government very important to him, and thinks all meetings should be in the paper. Favors the sunshine law. If a meeting pertains to the residents of Johnson County, they have a right to be there. Will try to keep an eye on things that are going on, so the county doesn't get into that situation of not having a meeting publicized. Wants meetings to be above board and in front of the public.



The current board of commissioners has met in illegal executive sessions about more than one issue, including the stormwater utility and hiring a county executive. Is open government important? Why or why not? What will you do to ensure that the board of commissioners is being open and honest with the public?

Price

In his opinion, executive sessions are for personnel and litigation. He doesn't feel anything else is covered under executive session. Anything else should be discussed in a public meeting. Knows there are a lot of executive sessions. "We need to only cover things that fall under those guidelines; and if it's not personnel and it's not litigation, then it needs to happen out in the public meetings."

Ripley

He campaigned on limiting executive sessions. Being an outsider, it's easy to take potshots at that. Once he got inside, he began to understand there is more litigation and more employee issues in this county than he ever realized. Commissioners don't have an executive session after every meeting now, but have one at least two times per month. One thing he wants to stress, because he thought it was happening prior to taking office, is that decisions are not being made behind closed doors. He teaches about open door law at Ball State University.

Sims

Would not continue the practice. They say they do that because of security. "They stretch (the open-door law) as far as they can stretch it, and to me that looks bad as a commissioner." People want to know what goes on in this county. Thinks county government should be open to public. People question what they have to hide. If people ask him a question, he will answer it. Officials need to have some privacy, such as if someone is being disciplined, but they stretch it to the limit.

DeHart

A lot of the stormwater issue happened before he came into office. Has worked to bridge gap with the council. Did some work on the north annex, which council members described as one of the best presentations brought before them. Feels he can keep communication level open. Right hand has got to know what the left hand is doing or one can't shoot a basketball. That basketball is not going to hit its mark if hands aren't in sync with one another. When dealing with taxpayer dollars, must work together diligently.

Young

Doesn't understand the council saying there's not enough communication. Council members have the same opportunity that an interested resident does to sit in on meetings. That works both ways, and commissioners should try to regularly attend council meetings, though not every time. County could possibly cut down on the number of meetings each month to have better communications between them. A believer in having everyone involved, no matter what's going on.



County council members have complained that there isn't enough communication between the two boards, such as on the animal shelter and the county stormwater utility. What will you do to address that concern? Is communication between the two boards important? Why or why not?

Price

Only way to have good government is to have both executive and fiscal body working together and have communication in place. Dialogue and communication have not been missing. Issues such as the animal shelter and the stormwater utility came before the council for approval with no communication. Details and cost should be made public so public can know what is going on. Officials have an obligation to share that information. When council members hears about a project, they look into it and raise questions about things haven't been done and then that holds up the project. If the two bodies work together, they can achieve a lot.

Ripley

Is one of his goals for his next term. Believes there is more communication now than there was under prior commissioners, but he doesn't believe the communication is where it needs to go. Trying to persuade council members to start communication similar to what is done in Hamilton County, where once a month the council and commissioners meet to discuss different topics. Have to do a better job to bridge the two groups and bring them together. If the county will have to cut \$1 million from the budget in the next few years, the two groups will have to meet to work together and develop a proposal.

Sims

Communication is important. They're elected officials too. Problem is a power thing. County needs an animal shelter, but commissioners won't work with county council. Would have open-door session between council and commissioners. Sewer issue and animal shelter been going on for at least five years and still hasn't been built.

DeHart

With executive, believes county would run into issue of having one person making all the decisions. In certain areas, consolidating is good, but not when it gets the power out of the peoples' hands. Having a chief in charge would be a lot of power for one person who's not elected.

Young

Was supposed to happen this year, but didn't pass the state. Doesn't know what they were dreaming in Indianapolis when they wrote that bill because he doubts anyone would vote themselves out of a job. Would not support it because he'd be shooting himself in the foot. The county needs elected commissioners instead of an appointed county manager to run the whole show because that would be back to a good-old-boy system.



The state legislature discussed a measure that would eliminate the three-member board of commissioners and instead appoint a county executive, but it first must be approved by county commissioners. Would you vote for that? Why or why not?

Price

Would be open to review and evaluate that. Would have to be full-time position and likely would need secretarial support if nothing else. Have to be open-minded, look at ideas and evaluate them. Once he has all the information in front of him, will give an honest opinion. Would add in some costs, likely with salary. Would be better accessibility. That is why he is running. He will be in some county government building on a daily basis. If is the change is in the best interest of the county, he doesn't have a problem making that decision. Would like to know all information before he decides, but he is open to the idea.

Ripley

Supports the proposal. County government's operations are so antiquated, they have to change. A three-person board of commissioners is not an effective governing board. There needs to be one individual, similar to the mayor of a city. A county executive may not be needed in a rural county, but it is needed in one with Johnson County's size and growth. Believes open door law part of the reason county needs to go to one executive. "Regardless of what people think about openness or transparency, you can't talk to your fellow commissioners, you can't ask advice of your fellow commissioners, you can't even do brainstorming."

Sims

Would vote for that. If county has one executive person, he holds all the gain and he will answer for it. He doesn't see a problem with getting rid of the commissioners. The question is would the executive be appointed by the state or the county? Should be a valid issue.

DeHart

The stormwater utility occurred before him taking office. A lot of times the county isn't holding its people accountable, whether it's the contractor or the consultant. County needs to hold the line and say no charging over a certain amount of dollars. Must understand overages will occur, whether a contractor runs into a high water table or it's the economy itself. Must use common sense, but shouldn't be running into problems you could have found through research. Attorney must review carefully to ensure no loopholes for a contractor to come in and say they're entitled to something in the fine print.

Young

County went over budget because some of the people in the county want to keep up with Carmel and other counties. Thinks county should try to live within its means. For example, an animal shelter, which is just a kennel or dog pound, shouldn't cost \$1 million to construct. On top of the building, it cost \$90,000 just to have some company design it, which he said was a sore spot with him. "You don't need a \$1 million building like that to shelter and care for the animals. You should run the county like you try to run your household. Don't spend more than you have in the bank or more than you need to."



In recent years, more than one county project has gone over budget, including the animal shelter, a new county phone system and the creation of a stormwater utility. Why did these projects go over budget? What will you do to be sure the commissioners are being good stewards of tax dollars in the future?

Price

Once he learned about overages he got information and brought it forward, but it was too late and the county was deep into the project. "There has been a lack of homework done on the front side, and we're paying for it on the other end." Need more accountability and transparency. If officials see a contract is going to go over budget, that needs to be immediately discussed in public, brought to the county council and evaluated.

Ripley

Stormwater utility did not go over budget because there was not really a budget at all. For the animal shelter, when you continue to postpone something, costs go up. Government moves slowly, which leads to unfortunate outcomes. As building is being constructed, commissioners control, monitor and watch it, which is where they are being stewards of county money. County gets ballpark figure, then price comes out three years later to build the project. On the outside, the bill appears bigger than when the county first started looking at the project.

Sims

One reason they went over budget was because they weren't planned right. Would want to reassess why they went over budget because he thinks they should come in under budget. Someone is not getting job done. Would work with county council to find out where the money is. Project this amount, tied up in arguments, that's what raises the cost. Who's asking the questions? Why are commissioners allowing that to happen? They should be on top of that. People are tired of paying taxes with nothing to show for it.

DeHart

Wants to plan the projects out 30, 40 or 50 years into the future. Believes projections have to go well out beyond 10 years as far as capacity goes.

Young

Assuming the jail will happen, county doesn't need to have \$333,000 contract with the company to tell the county what it needs. The sheriff can get his staff together to tell the commissioners what they need. You don't need to spend money with a consultant every time you want to do something. Opposed to the way they're going about it, which should be done with sheriff's deputies and with pad and pencil. Government should control population of the county as much as possible. The more people live here, the more bad guys will need to be locked up and, consequently, bigger jail is needed.



County officials again are discussing an expansion for the jail, less than 10 years after the most recent one was completed. What will you do to make sure the county is not in the same situation in another 10 years?

Price

Was recently appointed to jail study committee. County needs to look, evaluate and plan long-term, plan for 30 years. Last time, the county planned for 30 years and got 10. If the county can save money by doing it now, should do it. Planning will be good for future. County has commitment to the safety of county residents. That's a reality the county must face, and if the county faces it right, it can do well in planning. When the county is faced with a challenge, it needs to be addressed the right way. County will save money in the future if work is done right at first.

Ripley

County will create a future plan that follows suggestions from state Department of Correction. County should know 20 years out the number of people will be at the jail. This time around, make sure don't cut costs with construction. Make sure county is able to add pods in future, instead of cutting corners. The current design was done so jail could expand up, but construction work did not include the infrastructure to do that. Communicate where county stands and the capacity the jail is reaching and have a plan in place for the next work needed, rather than doing the same thing in 10 years.

Sims

The planning was wrong. Would ask what happened first time. What happened to money spent to expand it? Doesn't think county needs another expansion in 10 years.

DeHart

Says an additional office building would allow community corrections to come over and fill administrative offices with offices and staff. Community corrections office would be within sheriff's office and jail space. Thinks the county must have qualified guys out there, though doesn't need the best shooting range around. Says county must give officers what they need to be properly trained and stay on top of the game to protect the people of the community. If a new shooting range is what it means to have the best trained deputies, then county must spend a little extra money.

Young

Understands that the sheriff has a wish list. Everybody would like to have a nice office. Favors a functional facility based on the people the sheriff's office has. Has two trains of thought on the shooting range. Could do training at new range near Camp Atterbury or could use a new building to rent to other departments for training. Bargersville or Prince's Lakes could come to the county's range for a fee, which could pay for the employee assigned there or other maintenance costs. If county would just have a range to go to shoot at, they could go to the Department of Natural Resources range so they don't have to pay for maintenance.



With the current jail proposal, what is necessary to provide services and keep the cost for taxpayers low? Do you support the addition of a shooting range/training facility? What about the additional office building? Why or why not?

Price

The existing sheriff's facility would accommodate community corrections and the county could see cost savings. Have to plan for growth. If the jail grows, so do staffing and administration. County is mandated under law for officers to have so much training in certain areas, including shooting. Is a cost of doing business. Could charge fee for other agencies to use the shooting range. County has commitment to officers for training. County can be innovative and try to find ways to reduce the cost or burden on taxpayers.

Ripley

County can work with cities and other police departments. Shooting range is necessary. Not sure how it could be built on the current site. To protect residents, county needs to be able to equip officers and a shooting range is part of that. He trusts that the sheriff knows his needs as far as office space is concerned. If he says more office space is necessary, commissioners have to understand that. Doesn't think he or any commissioner know enough about law enforcement to claim to know what is necessary. The analysis by the consultants is this is what the county needs, not a wish list.

Sims

Doesn't have a problem with shooting range, but they have one in Greenwood. He wants to know why county needs another shooting range. There are shooting ranges at Camp Atterbury and Greenwood. He is not against shooting range or expansion, but would want to inspect the jail, and officials would have to show him why project is needed. Project will cost taxpayers a lot of money. County needs office expansion because of sheriff's deputies they have. They need conference rooms. He is for that because it's a lot cheaper than a firing range.

DeHart

Should keep it around because it helps save the environment, and we need more of that. Will work with them to keep them around and possibly find new location to open or fit more bins into the budget.

Young

No, does not favor eliminating. Solid waste management is a plus for county. Should stop putting plastic and glass in landfills. Is a big recycler who has recycling bins in his house.



County recycling bins are nearly always full. Do you favor eliminating the solid waste management district? Why or why not?

Price

Doesn't think county should eliminate the service. Recycling is needed and is something the county needs to continue to support from all levels. The good that it does exceeds the cost it takes to achieve it. District is doing educational programs, going into schools and educating young people about recycling and environmental safety. Look at trash cleanup days and amount of stuff that comes in that would otherwise be in county ditches and the highway department would have to clean up. The service is beneficial to taxpayers.

Ripley

Isn't sure the district can be eliminated under the law. Service is necessary. Four years ago, there were tires lying on the sides of county roads. Have done an effective job, such as by having a trash day. The bins are full because people are using them. Have to do a better job to empty out bins and check on them more often. Is a service the county needs to provide.

Sims

Is for elimination. Thinks the county should burn waste. Indianapolis uses an incinerator, and that could be a better deal for county. Waste should be burned, and county should build something to incinerate it. Works in Indianapolis and should work in Johnson County. Wants the county to look at other options.

DeHart

Knows this county is growing rapidly. Would leave things alone for now. Just let wheel turn the way it is for now. Favors working harder with what they have and could always come back and evaluate about how to get more efficient.

Young

He wouldn't propose it. The three commissioners elected to run the county shouldn't have taken the job in the first place if they didn't have time to function as a commissioner. He won't take the duty lightly, because commissioners are there to run the county so an executive isn't needed to run it.



Last year, the commissioners pushed for a new county executive who would take on some of the duties of the commissioners. Will this position be proposed again? Do you support it? Why or why not?

Price

Thinks commissioners are elected to do the job and should do the job. When you run for office of county commissioner, before they make commitment to spend the time, need to think long and hard about that. County has three commissioners, plus a county coordinator and would add another level of bureaucracy with county executive. Would like to look at rolling the coordinator and attorneys into one, so the county is not paying three salaries and benefits. If he is elected, he will be there doing the job, working with department heads. Would be open to a combination of positions.

Ripley

Proposal will not be pushed again. He supported it. Believes county needs one individual who can live and breathe that job. The county coordinator is serving in that role. County has an antiquated system. There are three commissioners who have full-time jobs and families. They need someone who doesn't make decisions, but is there to be their eyes and ears, to help pass on philosophies of the commissioners and lead department heads in day-to-day operations. Can be difficult to get hold of county commissioner. Department heads need to be able to contact their boss and get decisions made.

Sims

Doesn't support it. Thinks issue will come up again because he thinks it's a copout and the commissioners want someone to fill in for them. As elected officials, their job is to be at meetings. They need to explain why they need one.

DeHart

Takes calls all the time, and they're always welcome. Goes out to look at people's roads or drainage issues. Considers that as part of the job.

Young

Expects that his phone will ring off the hook. Can handle that. Would take any concerns to the rest of the commissioners to see if they can be addressed.



What are your thoughts on being contacted by constituents on issues they are concerned about?

Price

Gets contacted every week, not a week goes by doesn't get contacted. His e-mail and phone numbers all are public. Costs him an extra \$40 or \$50 per month to stay in contact. Driven every road in this county. People feel like they have a rapport with him. Have to be accessible, return calls, meet with people, and it can't be week or two weeks later. Gets back with people most times within 24 hours.

Ripley

Recommends it. People do call him, he gets calls at all hours of the day. People have access to his private cell phone number, a decision he sometimes regrets. Has been out of the country when he's gotten calls from people. Commissioners need to be accessible. He will always give people the opportunity to have his private cell phone number to call him whenever.

Sims

Has no problem with that. They can contact him any time.

DeHart

Favors leaving that up to the people in White River Township. Should work with their commissioner in District 3 to figure out what they want to do and how to do it.

Young

Believes that if residents of White River Township want the area to become a town, it can become a town. What needs to happen first is for the county to slow down Greenwood's and Bargersville's land grabs. Then they can decide if they're going to be a town or a city. Commissioners cannot stop the people of the township from becoming a city if that's what they want. But the county needs to stop Greenwood from stealing land from them, so it'll be up to residents.



What should happen with White River Township? Some have discussed annexation, incorporation or leaving it as is. What do you propose happen, when and how should it be accomplished?

Price

Needs to be evaluated. Had discussions with people from White River Township, the cities and towns about annexation and incorporation. All the research needs to be done, the information made public. Once that is all exposed, can ask what is going to be best for township. Can't be closed-minded. Might be too great of cost to incorporate. Could be less costly to annex, such as in Greenwood or Bargersville that already have government structures in place. White River Township gets good public safety services, but could improve infrastructure. Wants to be involved from start as commissioner and listen to what people have to say.

Ripley

One goal is to help White River Township become whatever it wants to be. Doesn't believe solution should be up to cities and towns splitting the area up. Need to get White River Township people to determine what services they want. Believes all or big portion of township needs to be part of a city. Many people moved there because they wanted peace and to be outside of the city, but county cannot provide residents with the services they need. Believes county could play mediator role and sit down with township, Greenwood and Bargersville. Need to look at people of White River Township and decide what makes most sense for them.

Sims

Issue should be on the ballot and up to voters. Something has to be done. People are against annexation and worried their property value will go down. Has to come to a vote. Issue is important enough to put on ballot. People want better police and fire protection. Put it to a vote.

DeHart

There are more than 600 miles of road in unincorporated areas. Knows for a fact county had a crew in White River Township sealing up cracks and fixing small and bigger potholes recently. Have to prioritize roads and be mindful which roads in the county get traveled the most. Have to look at which roads need to get fixed to prevent accidents. Will work in the subdivisions as possible north of Whiteland Road. Some people don't see a police car or county highway truck as often as they like, but that doesn't mean they're not out there patrolling. Officials are mindful of what's going on in those areas.

Young

Believes part of the problem goes back to putting in substandard roads in housing developments and apartments that were torn up after large trucks were there building. So the county inherits substandard roads after they're turned over. The developers need to be accountable for these roads, because the residents pay for it, if not themselves than by paying the county to do it.



White River Township residents have complained that their roads don't get fixed and they don't get enough services, even though they live in one of the most populated areas of the county. What can be done to address their concerns? What will you do?

Price

Have to rely on highway director for updates on current conditions, which is the same as in other townships. Would like to see money that comes from a township in the unincorporated area be spent in that township. Wants to know how much money is coming in from each township and how money is being spent in the township. White River Township has a greater demand. With more traffic and population comes more obligations. Would work with highway director. With knowledge, can make great improvements to infrastructure.

Ripley

Need to do a better job of communication. Look at where dollars are being spent. County is looking at and focusing more than ever before on White River Township streets and roads. Spent more money on roads in past few years, which is what he campaigned on. Look at county expenditures, it has happened and county even got wheel tax to get funding into place. County is rebuilding those roads bit by bit. Highway department has come up with a plan and a rating system. Work is going to take time. The roads in some subdivisions are 30 years old. With the county's money supply, they cannot all be fixed immediately.

Sims

Roads are terrible. Can't get them fixed. County commissioners promise all this stuff and can't deliver. Is the reason why area should annex or incorporate. "If they want that kind of coverage, they're going to have to pay for it, and I think they would pay for it." Would bring the issue to the county council and people of White River Township. Would host meeting that is open to every resident. Part of commissioners' job is to find a way to get it done.

DeHart

Believes it's a slow, drawn-out ordeal. The community of White River Township got together and put money toward those railroad crossings, but county must look at all railroad crossings and formulate a priority that puts a number to each of them. Believes there are about 30 railroad crossings in the county and would have to prioritize those where it's most needed. If the money's just not there, then so be it.

Young

Believes county needs to have a five- or 10-year plan for railroad crossings, with numbers system like they have on the roads in the county. Believes the worst roads should get the care first under an upgrade plan that would set up one or two crossings every year. It would take decades to ever fix them all. Again, tax dollars would have to pay for it.



Should the county have a plan to continually fund railroad crossing upgrades countywide? If so, how could that be done and where would the money come from?

Price

When he was highway director, tried to get grants for railroad upgrades and new signs. Need to continue to do that, talk with federal and state governments to get more funding. Is county's job to improve crossings. County should set aside some money and ask department heads to look into every funding mechanism and grant. County can do some improvements, but not all. Saw that the collaborative effort between public and private groups in White River Township worked well. One crossing is just as important as another, but county also should look at the number of trains and traffic in deciding on improvements.

Ripley

What was proved in White River Township is that there must be involvement of community. Commissioners and highway should probably create a budget line item for crossings. Need to make sure crossings are as safe as possible. County needs to start thinking of a plan, similar to the state's plan to rank crossings. County should get community involvement with a lot of crossings that need to be done. Know cost of crossings, but doesn't know how county would get the crossings done when it can't even meet road needs.

Sims

Doesn't think the county should. Can't do that countywide. The railroad is federal. Would like to upgrade them, but the only way to do that is through Indiana legislature. Commissioners can't fix every railroad crossing in Johnson County. Would also look to railroad company and talk to them about upgrades. Would talk with governor and see what he could do.

DeHart

One commissioner serves on the committee. Should lean heavily on the findings of that committee and its recommendations. Not opposed to growth, but it needs to be controlled, and government needs to be compatible with that growth. Thinks farmers should have say in what they want done with their property and not have it dictated to them. The biggest thing with this comprehensive plan is creation of jobs within the county, making it a better place to live and raise a family. Must be on fast track for growth, because with growth comes jobs and income.

Young

Was involved in 2005 when it was volunteers, and believes commissioners should give the committee oversight and direction. Has the feeling that the 20-year plan is in the hands of an outside consulting company. When volunteer board went to an appointed board, the county took a step backward. Believes some property in the county should stay farmland. Believes development in the county should go up and not just out all the time. Thinks a number of stores, shops and buildings could do the same job and have the same amount of floor space if they went up two or three stories.



A steering committee and consulting firm are set to begin drafting the county's next master development plan. What role should a commissioner play in this process? How do you envision the county's agricultural, residential and commercial development for the next 20 years?

Price

Commissioners must be involved. Shouldn't micromanage but be there for support, direction and expertise. County needs to look at corridors that should be zoned as commercial. Smarter and better planning is always good. Can't change past, but can change future. Through good planning and zoning, county can have corridors for commercial development on State Road 37 and Interstate 65. Residential development drives tax dollars, but there is a challenge with that. If officials plan right, would be for betterment of county. There is agricultural land county needs to keep.

Ripley

For a county commissioner to tell you what they believe the county needs to be is wrong. Needs to be a committee and people in each community that meet as a group to develop what needs to be done. He is not going to dictate or tell people what needs to be part of the plan. Elected official does not drive the process; assists and participates, but does not drive it. Not going to say he believes he knows what's best and what needs to be done and how county needs to be set up. Hope this group helps Johnson County decide what it wants to be when it grows up.

Sims

Over the next 20 years, more than 40,000 people will move here. Commissioners have a very important role. They oversee process and should oversee it. If county doesn't set some agricultural land aside, there won't be any farmland left in 20 years. County has to set aside green-space, talk to farmers to see if they can donate or if county can purchase a piece of land.