



VIDEOS: Morrison, Nowlin Talk Trash at Mayoral Candidates' Forum

By Joe Hyde | Apr. 15, 2015 8:30 am

Mayor Dwain Morrison doesn't want to talk about the trash contract. He presented every person in the audience, about 40 people in all, with a three-page flyer. Pages one and two are the Mayor's proposed agenda for the next two years.

"On the back, on both pages, back and front, is the new trash contract and that alleviates all of the lies and the misinformation that has been sent out about the trash contract, because the true facts are on this sheet," he said. "And I want to ask you to read, back and front, and if anyone really thinks after reading this that we made the wrong decision, I ask you to please, please contact me and justify your feelings on this. That's all I'm going to speak about that."

Along with Morrison's opponent David Nowlin, the two candidates for mayor participated in a public forum with the San Angelo Tea Party Tuesday night, and the trash contract did come up again, much to Morrison's dislike. Single Member District 4 candidates Lucy Gonzales and Andrew Justis also participated in what was for the most part a low-key and informal discussion of the issues facing San Angelo.

"That trash contract, we all know, wasn't done with transparency. This talking about it after the fact is not good enough. We didn't have what we were promised, that being transparency," mayoral candidate David Nowlin said. "The mayor said it was a good deal, to trust him. I can tell



Mayor Morrison mingles with the San Angelo Tea Party right after the candidate forum on Apr. 14, 2015. (LIVE! Photos/Joe Hyde)



David Nowlin, left, talks to a San Angelo Tea Party member.

you this: There were three people for it and three people against it on that city council and had I'd been the mayor, we wouldn't have that deal. We might have had a deal, but we wouldn't have *that* deal.

"It seems like we're paying about \$5 more per month for our trash pickup and getting less service," Nowlin said.

Mayor Morrison referred to the April 2014 vote on the trash contract. He stressed that it was then that the council voted 7-0 to declare Republic Services the winner of the RFP process. By May, the SMD 5 council position changed hands from Republic supporter H.R. "Winkie" Wardlaw to trash contract skeptic Elizabeth Grindstaff. Nowlin was referring to a later vote in July 2014 to approve the final contract, 4-3 on a consent agenda item. Then, Grindstaff stated then that her opposition to the contract was based upon the fact that the contract was the only leverage the city had to insure Republic refunded alleged illegal fuel charges and environmental recovery fees. Councilmen Don Vardeman and Rodney Fleming agreed. Morrison pressed for contract approval anyway and won it 4-3. Over 700 signatures in a petition of opposition to the trash contract were presented to the council at that meeting.

Morrison's defense of the trash contract is that the TDS bid was much higher. His campaign document claims TDS proposed to charge \$21.22 per residence, and the negotiated residential rate from Republic is much better at \$13.97.

The last chance to delay the contract was at the last council meeting in July 2014. Then, council considered delaying the implementation by six months, Morrison said. But, had council done that, the good deals for the city written into the final contract would have been lost, including the \$12 million in upfront payments to the city, he argued. Also, Morrison countered, with no contract in place by Aug. 1, San Angelo would have no trash collection services at all.

As for transparency during the contract negotiations, Morrison said, "Nobody that plays cards ever shows their hand before the bets are made."

After Morrison's defense, Nowlin replied, "If you believe all that, alright."

Also at the forum, Morrison said that he successfully urged the city council to transfer \$2 million of the upfront payments from Republic to the water enterprise fund to prevent San Angelo water rates from rising. He promised to take the remaining \$1.6 million left from the trash contract's upfront payments to create an incentive program to encourage xeriscaping and other building and landscape improvements that conserve water.

Appointed or Elected Chief of Police

The city charter is under review by an appointed committee of citizens. Part of the charter that makes the news every four years is whether San Angelo should continue to have the police chief an elected position instead of a position appointed by the city manager. All of the candidates agreed that the position should continue to be an elected one. Morrison gave a brief history of the elected chief based upon his recollection and said he was very much in favor.

Nowlin said he was in support of what the people wanted, and he believed San Angelo remains in favor of the elected chief based upon feedback on the campaign trail. But he said he would welcome a resolution to support a vote of the citizens to debate the issue and reconsider.

Morrison said that the issue generally comes up every four years and the ballot initiative always fails. Although he did suggest that the most recent initiative saw gaining momentum for an appointed chief.

Another candidate forum will be held at Zentner's Daughter Restaurant Thursday at the monthly San Angelo Pachyderm Club at noon. We will cover more of what Gonzales and Justis have to say at that meeting.