

# Professionalism, trash aired at candidate forum

**BY:** Monique Ching

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**TAG:** elections (/topic/elections) | politics (/topic/politics) | local news (/topic/local+news)

SAN ANGELO, Texas - About 20 minutes after a brief discussion about professionalism and manners, San Angelo's two mayoral candidates verbally grappled for the floor while responding to another question.

"An internal water audit was done, the complaints ended. We took care of our problems. We spoke with our directors, both at the water department and also the head man that's over the water department, and we told them we don't want any of these problems. We want these things solved, we want personnel trained, we want to get rid of these—" said Mayor Dwain Morrison.

"I just wanted a yes or a no to that question," said David Nowlin, his opponent.

"—And we did that, and then the complaints went—" Morrison said

"Thank you, Mr. Morrison, I just wanted a yes or no on that," Nowlin said.

"—The complaints went to zero, almost zero immediately. When you solve the problem internally there's no reason to solve the problem again externally. We solved the problem with the internal audit, there was no reason to call for an external one," Morrison said.

The two candidates were talking about an internal audit of the city's water department, which began at the end of 2012 while Morrison still was a councilman. The two spoke Saturday morning at a candidate forum held by the Standard-Times and Conéxion Hispana, responding to written questions from an audience of more than 50 people.

Earlier, Nowlin responded to a number of audience questions regarding his leadership and general conduct.

"I'm concerned with your ability, experience and understanding of how to proceed when it comes to leading city council meetings through detailed discussions, intense controversies and giving citizens the rightful opportunities to speak before the council," said Jack Barbour, professor and chairman of the political science department at Angelo State University, reading a submitted question. "My concern comes from observing you as you 'ran the Zoning Board Adjustments meeting' that heard the appeal of (the proposed Hill Street frack sand depot). How can we be assured you can do the job of mayor with professionalism and authority when it seems that you are not comfortable with your role as chairman of the ZBA?"

Regarding the proposed sand depot hearing, Nowlin said he was trying to ensure the meeting was conducted in a legal and orderly manner — to avoid board members discussing issues prematurely and to prevent residents from speaking longer than their allotted time. He added that attorneys on both sides of the issue are supporting him as a mayoral candidate.

"As far as how I will lead the council, it's going to be with kindness and consideration and respect," Nowlin said. "I don't believe I've ever been rude to anybody. I've had to stop some people from talking when we gave them a time limit, but that is what it is. I'm very considerate of other people ... I don't cut people off, I don't call people by their first names or pet names, I treat them with respect — I call them 'Mr.' and 'Ms.' And I usually don't even make a motion, rarely do I second. I let the members do it. I walk through it with leadership, not like a boss."

Morrison was questioned a few times about last year's selection process of San Angelo's trash contract.

"The submitted Republic bid was not released by the city after the July vote. It required a Freedom of Information Act request to get the city to release it to the public in September 2014. What were you hiding?" Barbour said, reading a submitted question. "The original Republic bid was for \$11.54 per month with \$7 million up front. The city negotiated the price up to \$13.97 per month and the government got a \$0.7 million more upfront. Isn't that a hidden tax increase?"

"It's not true that it took an open records (request) to have the contracts released because immediately, immediately within two days after the contract was signed, both contracts were posted in their entirety on our city website. ... There were possibly some open records requests before the contract was negotiated. We did not release that until we'd negotiated the contract because we couldn't," Morrison said. "The original contract from Texas Disposal Systems (the other bidder) was \$18 and something, originally. When we finally negotiated, we had (Republic) pick up the \$8.4 million on a landfill closure fee, which the citizens had been paying for. ... They also picked up the (methane) flares, they also picked up the (Citizens Free Dumping) once a month, they also picked up a \$3.6 million fee to us and they picked up an annual fee. They picked up all of these charges that we were going to have to charge the citizens. ... All of these prices would have been added to the \$11.54. So it was finally negotiated, Republic said, 'We will pick it up for \$13.97 a month,' that's about \$2.50 (more). You would have been paying for it anyway, when we added all of the charges that we are already obligated to pay back in."

Candidates for the Single Member District 4 council seat also spoke during the two-hour meeting.

Candidate Lucy Gonzales, a retired parole office manager, reiterated her desire to help residents find the resources they need at the city and feel heard by city officials.

Her opponentm Andrew Justis, a manager at a Christian bookstore, also revisited aspects of his platform regarding economic development. He expressed a desire to boost San Angelo's manufacturing industry and to diversify the city's economy so it is not solely reliant on oil or on Goodfellow Air Force Base.

Both expressed a desire to work with other elected officials to help San Angeloans, but both political newcomers were less concrete in their answers regarding policy issues — such as funding for street repairs, how to boost economic development and how to manage tax increases — expressing a desire to learn more about the city's processes when elected.

Early voting begins Monday. Election Day is May 9.

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### **EARLY VOTING**

**When:** 8 a.m. to 5 p.m. Monday through Friday and 7 a.m. to 7 p.m. May 4 and 5.

**Where:** Tom Green County elections office, second floor, Edd B. Keyes Building, 113 W. Beauregard Ave.

**What else:** Voters who want to cast paper ballots can do so only during early voting. Only electronic ballots will be used on Election Day.

**Council districts map:** [cosatx.us/elections](http://cosatx.us/elections) (<http://cosatx.us/elections>).

**Acceptable forms of photo identification:** Texas driver's license, Texas Election Identification Certificate, Texas personal identification card, Texas concealed handgun license, U.S. military ID card containing a photo, U.S. citizenship certificate containing a photo, U.S. passport.

**Ballot by mail:** Must be received by the election office by Thursday by fax or by mail.

**Contact:** 325-659-6541. Voters also can set up curbside voting by calling this number.

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