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County commission candidates test waters at forum

TIMOTHY O'HARA Key West Citizen

The upcoming Monroe County Commission races appear to have received the most interest from perspective candidates so far.

The Key West-based voting advocacy group Hometown! hosted its first candidate forum of the 2020 elections on Monday night. The event was the opportunity for incumbents to announce their plans to run again and for newcomers to announce their intentions. Five candidates vying for three seats spoke at the forum.

Monroe County Commission incumbent Heather Carruthers said she had not planned on announcing so early but was encouraged by friends to let people know she plan to run again.

Her competitor Richard Boettger, who writes for the Blue Paper, used the forum to announce his plans to run for Carruthers's seat, which represents a majority of Key West.

Two Upper Keys candidates, Islamorada Councilman Mike Forster and Key Largo businessman Robby Majeska, relayed their intentions Monday to run for the County Commission seat currently held by Tavernier resident Sylvia Murphy, who has said she plans to run again. Murphy did not attend the event.

Former Key West Mayor Craig Cates reiterated his intention to run for the seat currently held Commissioner Danny Kolhage. Kolhage has yet to make a decision, but Cates said Monday that he was not running against the incumbent but running for the seat, which represents east Key West, Stock Island and Key Haven.

There was plenty of indecision announced at Monday's forum. Key West City Commission incumbent Jimmy Weekley and Florida Keys Mosquito Control District incumbent Jill Cranney-Gage both said they had not made a decision about whether they were going to run for their seats. School Board incumbent Andy Griffiths said if people wanted to know whether he was running they can go to his roast Saturday night at Beachside Resort in Key West. The roast is a fundraiser for Take Stock in Children.

Former Key West City Commission Mark Rossi, who ran for mayor two years ago but failed to file the proper paperwork to qualify, attended Monday's forum and was asked by Hometown! board chair Todd German if he plan to run again.

"I have to ask my best friend and partner first" Rossi replied, referring to his wife, Teri.

Despite only being in office for 133 days. Key West Mayor Teri Johnston announced Monday she will run again.

All of the Florida Keys constitutional officers, except Sheriff Rick Ramsay, and every local judge working out of the Key West courthouse and up for election spoke at Monday's forum. Ramsay attended but left before he could speak.

None of those candidates have received challengers so far.

Neither Keys Energy seat incumbent Tim Root nor Peter Batty Sr. attended Monday's forum. Both told The Citizen on Tuesday that they had yet to make a decision about running again. tohara@keysnews.com