

Rolando Toyos
Coalition For a Better Memphis
Shelby County Commissioner Candidate Questionnaire

My various experiences make me uniquely qualified for the County Commission position in district 5. My district includes a diverse group of people culturally and economically. I believe I can empathize with a majority of my district since my background is so wide ranging.

I was born in New York City to two immigrant parents of Hispanic heritage. At a young age my father left our home leaving my mother very few options. She decided that our family, my older brother and I, needed a fresh start. So we packed up, jumped on a Greyhound bus and during the Christmas holidays traveled cross-country to a cousin's house in Santa Rosa, California. When we arrived we really didn't have any prospects just the will to make a better life for ourselves.

The start of life there was difficult. When my mother went to enroll me at the local public elementary school they did not wait for my transcripts from my former school. They heard my mother's Spanish accent so they assumed we were new arrivals to America and placed me in remedial courses. The error was caught and I was placed in the proper "track" but it showed me very early that I would have to prove myself. To survive my mother accepted a job assisting at a school, my brother (Lieutenant Colonel Ruben Toyos, US Army) worked at a fast food restaurant, and I started a paper route. We kept our family together and supported each other through our struggles.

In high school I continued to work, letter in 3 varsity sports, and excel in school. I won the scholar athlete award for my school and was a finalist for a national scholar athlete award. I decided to attend the University of California, Berkeley to pursue a degree in Biology. When a knee injury sidelined me from my athletic pursuits I decided to use my extra time getting involved on campus and the community. I started

working at a student advocacy group, MPACT, which was an organization established to help under represented groups on campus better adjust to campus life.

I eventually became the director of the program. The program was meant for a subset of students but our organization brought an entire campus together. We banded together to tackle such issues as the divestiture of the university from companies that were doing business in South Africa, because the country was supporting apartheid. During these years I also was an Assistant Basketball Coach at Berkeley High School, a Big Brother, and help start a tutoring program that brought college students to a local public high school for mentoring and tutoring.

After graduating in four years, I attended Stanford University for a M.A. in Science Education. While attaining straight A's, I taught two public high school science classes and was an Assistant Basketball Coach of Menlo Atherton High School, a team that won a state championship. I also was chosen to be the only first year teacher to be part of the Carnegie Funded Teacher Assessment Project (TAP). TAP was designed to increase professionalism in teaching by having teacher's go through a rigorous certification process. TAP certification would reward expert teachers with an increase in salary and responsibilities.

After graduating from Stanford I accepted a full time teaching position at a local public high school. I also accepted the Head Coaching job of the basketball team, making me the youngest high school head coach in California. That year I won a National Teaching Award for my hands on science curriculum and took a team that went 3 and 17 the previous year to 13 and 11.

After working with kids for many years I made the decision that I wanted to pursue my medical degree. I chose the University of Illinois because they offered me the opportunity to complete research, continue teaching, and because I found someone that I thought could be good mentor - Dean of Students Dr. William Wallace. (He became the most influential person in my

life.) I became Class President, started a tutoring program for high school students interested in medicine, completed research in trauma surgery, and graduated with James Scholar Distinction.

After graduating from medical school, I completed an internship in Internal Medicine at Illinois Masonic Hospital and an Ophthalmology Residency at Northwestern Hospital. During that time my book, *Insider's Guide to Medical School Admissions*, was published and became a best seller on college campuses throughout the United States. Dr. Wallace became sick with kidney failure. After a long struggle with his disease he eventually died. But before he died he challenged me not to change. He wanted me to continue to serve my community and help the underserved achieve success.

Three days after finishing residency I started working at Jackson General Hospital in Jackson, Tennessee. It is there where I started Toyos Clinic in 1998. I opened several centers throughout West Tennessee, including Memphis. Our clinic was voted by Inc. Magazine as one of the 500 fastest growing companies in the United States. We were also chosen one of the 50 fastest growing companies in Tennessee by Tennessee Business Magazine. We have always had an "open clinic" meaning that we care for the uninsured regardless of their ability to pay. (Also, unlike most clinics we have always accepted TennCare.) I won The Humanitarian Award from the Jazz Foundation for our clinics free care that we gave to the victims of Hurricane Katrina. I eventually made Memphis my home and the clinic here our primary clinic. I have tried to integrate myself in the community fabric by supporting various causes and being a board member of Ballet Memphis and the Rock and Soul Museum. I think people have noticed this commitment by voting me one of the Top 40 under 40 by Memphis Business Journal and Memphis Magazine's 30 Who's Who.

In my day job, Ophthalmology, I have won research grants, conducted FDA studies, designed surgical equipment, published, invented surgical techniques, and have been invited to lecture nationally and internationally. I worked hard to perfect my surgical skills and that has paid off in the success of our clinic as we have attracted patients for all over the world.

I believe I can bring my expertise in business, health care, education, and leadership to the County Commission position in District 5.

I am a first generation American. My family has always stressed to me that the freedom and liberty that we have here is unique. For example, in modern day Cuba you do not have freedom of speech. So I have never taken for granted the opportunities that I have living here. I have tried my best to fulfill my civic duties and help my community.

I know that my mother is proud that her boys have become successful by achieving the American Dream. I look at my daughter and fear that previous generations are letting her generation down. If we continue to borrow and outspend our needs there will be nothing left for them but debt, a debt that may necessitate a change in the principals that have governed this land since our founding fathers. I do believe that either you become active to become part of the solution or you become part of the problem. I wanted to run for an office where I felt I could make an impact without sacrificing my work as a surgeon.

The three greatest issues that will be facing Shelby County in the next four years are health care (included in this issue is The MED), the local economy, and education. These issues are intertwined and so helping one will help the other two.

The growing debt in the country, states, and our county threatens the American way of life. Liberty is not free. Since I am running for a county office I will give you some of my solutions to begin to lower the debt and put us on a path to increase our reserves. The county is currently helping fund services to The MED, which is a vital health care service to the community. The MED is not unique in its situation of how to navigate through the current health care crisis that we face in America. How do you supply the most technologically advanced care in the world to all patients insured and not insured while being paid less each year to provide that care? The fallacy that we have here in Memphis is that somehow this is a unique situation to The MED. Any hospital or clinic that has an open door policy, like Toyos Clinic, has had to face this reality for many years. I have had the privilege to be a speaker or visiting professor at many different hospitals and universities over the years. I have seen how each one has dealt with the crisis. If we can solve the problem with The Med we will be able to decrease funding and save money.

First, I propose that we have a resolution that extends the Tennessee Good Samaritan Law to any doctor, clinic, or hospital that gives free care to the uninsured. This would lower costs at The MED in several ways: 1. It would cut down on needless tests that are only done in the practice of defensive medicine. 2. Currently you have many doctors in the area that travel to distant lands on mission trips to provide care to the needy. Many of these same physicians and clinics would be more open to the idea of providing free care here if they could operate their clinic like a mission. This would cut down on uninsured patients needlessly wasting time, resources, and money in The Med's emergency room. 3. The MED would spend less money entertaining frivolous lawsuits

and at the same time lower their malpractice premiums. 4. As has been shown in states with some type of tort reform, decreasing the burden of lawsuits helps hospitals recruit skilled health care workers who are willing to trade some compensation for fewer legal hassles. 5. You would have an easier time recruiting local volunteer faculty to help the medical students and doctors in training, which would mean more supervision and fewer needless tests ordered. While changing the perception of The MED from the place to go in a crisis to a place for all health care needs which will bring more insured patients, increasing the bottom line.

Another resolution that I would propose is get a specific funding package from the state. How can any business function when you cannot accurately form a budget? I would start with TennCare. Our clinic accepts TennCare, but when making my budget I assume that we will not be reimbursed for the work. What The MED needs is a commitment from the state that they will receive a set amount for services they provide. For example, we need to be honest with everyone involved and set a number. The state should say, "that we will be paying you 30 cents on the dollar for all services billed because at the present time that is what our financial situation can afford". I think this will lead to fewer shortfalls because now you can set your budget.

I would encourage The MED to set up a patient care only Foundation. Donations to this Foundation would go for paying the bills of the uninsured. I would hire a staff to find money at the national level. You have a great brand, "The MED", that could be used to inspire people from all over the world to gift for patient care. Also, local hospitals could donate funds to this type of foundation.

The Foundation will have to pitch more than health care in Memphis to receive donations. If you form a world class research program not only will you receive donations but then you can apply for research grants. In medical school I worked in the Trauma Surgery

Research Department at Cook County Hospital in Chicago, IL. We would operate on the uninsured frequently but it was the most well funded department on campus because we received money from private industry, National Institutes of Health, and private donations. The department was constantly doing clinical and animal research. We became a premier trauma department because we had the patient volume to support our ideas. The MED has the same advantages of high patient volume and experience. The hospital needs to share that knowledge and at the same time strengthen their financial situation so they will not rely on government bailouts to stay open.

We have counties and states that take advantage of The MED but do not provide support. I would submit to these areas data of the cost to provide care to their uninsured. I would give them a grace period to figure out where they will find the money to help pay for their constituents. Also it would give them time to establish their own Level 1 hospital if they believe that would be a more economical answer for their area. I believe they will find that procuring some funds to help The MED will be a cheaper solution. If they cannot fund their part, then our county should not be responsible for their share.

I have other ideas to help fund The MED that would be better directed to their administration as a doctor and not as a commissioner. But, I do feel my role as commissioner may bring me to the table to share these ideas.

We can decrease our debt by having a more efficient public school system at a lower cost. Before I went to medical school I was a high school teacher in the public school system. Before that I was at Stanford University attaining my M.A. in science education. We were dealing with the same problems then that we are dealing with now. The advantage of going to the number one program in the nation in education is that I was exposed to every possible idea on how to

educate our children. I would be happy to discuss this topic at length but for the purpose of this discussion I will concentrate on how we can rein in our spending on education.

The first premise you have to start with is that not every child will want or need to go to college. The second premise is that getting a high school diploma actually means more than a certificate of attendance. For example, when a child graduates from high school that they either have a marketable skill or they have the educational background to start in the workforce. Finally, if a child wants to attend college, the school should provide the necessary prerequisite courses to advance.

We are currently spending more per child in public school than at any other time in history. Most taxpayers and parents feel we should be getting more for that money. The only program to maximize education while saving money that I know well, because I was a teacher in that system, is a school within a school program that partners with industry. (As an aside, the Electronics Academy at Sequoia High School is still going strong 20 years later.)

In this program you work with your major employers in the area and find out what type of workforce will be needed in the future. For example, let's say our local hospitals will need more trained health care workers - you set up a Health Care Academy within your High School. (So similar to a Charter School but controlled by the school not as a separate identity.) Students not only take a normal curriculum but they also take elective classes that focus on health care work. These students are paired with mentors who are currently working in the health care field and spend time observing the job. At some point they will have an externship where they will be paid by the business to complete some part time job.

In the program they learn job skills, business etiquette, and how the job market works. These

students have applied and gained acceptance in the program. The program works like a job because if they do not perform to par they are eventually released from the academy and attend the regular school. How does this program save money? The program receives part of its funds from the local business.

Why would a business help fund public school education? Studies of this model have shown that companies save money in the long run because they spend less money recruiting, training, and keeping talent in the area.

The local schools benefit because they will not lose students to other schools (like charter schools) and maintain their funding. So whether you have 10 students or 100 students you are still paying the same utility bill, staff, etc. Now if you lose those students to another school your overhead stays the same but the amount of money coming in the school is lowered, leading to a waste of taxpayer money.

Another way that it would reduce our debt now and in the future is that our local students will have jobs which means more future tax payers, less crime, and more positive involvement in the community. So, I see partnerships with local industry in a school within a school format as great model to reduce cost, increase our tax base, lower crime, and increase aptitude.

In terms of overall funding of education I would have no problem with the County taking over funding for public education. I believe it would be easier to work with the different school boards and administrations in implementing cost savings and other ideas dealing with one governing body. We would have to resolve the issue of the maintenance of afford dispute with the City Council and Memphis City Schools. But if an agreement on those funds going forward can be reached by the two governing bodies then I think both county and city residents would support the measure.

One of my plans to resurrect the Hickory Hill area in my district is to take "smart growth" concepts and implement them in the area. Currently, we have some condemned buildings like the Marina Cove Apartments that act as a deterrent to any hopes of revitalization in the area. One part of my platform is to tear down the apartment complex and help start a foundation to create a City Garden much like the one that was created in St. Louis. We have many local talented artists that we would commission to provide some of the artistic construction. I believe with the help of the local government we can create a beautiful, open, green, space that can serve as a centerpiece to the revitalization of Hickory Hill. Couple this effort with the re-opening of Hickory Ridge Mall by the World Overcomer's Church and you can begin to picture the rebirth. I believe having an open space will decrease the crime in the area, which will encourage more businesses and residents to stay. As it stands now Marina Cove is only attracting criminals, squatters, and drugs.

So as you can see I would be in support of cutting down on urban sprawl and looking at what our county currently has to offer. I would encourage developers to work in those areas before they consider doing more building on the outskirts, which will require more money from the county to supply services in those areas. As far as a policy I think you would have to look at each proposal on a case by case basis and see if it works to meet the principals of smart growth. How will the project affect its surrounding areas? Can you

afford the project? How will it be sustained after completion?

I think I have touched on a few ideas to stimulate economic growth. As a business owner I know first hand that the two deterrents to economic growth in Shelby County is the poorly educated workforce and crime. I would love to add more quality doctors to my staff but over the years it has been hard to attract doctors here due to Memphis' reputation for crime. No one wants to bring their family to an unsafe environment. I have lost out to other centers in the country even though they have less to offer because the spouse did not feel safe here. With that in mind when we have had job openings for support staff I have had trouble finding employees. We have plenty of people who apply for our job openings but they are not ready for the job or not skilled enough for training. As I stated before, we need to educate our local kids so they are ready to handle the challenges of the new work environment. The employees of today need a base of technical skills so an employer can hire them and train them. What increases crime rates is unemployment. We need to educate our kids in a more productive way so they have the skills to prosper. If we start doing that as a community we will see crime rates go down.

I have read that Shelby County has granted more tax freezes than any other County in the state. The theory behind offering incentives to companies is that the company will bring jobs, increasing your tax revenue which will more than pay for the incentives. In theory that would work but we have to keep those employees living here. I think many of these employees do not live in the county. They are moving to other places like Southaven for better schools and safer neighborhoods. I do not know if this last statement is true but that is the perception (Just ask all my employees that live in Southaven). We need to provide a better living environment so that when we offer incentives to companies that we reap all of the rewards.

I have already addressed The MED.

Legacy:

I am running for County Commission, to do my part, so my daughter can inherit the same country that my parents fought so hard to attain.