

WHO'S COUNTING?

577 days to the 2018 elections; Hometown hosts first event

Big announcements were made at the Call for Candidates event for the 2018 election cycle. Hometown, a nonprofit, formerly known as Hometown PAC, hosted its first candidate introductions on Monday night at Salute in Key West.

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Todd German, chairman of Hometown, said he was extremely pleased with the turnout, especially in an off election year. Scanning the beachside crowd, he mentioned the new young faces in the crowd who came out to test the waters. "We hope to host a candidate workshop in the near future," he said.

Here is what emerged regarding various offices and candidates:

KEY WEST MAYOR

Todd German said the open seat has drawn some interest from community members like Wayne Coulter and Randy Becker, who were not present. Those who spoke included Dave Gonzalez and Monroe Holloway.



Craig Cates

The city attorney has found a way for me to run one more time," Craig Cates joked, before clarifying that he has reached the term limit. He urged the community to get involved. "I don't consider myself a politician, but a community servant."



Jimmy Weekley

A big announcement coming from Key West City Commissioner Jimmy Weekley from District 1: "I am not, in no way, shape, or form, running for mayor. Let me just squash that rumor now," he said at the forum.



Dave Gonzalez

"You can't stop what's going to happen to Key West," he said. "But, let's try and slow it down." Dave Gonzalez is a native Conch and currently the curator at Ernest Hemingway House and Gardens. He mentioned that tourism needs to "meld" with the heritage of Key West and that he would be a strategic leader for the community.



Monroe Holloway

Monroe Holloway, a 2003 graduate of Key West High School, said he wants to help out the younger generation in Key West. He cited wages, housing and childcare as important issues. "Our community has always been one to look out for each other," he said. "We need to focus on the key drivers and be the beacon of the One Human Family we speak of so often."

KEY WEST CITY COMMISSION

Sam Kaufman, incumbent, said he will be running again. "I love being on the city commission, and keep an open-door policy," he said, carrying signs he had saved from the last election. "I am all in for 2018."

Oliver Kofoid said he is not officially running, yet, but said "never doubt what small people can do." Kofoid said he loves District 2 and that his commissioner (Kaufman) is doing a good job, but hopes someone will run against him. "If no one does, and my company says it's OK for me to run, then this may be the only time I'll be able to stick it to a lawyer," he said, smiling.



Sunny Andracchio

Sunny Andracchio of Schooner America wasn't sure which district he will be in, but said he loved Key West and the people of the island. "I will always vote for the interests of the people as a whole," he said.

Commissioners Richard Payne and Margaret Romero were not present and no one announced intent to run in either district.

MONROE COUNTY SCHOOL BOARD

Both Bobby Highsmith and John Dick said they will be running for re-election and there were no challengers present. Highsmith spoke of the stability in the school board, while Dick said he was proud that Monroe County teachers are the highest paid in the state.

U.S. HOUSE, DISTRICT 26



Giancarlo Espinosa

Key Wester Giancarlo Espinosa stepped up to speak. Since becoming an American citizen a year and a half ago, he said he's "going all in." Espinosa discussed issues like healthcare, incarceration rates, and bank bailouts. The seat is held by Congressman Carlos Curbelo, who was unable to attend due to Congress being in session.

MONROE COUNTY BOARD OF COUNTY COMMISSIONERS

Monroe County Commissioner David Rice said he will be running for re-election. "I love being on the commission; campaigning, not so much," he said, adding he wants to help plan for the future. As of yet, there are no challengers.

Hometown chairman Todd German said the District 2 seat, which George Neugent will be vacating, will be a hot race to watch. Two people, Chuck Weitzel and Chuck Licis, spoke at the event but have not filed officially.

KEYS ENERGY UTILITY BOARD

Charlie Bradford, Group 5, said he plans to run for the seat he currently holds, and said with the addition of a new seat that will encompass the Lower Keys to have representation through the Seven Mile Bridge, he hopes qualified candidates will step up. "We think it is important to have people on this board that have experience," he said. "The energy board is very serious and it's important to know what it's going on."



Greg Daniels

Greg Daniels said he's looking into running for one of the open seats. As a member of the Keys Energy Advisory Board and a construction coordinator for a local telephone/internet/cable provider, he said he's worked with Keys Energy and has a background to support his campaign.

Walt Drabinski has a 40-year background in the electric industry as an electrical engineer and a management consultant for electric companies. "I can contribute to the energy board and I hope you will support me," he said to the crowd.

Hometown PAC is no longer a political action committee, and is now a nonprofit organization. "Since we don't endorse, there was no reason to remain a PAC," said Hometown Chairman Todd German.