

TEA Party Getting To Know Candidates

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By: Summer Kelley, Staff Reporter

The TEA, or Taxed Enough Already, Party's first meeting in weeks may have been low on attendance, but was full once again of politicians.

The meeting was called to order by former county executive, Ben Brandon, who led the group in the Pledge of Allegiance and then in the pledge to the Georgia state flag at the request of a supporter of gubernatorial candidate Ray McBerry. Brandon then shared a quote attributed to Albert Einstein – “Problems cannot be solved by the same level of thinking that created them” – as a bridge into the evening's informational section of the meeting. Included in Brandon's presentation were recent quotes from the county's newspapers regarding grants and the Census. Brandon stated that what was needed was a “paradigm shift”.

The next speaker for the evening was Attorney General candidate, Sam Olens. Olens currently serves as the County Commission Chairman for Cobb County, a position he has held since 2002. He and his wife, Lisa, have been married for 24 years and have two children. Under Olens' leadership, Cobb County has obtained a triple, triple A credit rating, the best rating a government can receive and has the lowest millage rate in the metro Atlanta area. Additionally, Cobb County has been the first government to save money by participating in 287G, where illegal immigrants who go to jail are taken back across the border on the federal dime. Olens said that the county has also been sued by the ACLU (American Civil Liberties Union) because of the invocations given before each commission meeting. The county won the suit and although Olens admits the suit took tax money, “principles are principles” he said. Olens is also proud of the fact that Cobb County's budget is 57 million less than the prior years, but no one has been laid off or furloughed.

“The answer to the economy is not more unemployment,” Olens said. “You need to remove any additional spending you can before laying people off or furloughing employees.”

The job as Georgia's Attorney General is seen by Olens as the best job it couples public service with law. As a County Commissioner, every email Olens receives from the public is public record and as Attorney General he would like to see the same rule applied to state legislators. Olens said he would also like to see violators of the open records laws receive stiffer penalties than the current \$100 fine.

“If there's no deterrence, then why have the law,” Olens said. “If they are doing the right thing, then they have nothing to be afraid of.”

Next year, Olens said that he anticipates the re-districting by the state will bring several lawsuits and Georgia will need an Attorney General to steadfastly fight that. He also would like to make sure Georgia is prepared for the water fight as well and believes that as “the constitutional officer in charge of that lawsuit”, the public should be hearing directly from the Attorney General. Olens also spoke on how he would protect the 10th amendment on the state's behalf and would fight the federal health insurance bill, should the bill pass.

During question and answer time following his speech Olens was asked by Brandon about the dispute between Georgia and Tennessee the past five years regarding the improperly marked state line that is one mile too far south. Brandon said the Governor has the authority to do something, but has not done anything so far and asked Olens what he would do to get the problem fixed.

Olens replied that Brad Carver, special counsel to the Governor, is working on the situation. The Governor's office is currently in active negotiations with Alabama and they hope that they will receive a positive agreement from Alabama and can then move forward to Florida. At the first sign the negotiations will not be successful, a suit should be filed in Tennessee. The only reason the Governor is not hitting every issue at once is that "you don't want to have every state around us in litigation." Olens suggested that Dade County talk to law firms that are good in this kind of litigation, like the law firm that handled the suit of New Jersey against New York over Ellis Island. The suit went to the U.S. Supreme Court and was won by New Jersey. Olens said the county needed to have a firm that had a track record of experience. Another consideration, Olens said, is that officials in Tennessee would like to see the Chattanooga to Atlanta Maglev (magnetic levitation transportation system) and this could be used as a bargaining tool, wherever the Maglev tracks go, there should be a water line with them – quid pro quo.

"You take advantage of the cards you are given," Olens said. "I agree with the governor that you don't automatically file suit. If you lose, it doesn't change anything, but if you win there are a lot of folks thinking they live in Tennessee that would suddenly be in Georgia. The worst thing is not to be prepared."

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Brandon ended the evening with further information on how the TEA Party is making a difference in the United States and County Commissioner Lamar Lowery was given the opportunity to speak about statements made regarding the sewer system issues on Lookout Mountain.

More candidates are scheduled in coming weeks to speak at TEA Party meetings.

Watch for the TEA Party schedule in the Dade County Sentinel.