Phillips County will elect two county commissioners Tuesday, Nov. 6.

Republican candidate Harlan Stern of Holyoke is running unopposed for the District 2 seat while Republican Don Lock and unaffiliated candidate Carl Wirth, both of Haxtun, vie for the District 3 seat.

The two seats open as Bud Biesemeier and Jerry Beavers are stepping down after 12 years of service each.

Don Lock

District 3

Lock grew up seven miles south of Fleming and has been in the county pretty much ever since then.

Lock noted Haxtun and Phillips County have been very good to his family and now it's time to give something back. Four years ago, Lock thought about running for county commissioner but he was still pretty heavy into his work.

Lock began working as a plumber in 1961 and is still involved in one way or another today—just

not as much. He feels he now has the time.

“I don’t need this job; I want this job,” Lock said of the commissioner seat. “Phillips County has been good to me. If I could do something to help it back I really want to do it.”

For the last year or so, Lock has been really thinking about running. “Bud did a great job,” Lock said of Biesemeier, who is stepping down. “A lot of people complain about the commissioners.” After sitting through a couple meetings, Lock said, “They all do a great job, and I hope to carry that on.”

Lock said he doesn’t have any axes to grind. He said he would’ve moved out of the county by now if he was unhappy with it. “I have no inkling to move. I like it here.”

The District 3 candidate said it is important, especially now, to stick to the budget. He said roads are crucial to a county such as Phillips County and feels the county has done a great job with them.

He was drafted into the Army in 1964 and got out in March of 1966. Upon returning he went back to plumbing.

“That’s been my life and my livelihood,” Lock noted.

In 1975 Lock and his brother started their own plumbing business. His brother stayed in Sterling, and Lock moved to Haxtun where he has been ever since. “I wouldn’t trade it for anything,” he noted. “It’s a good place to raise kids.”

He was married in 1972 to Bev, and the couple has four grown children and nine grandchildren with another on the way.

About three years ago, Lock's son Brian took over the Precision Plumbing business.

Lock spent 14 years on the Haxtun Town Board.

In his free time, Lock enjoys golfing, fishing, reading, camping and building things.

Carl Wirth

District 3

Wirth grew up in Wyoming and has lived south of Haxtun for the last 20 years where he has been a construction surveyor off and on.

It's always been a dream of Wirth's to serve as a county commissioner. In April he was talking with a friend when the idea really popped into his mind.

"I'm having fun," Wirth said of the process thus far. He said sitting in on recent commissioner meetings has gotten him very interested. He said the three current commissioners work very well together. "I'm very amazed at that. It's commendable," he added.

He said keeping the county moving in a focused direction is important. Economic growth and

jobs was the first thing to leave Wirth's mouth when asked about important things to focus on in Phillips County.

He said he is currently looking into a biodiesel project. Wirth considers himself one who thinks outside of the box and is big into researching different topics.

Having phased surveying out of his life, he now spends his time raising chickens and guineas on his eight acres of land. He is also involved with autism awareness and education. Wirth also recently finished a business development class in Sterling through Colorado State University.

Wirth graduated in 1979 from the University of Wyoming and stuck around Laramie after graduation. Children and family brought Wirth to the area just over 20 years ago.

Harlan Stern

District 2

Stern has always felt like he wanted to be more involved with the community.

Becoming a county commissioner has always been on his mind but while he was working at Grainland Cooperative, he felt there may be a conflict of interest. "I just didn't think it'd be in the best interest."

Now that he is no longer at Grainland, why not run for commissioner? He feels it is his time to give something back to the community and get involved.

Stern also feels his background in budgeting and finance as the CEO of Grainland Cooperative will transition over to the new venture. He understands the county works differently, but there is still a need for the continuity that creates a work environment that gets everybody cohesive and working together.

“I view the county no different than a business,” Stern said. “You have to have continuity and teamwork and everybody striving for the same goal.”

Stern commends the existing commissioners, especially Beavers and Biesemeier. “I think that they’ve done a great job. Not everyone has agreed with what they’ve done, but that’s part of the territory,” Stern added.

The District 2 candidate strongly believes any improvement that needs to be done within the county, needs to be done within the financial capabilities of the county.

As Stern is unopposed, he is really looking forward to serving as the commissioner for District 2.

“I’m real excited about it,” he noted. “I’m real comfortable going into it.” The candidates have attended a few meetings, having been invited by the current commissioners. Stern said that has been very helpful.

In his free time, Stern enjoys woodworking, especially building grandfather clocks. He also is involved with quality control crop adjusting. He is also a member of the East Phillips County Hospital District board.

He and wife Mona had three sons and also have four grandchildren they like to follow around.

Candidates in their own words

Editor's note: The Holyoke Enterprise provided the three county commissioner candidates with four questions. The questions and the commissioner candidates' answers are included below.

1. Explain your reason for running for county commissioner.

2. Explain your background to give people an idea of where you come from.

3. What would make you a great county commissioner?

4. Elaborate on two issues you feel Phillips County is facing.

Don Lock

1. Phillips County has been good to me in the past and I just want to give back to the community.

2. I was raised south of Fleming, went to St. Peter's School for eight years and graduated from Fleming High School in 1960.

3. Dedication to the job. I stick with the job until it's finished.

4. The economy is probably the worst, but we need to work with what we have. Working to keep up the county roads. They are in pretty good shape now.

Carl Wirth

1. Been my dream as a kid to be a commissioner, like my uncle via marriage. Carpe Diem-keating.

2. Construction field surveyor, etc. Laid most of the foundations for Sterling Correctional Facilities, while supervising the concrete crews. Numerous other major industrial projects, such as ethanol.

B.S. degree in education with a major in civil engineering from the University of Wyoming in 1979.

3. Vision; handwork; full-time, not a part-time commissioner; fond of research, seeking to get information to get answers for projects like genealogy; current graduation from NX Tele Business Development course.

4. Economic-developing jobs and business, sustainable biodiesel; developing an industrial zone of 40-120 acres in Haxtun for industrial/business development; repair railroad crossings in the county as well as County Road 41 near Venango, Neb.; transparency in government; reverse 911; wellness center; rebuild reserves in social services and capital building funds; and autism awareness.

Harlan Stern

1. I believe that Phillips County has a strong tradition of community spirit. Mona and I have lived in this community for a long time. At this point, I have the time and the opportunity to give back to the community, and being a commissioner will allow me to do that in a meaningful way.

2. I spent 31 years at Holyoke Coop/Grainland. I have also been involved with the Lions Club and nearly 30 ag-related boards in which I have chaired a third of them.

My wife Mona and I have been in Holyoke since 1978.

3. With respect to being a “great” commissioner, I would first like to say that striving to be great may be a difficult standard. However, what I will promise is that if I am elected as a commissioner, I will devote the time that is necessary and use my business knowledge and experience in making decisions that I believe will be in the best interest of Phillips County and her citizens.

4. As with most, if not all, government entities, the important issues for Phillips County are the economy and the budget. These issues are obviously closely related.

As a commissioner, I would emphasize fiscal responsibility. I believe it is imperative for our county to adhere to reasonable budgetary constraints and prioritize our spending accordingly.

Another significant issue for Phillips County concerns the roads. Road improvement and maintenance are obvious necessities but also a significant cost issue for the county. Accordingly, I believe that although roads should be a priority, they must also be addressed with long-term budgetary planning.

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