

St. Joseph Local Candidate Questionnaire

1. Do you support competition in Buchanan County's healthcare?

Gary Lewis:

Yes. My 22-year career in sales and my 40 years in Healthcare has taught me that competition always benefits the consumer. (basic principle of economics)

Gary Wilkinson:

I feel competition itself is a *healthy* component of our system of free enterprise; promoting efficiency, innovation, and an awareness of the importance of excellent service in maintaining customer loyalty.

Whenever one entity is able to control a certain area of commerce without the public's ability to select the service provider or purchase the product of their choice, the quality of that service or price of the product is more likely to fall below acceptable standards.

John Josendale:

Absolutely

Whitney Lanning:

Yes. Over the course of my campaign I've heard repeatedly from individuals who are struggling to find access to affordable, quality healthcare. I am a proponent of additional resources to address medical needs, behavioral health and addiction.

2. How do you feel the mask mandate went in St. Joseph?

Gary Lewis:

There was a lot of misinformation and half-baked solutions to problems without known answers. In a situation where there was no treatment and no vaccine, medically there must be action to protect the public as a whole. I think the initial reaction of masking was appropriate, (fear of the unknown). However, with new information and greater awareness for this virus I think that mask mandates are out of line. I have not seen any clear science that mask mandates are working. COVID is resurging every day with current mask mandates????

Mayor

Gary Wilkinson:

The overall impression was one of uncertainty and some confusion in the decision making process. Some of that can be attributed to mixed signals coming from higher level agencies who are counted on to provide expert guidance in such matters.

At the outset of this particular pandemic, it became clear that its effect were far more lethal than seasonal bouts influenza with growing cases of life threatening illness and deaths.

As the effects of the virus spread and our health care system and its workers were overwhelmed, it became apparent that extraordinary measures were in order.

When in doubt err on the side of safety, so I had no problem with being told to wear a mask, as it did not involve putting any substance into my body, but could possibly protect others from me spreading disease.

John Josendale:

Was it well executed? No. Was it the right direction? No. It's difficult to say, looking back. Part of the problem with the vaccination rollout was the mandate. The misinformation and changing info from the federal government made it difficult. In this part of the country especially, when you make something mandatory, it makes people skeptical.

Whitney Lanning:

I believe the mask mandate was fine for the time that it was enacted. The onset of COVID-19 was unexpected and the City Council did their best to mitigate the issues caused by the pandemic. I do not believe that enacting a mask mandate in the future would be successful, given in part by the local perspective on the matter. Furthermore, the availability of the vaccine has created a higher level of personal choice, which I believe all individuals should have when it comes to their health.

- 3. Do you support policies that would permit males and females to share the same public restrooms, locker rooms, and showers, based on their self-identified gender instead of their natural born gender?**

Gary Lewis:

NO.

Mayor

Gary Wilkinson:

Public policies are enacted to maintain order and provide for the safety of the general public. These policies are not able to be all things to all people and there will be instances where individual preferences come into conflict with certain regulations.

In the matter of males and females sharing public spaces in circumstances where their privacy may be compromised, I believe that in the interest of safety steps should be taken to protect children and those at risk of being abused.

In my opinion the term 'self-identification' involves many variables, dependent on feelings of the individual that may change over time.

So, while valuing the worth and contributions of each person; in setting public policy the welfare of all dictates to me that public rest rooms, locker rooms, etc., remain male and female.

John Josendale:

No

Whitney Lanning:

I support trans-inclusive policies.

4. Do you support requiring photo ID to vote?

Gary Lewis:

Yes, absolutely. You must have a photo ID to fly on an airplane, to rent a car and to rent a hotel room. The right to vote is a far greater responsibility and you should be required to show a photo ID to vote. No exceptions. It is the least we can do as citizens to guarantee our elections remain fair.

Gary Wilkinson:

The right to vote is a fundamental principle of our system of government and is an important in the selection of representatives of the people. At no time should that right be abridged to make it more advantageous for any one segment of society or modified to make it more difficult for others.

For many, acquiring a photo ID can be as easy as a visit to the local driver's license bureau or county clerk's office. But for many, including rural residents and tenants of inner-city locations this is a difficult task.

If the photo ID is a requirement, will provisions be made to provide access to a photo ID for these individuals, without attaching prohibitive costs that, in effect, make it unlikely they will be able to afford it?

Mayor

John Josendale:

Yes

Whitney Lanning:

Missouri law does not require photo ID and local government would not be able to supersede state law.

5. If faced with a budget deficit, would you support or oppose cutting spending rather than increasing taxes?

Gary Lewis:

I would support cutting spending.

Gary Wilkinson:

The level of services provided by government bodies is made possible as a result of revenues provided by tax payers. If a certain level of service is expected and an accurate accounting of finances shows that more funding is needed to provide that service, the citizens should be given the opportunity to vote on whether to reduce that level of service or increase revenues through taxation.

This is more readily done on the local level as revenue issues are common in municipal settings. But on a national level elected representatives are required to set the level of taxation or reduce spending and services.

John Josendale:

Part of my platform is fixing the budget. My history in business has taught me a lot in this regard. I do not believe in raising taxes. I am a hand-up person, not a hand-out person.

Whitney Lanning:

Quite simply, we cannot afford to raise taxes. In the past 4 years there have been at least 4 local tax increases. The next mayor and council must ensure that we are making best use of the revenue we have. We must find creative solutions to addressing the needs of our community. As a nonprofit CEO, I know how to access funding and leverage resources to solve problems.

Mayor

6. If the council were given \$1M to use to fund projects in St. Joseph, what would you fund?

Gary Lewis:

Police and Fire needs be met first.

Street maintenance.

Marketing STJ to new business for relocation here

Riverfront Development

Free Baseball programs for our youth.

Krug Park Amphitheater – Venue for under 5,000 people

Gary Wilkinson:

The primary responsibility of the City is to provide for the delivery of basic municipal services to its citizens. Police and fire protection; adequate infrastructure, including street construction and maintenance; public health services, parks and recreation; all are services the City provides.

In the event the City obtained funds to use at its discretion, I would look to invest those funds in a project that would pay future dividends such as; workforce development training to supply needed workers for industry; infrastructure improvements to streets, sidewalks and curbs to improve the City's appearance; or, providing repairs to City facilities caused by long deferred maintenance.

John Josendale:

The city has been given \$19M this year, and \$19M last year, in various forms of COVID funding. The city took about half of that and put it towards the sewer to lower the payments so we don't have to raise the sewer rates again. The new children's center is going up. Some of the money is going to Missouri Western. Some is going to the law enforcement branches. Pivotal Point and Mid-City Excellence also received money. All that money was allocated by a committee, made up of citizens from around the community, who had a say in where that money went. I like that, that's the way it should be. It shouldn't be any one person's say, where the money goes.

Whitney Lanning:

Crime is a significant concern for me and those I speak with. The local government has limited control on the prosecution and sentencing of those who commit crime; as a result, local government should focus on the causes of crime, to include addiction, mental illness and homelessness. I would look to focus these dollars on crime prevention, to include properly funding the wages, benefits and equipment of police and first responders.

7. Do you believe in equity (equal outcome) or equality (equal opportunity)?

Gary Lewis:

I believe in equal opportunity.

Gary Wilkinson:

The outcome of an endeavor is the result of the factors that went into its completion including training, effort, ability, and in some cases good fortune, or luck.

If equal outcome means the results for all participants in a certain undertaking are the same, than that would be a very unusual circumstance; as people's backgrounds reflect different levels of training, effort and ability.

Outcomes of a particular activity will vary based upon the preparedness and ability of the participant.

Equal opportunity means individuals are provided training and resources without regard to factors beyond their control such as race. There should be no ceiling on what can be accomplished just as there should be no restriction placed on who is able to participate.

John Josendale:

Equal opportunity. I don't believe in communism. I don't believe in socialism. Give people opportunity to succeed. Like I said earlier, a hand-up, not a hand-out.

Whitney Lanning:

I'm not sure about the context of your question. But I believe that everyone deserves and opportunity to be able to achieve equity. One cannot exist without the other.

8. How does St. Joseph compare to Kansas City? What lessons can each city learn from each other?

Gary Lewis:

No way to compare the two head-to-head. You would be comparing apples to oranges. It would better to Juxtapose them. I have over 40 years of doing business and recreation in KC. I know that city better than most in STJ. The better statement is how we can leverage the KC amenities to our benefit. i.e.- The soon to be brand new International airport. (KCI). Chiefs Training Camp.

KC has liberal leaders and very poor schools. Not sure we want to emulate anything they are currently doing.

I do favor better working relations and communication with the KC leadership. That seems to be non-existent today. I believe that we share some common ground historically. There are a lot of STJ residents that make the drive everyday to KC for employment.

Mayor

Gary Wilkinson:

The Kansas City metropolitan district is a large urban region with all the amenities and opportunities that such areas afford. It also comes with high areas of crime, traffic congestion, pollution associated with large cities.

In the decades after its founding St. Joseph's population exceeded that of Kansas City, much of that due to the Gold Rush of 1849. But economic factors, including the designation of Kansas City as a rail hub and the location of other key industries relegated St. Joseph to the status of a small thriving community on the banks of the Missouri River.

Our proximity to a large metropolitan area has advantages and disadvantages.

For advantages, we are in short driving distance of numerous cultural, dining, sports and entertainment venues, plus an international airport.

And choices for employment and educational opportunities are increased for those wishing to live in a less urban environment.

For disadvantages, choices for higher paying jobs and better promotional opportunities tend to draw experienced and talented resources from our labor pool, resulting in a static or declining population and a lower tax base.

Each city can work with the other by consulting on issues of transportation, technology, culture and industrial recruitment that affect both.

John Josendale:

St Joe is not KC. People tend to be negative about Saint Joe, but the problem we have is that we don't know what we've got. We have a nice community with a smaller town feel, but all the amenities you could want, and just a 45 minute drive to the big city for everything else. Kansas City does have an advantage in that they can offer more white collar jobs. In St. Joe we need to do a good job training for white-collar and blue-collar jobs. We are working to attract businesses that would bring more white-collar opportunities.

Whitney Lanning:

We obviously have fewer people and less revenue. However, we have a lower cost of living, no rush hour traffic, and the small town feel that you cannot get in Kansas City. Our proximity to Kansas City should be embraced, not feared. We should leverage the fact that we are close enough to visit Kansas City, without the issues you face living in a large town.

Mayor

- 9. Merrick Garland stated that the greatest threat comes from racially or ethnically motivated violence, “specifically those who advocated for the superiority of the white race”. Do you agree or disagree?**

Gary Lewis:

Anytime you use race as a weapon the outcome will be disastrous to all involved. Just look around to what is happening now in our country. It needs to be dialed down. Could have catastrophic ending for all involved if not checked. Everyone has blame here. (all races)

Gary Wilkinson:

Justification for resorting to violence cannot be attributed to ones views on social issues, one way or the other. If there is disagreement on matters of importance, it is incumbent on the disparate parties to state their positions in a forum of discussion and seek to resolve their differences in a civil discourse.

It that is not possible, legal redress can be sought in a court of law.

John Josendale:

BS! I have traveled all over the world, and seen very different cultures and ways of life. Folks don't know how good they have it here, with freedom to interact and express themselves. It seems like the first excuse everybody throws out is race, and the second excuse is the "haves" and the "have-nots".

Whitney Lanning:

I would need more context to be able to appropriately answer this question; i.e. the greatest threat to what? Regardless, I believe that racism is present in our community and we should be actively working to create a more equal and just community.

- 10. Are there circumstances where the city council can restrict the church from assembling? If so, under which circumstances?**

Gary Lewis:

No. Our 1st Amendment guarantees us that right. Freedom of religion is a fundamental human right that protects the conscience of all people. It allows us to think, express and act upon what we deeply believe.

Gary Wilkinson:

The right of peaceful assembly is a guarantee included in the Bill of Right. Issues of a philosophical nature; even those in conflict with the beliefs of those in authority, are not a sufficient reason to restrict the assembly of such adherents.

Mayor

John Josendale:

No. Under no circumstances. People of faith, I don't care what it is whether its Christian, Hindu, Buddhist, or what, that is their source of hope, and you can't interfere with that.

Whitney Lanning:

I would not support any form of infringement on a person or persons for their religious beliefs. I have been very outspoken about the need for local government to involve local religious leaders in the process of identifying and addressing community needs. We share a common goal, serving others, the motivation for our service may be different but that shouldn't prevent our partnership. We should capitalize on our common goals through increased partnership.

Additional Info:

John Josendale:

Other remarks: Saint Joe is a "city manager" town. There is a full time, paid city manager. The city council is more like a board of directors if you compare it to a corporation, the Mayor being the chair of the board, while the city manager may be like the president of the corporation who actually runs the business. The city council sets policy. The Mayor needs to be the leader. The city council needs to be a team, and work well together. It's not about one person, party, or agenda, it's about the people. It should be the city management team's responsibility to work with all the organizations in town to help them be successful.

Whitney Lanning:

INTRO:

Hi, I'm Whitney Lanning and as you know, I'm running to become the next Mayor of St. Joseph. I am originally from a small town in Kansas. I played college basketball at Oklahoma State University. After graduation I moved to Kansas City, Missouri to pursue a masters degree in Psychology. While attending graduate school I worked as a child abuse investigator for the Jackson County Children's Division. After graduation my husband and I relocated to St. Joseph, as I took on the role of Head Start Director at our local Community Action Agency; I have served as the Executive Director of that agency for the past 6 years. My husband and I have been married for almost 12 years, we have two daughters and have fostered 10 children as foster parents. We both come from a working class background and have a strong commitment to serving our community. We chose this community to raise our family. I am running for office to create a brighter future for families, seniors and local businesses. I feel strongly about our need to engage with the community and hear what voters have to say. We will not always agree, but I am committed to listening to voters and always being honest and transparent about the issues and what I think.