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

**AN ELECTRONIC VERSION OF THIS FILE CAN BE RECEIVED BY SENDING AN EMAIL TO [peggy@bettermemphis.org](mailto:peggy@bettermemphis.org)**

NAME: NORMA J. LESTER

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District for which you are running:  
**COUNTY COMMISSION DISTRICT 2 POSITION 3**

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**Section 1: Qualifications and Background (2 questions)**  
**Section 2: Vision and Strategies (4 questions)**  
**Section 3: Improving the Education System (4 questions)**

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<b>1. QUALIFICATIONS AND BACKGROUND</b>
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**1. Describe your qualifications for holding the office of Shelby County Commissioner. (Please answer in the space below and attach a resume.)**

The last 25 years of my career were spent in various management and executive roles both in government settings and corporate America. I've had the direct responsibility of multimillion dollar budgets and supervision of up to 6 division directors. I have served as officers of several boards and the recipient of several awards and recognition for outstanding leadership.

As a former county employee I am familiar with government operations including the Civil Service System and through years of direct observations developed insight into the operations of the County Commission.

Most importantly I maintain the ability to reach across racial and political lines to maintain a sense of objectivity in accomplishing the best outcome for the overall good.

Please see attached resume for additional information.

**2. What events or experiences caused you to decide to run for this office?**

As with most citizens, I was becoming dismayed with the fall out of our elective officials both locally and on a national level. I found myself complaining constantly. The end of 2008 the paper published an outstanding number of single parent births and I became aware that we were

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know as having the highest infant mortality rate in the country. Coupled with this there was a shake up at the Med that resulted in the dismissal of the VP of Nursing and Hospital President. In reflecting, I noted that never in the history of city or county government had there been an elected official with a holistic background in health care and there existed an opportunity for me to bring something totally new to the table that could impact our community.

**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?**

- A. Lack of Revenue
- B. Crime
- C. Health Care and Educational system

**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?**

First and foremost the county has to develop a plan to better utilize its resources starting with consolidation of services within the county system.

Review debts for the possibility of interest reductions or restructuring payment

Review the existing PILOT program

Capitalize on federally supported or grant programs to off county dollars

Utilize non violent parolees that can't pay probation fees in service positions to preserve county employee salaries.

Restrict engaging in large capital expenditures until reduction in debt revealed

Continue work with City officials in pursuit of shared services

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- 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?**

To avoid duplication of taxes, I fully support the County funding both school systems. It seems there are formulas already establish and the County should appropriate matching funds accordingly. I don't see the shifting of a burden, I see city residents not being hit on the city and county side in that we are all county residents.

This is not an area of my expertise but I as a Quality Assurance person, I would review, standards, trends and in consultation with school leaders and others, to develop a feasible plan.

- 4. Some people believe that urban communities should adopt policies that encourage what is called "smart growth." Do you believe Shelby County should have a general policy about new residential and commercial developments? If so, what should that policy be?**

I encourage smart growth and feel Shelby County should modify its existing policy. There has been a perception that the inner city has been unfairly taxed to support the infrastructure of county development. This too is not my area of expertise and as such I am certainly not qualified to develop a policy but as any good manager or planner, I'd review established trends and see how they could be woven into our system.

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### 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?**

Greatest obstacle is the inability to provide gainful employment. This is not limited to Shelby County as it is a nationwide problem with a domino effect. The challenge for Shelby County is to work with our state and federal legislators in pursuit of attracting *regional* jobs in this area. Cities with regional jobs cause other jobs to develop. We are constantly compared to Atlanta but the federal jobs in Atlanta far exceed those in our area and the support of those jobs further enhances economic growth.

With the existing economy we need to develop measures to help sustain our existing small industries. When new companies come in with limited job openings for a community that unemployment far exceeds the national average, there simply will not be a significant gain.

Another obstacle is the educational system at the elementary and high school level. A major concern for attracting business relocation is the school system and although we do have some good school, overall the school system is less than desired. The existing system does not prepare students for the labor market.

**2. What is your philosophy about offering incentives to companies that are considering major new investments or job expansions in Shelby County?**

I favor incentives but feel provisions should be included that reflect time frames or ratio of profit. There should not be a significant difference between the ratios of burden on the taxpayer to that of the business.

**3. What is your view regarding the best way to address financing of The Med and the need for public health options?**

The immediate solution is for the state and local governments to fund the Med. Thereafter there should be an in depth plan to sustain operations. Given the Med is a regional hospital federal funds should be provided in a regional manner. It should also be mandated that the state reimburse the Med at a higher percentage of federal dollars generated.

Partnerships should be formed with area hospitals to perform more extensive and costly diagnostic tests for an administrative fee. This would enable the Med to shut down operations in those areas. The layout is a nightmare. Consideration should be given to closing down the Adams Street building and converting those offices to areas within the hospital.

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I fully support public health options and would want to pursue contract with UT for operations of the Med Plex as a possibility of public service. I would also entertain reaching out to retired nurses for volunteer services, similar to what is provided with the Church Health Services.

**4. When you complete your service as commissioner, what do you want your legacy to be?**

That I stood strong on my convictions as a public servant and made an impact on public health care delivery

**This feedback may not be appreciated but for me I felt it necessary. The position I seek is a district one and although certainly emphasis is placed on government as a whole, my constituents are concerned about issues specific to their district. I found it concerning that there were no questions reflecting candidate's knowledge of their district and their efforts to address constituents concerns. I hope you will find this worthy of consideration in future elections.**

**Thank you,  
Norma Lester**

**- End -**