

COALITION FOR A BETTER MEMPHIS
Shelby County Commissioner Candidate Questionnaire
Election Date: May 4, 2010

Name: Mike Ritz

District for which you are running: District 1, Position 1

Section 1: Qualifications and Background (2 questions)

Section 2: Vision and Strategies (4 questions)

Section 3: Improving the Education System (4 questions)

1. QUALIFICATIONS AND BACKGROUND

- 1. Describe your qualifications for holding the office of Shelby County Commissioner. (Please answer in the space below and attach a resume.)**
Rather than be redundant, please see the Coalition Candidate Qualification and attached resume.
- 2. What events or experiences caused you to decide to run for this office?**
When I moved here in late 1977 with my family, we had very little financial resources and my position as the first Director of the City and County Office of Planning and Development. A few years ago I was able to retire at a relatively young age. I originally ran for office in 2006 because I wanted to give back to the community some time, leadership skills, and attention to details. I feel I have done some good and been a positive influence on the County Commission the last 3 1/2 years and would like the chance to continue to serve.

2. VISION AND STRATEGIES

- 1. In your opinion, what are the three greatest issues (problems or opportunities) facing Shelby County in the next four years? 1. Public Safety. 2. Local school funding dispute between MCS and the City Council. 3. The State of Tennessee's use and treatment of US Department of Health and Human Services (DHHS) funds which the State receives based on the**

NAME: MIKE RITZ

uncompensated /charity care at the MED. See the civil rights complaint I filed against the State and DHHS at www.mikeritz.org under Ritz Complaint..., February 5, 2010.

- 2. Shelby County's debt is seen by many people as a threat to county government. How would you propose that the county pay down its debt? How would you prevent additional debt in the future? The pay down of the County debt is well established and understood. We do not need to refinance or reschedule the debt pay down unless interest payments can be substantially reduced or we run into a credit problem with one of the contra parties on our interest rate swaps. After peaking at \$179.4 million in fiscal year 2009, our annual debt service has begun to drop and is \$175 million for this FY 2010. About \$1.1 billion of our current \$1.72 billion debt was spent on school construction. With the 2 school systems not expected to grow over the next ten years, our need for new school construction should be mostly limited to rehab/replacement of some MCS schools and replacement of a few old SCS school buildings. If we can avoid a new jail, new MED, new Convention Center, and unneeded/ stupid roads (like paying \$7.0 million to build a 2 lane road to replace a 2 lane Houston Levee from the Wolf River to Macon), we should be able avoid big new capital projects which are funded by bonds.**
- 3. The Memphis City Council has taken steps over the last few years attempting to shift the burden of funding both city and county schools to Shelby County residents. What are your views regarding the best way to fund public education of Shelby County and Memphis children? I think the County should be the sole source of local funding and I have made a comprehensive 7 year proposal to do that to the Ad Hoc Committee on Public Education Funding on which I sit as one of the five County Commissioners. The critical part is getting support of MCS, which is being advised by their Counsel to not participate, and the City Council. There does not seem to be a majority of Councilmen who will cut the city tax rate as the county tax rate goes up. Maybe we can trade them some continuing funding obligation for the continuing \$78 million City to MCS funding obligation.**
- 4. Some people believe that urban communities should adopt policies that encourage what is called "smart growth." Do you believe Shelby County**

NAME: MIKE RITZ

should have a general policy about new residential and commercial developments? If so, what should that policy be? Yes, but it is not one policy but several and some need City Council support. These smart growth policies are: A. Adopt the proposed Unified Development Code (UDC). B. With the encouragement within the UDC, encourage adoption of neighborhood or area plans, like an updated Grey's Creek Plan, and urban road designations. C. Avoid City and County funding and matching of federal funding for roads and/or sewers that encourage sprawl. D. Discourage public support /endorsement of development which hurt neighborhoods like the Harold Buehler construction of single family rental homes in otherwise stable or tipping neighborhoods on free County lots. E. Be very diligent with tax increment financing districts. The Uptown TIF District should not have included the Pyramid. The Highland/U of M TIF District was not well conceived and organized.

3. IMPROVING THE SYSTEM OF GOVERNMENT

1. What do you regard as the greatest obstacle or barrier to economic growth in Shelby County today? What can the County Commission do to reduce that impediment? Because the Chamber's Memphis ED is doing such a good job attracting businesses to consider locating or expanding businesses here, our biggest deficiency now is our two headed government trying to assist particular businesses to invest here. Multiple appointments to the Port Authority and Industrial Development Board do not help. We also have Councilman and Commissioners who want to tinker too much. Witness the private sector activities or lack there of at the Fairgrounds and the Pyramid/Bass Pro debacles. We need to slim down the involvement of 2 mayors and 2 governments in all things economic.
2. What is your philosophy about offering incentives to companies that are considering major new investments or job expansions in Shelby County? I support the current IDB PILOT program. The PILOT rules changes of the last few years need to be allowed to work. I think the downtown PILOT program needs some attention and focus.
3. What is your view regarding the best way to address financing of The Med and the need for public health options? See my civil rights complaint at www.mikertiz.org. In addition to changing Tennessee's approach and use of DHHS funds sent to the State based on the MED's

SHELBY COUNTY COMMISSIONER CANDIDATE QUESTIONNAIRE 2010

NAME: MIKE RITZ

uncompensated/charity care, I think we should sue Mississippi and Arkansas to get their attention and money. Recent changes in federal law allow those two states to get DHHS funds with which they can reimburse the MED for their charity care. Each States' charity care is about 11% of the MED's charity care on an annual basis.

- 4. When you complete your service as commissioner, what do you want your legacy to be? He did a good job representing the taxpayers, voters and citizens. (These are not all the same!) He was the best County Commissioner since Morris Fair.**

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