

2010 RAVEN SOCIETY CANDIDATE POSITION SURVEY

Please feel free to attach as many pages as are necessary to include your complete answers.

1. Name: **Jim Folts**
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2. Website: **jimfolts.com**

3. For which office are you running?

Commissioner - District 7 - Seat A

4. What is your professional background and current occupation?

I built two high technology companies that, together, employed more than 1000 people. I know how to develop ideas, raise capital, create jobs, make and review budgets, reduce waste, encourage innovative solutions to problems, and get results. Earlier in my career, I held a number of management positions with the General Electric Company. I also served as a Vice President of Perkin Elmer Corporation, a Fortune 500 company at the time.

5. Please list high school(s) attended and any higher education with degrees earned, if any.

Bachelor of Science in Electrical Engineering, plus numerous finance and management courses and seminars.

6. List professional, governmental, community service or other relevant organizational affiliations you have maintained within the past 10 years. List approximate dates of service.

For the last four years, I have been the spokesman for Citizens for Better Government (CFBG), a citizens' organization dedicated to improving government by carefully analyzing County financial reports. Many people assume that the purpose of our work is to expose waste and corruption, but there is a more important aspect of our effort. 'Following the money' shows the REAL priorities of a government. CFBG has shown that in Blount County, there is a real disconnect between the priorities demonstrated by the government, and those of the community. I am also active in church activities and Angel Flight, a group of volunteer pilots who fly seriously ill patients to distant medical facilities.

7. Please comment on how your own background and skills would assist you as an officeholder.

I have a proven my leadership capabilities in building successful businesses. I know how listen to people, define problems, develop ideas, make and review budgets, reduce waste, encourage innovative solutions, and get results.

8. The Raven Society Mission Statement is at the top of this page. Do you support this mission? Why or why not? If elected, what will you do in support of this mission?

I do support the mission of the Raven Society. I will work to make sure the Planning Commission is made up of a real cross-section of County citizens (not just the politically connected), who listen carefully, and follow the law. I will work to stop special exceptions for the "connected few".

9. What do you see as the three most critical issues facing Blount County? Being as specific as possible, please tell us how you will address each of these issues.

1. Debt and spending - The County debt has nearly doubled since 2003, to just under one quarter BILLION dollars. The County debt per person is one of the highest in East Tennessee. Even worse, the debt is made up of a toxic mix of variable rate bonds and derivatives (the kind that billionaire, Warren Buffett, called weapons of financial mass destruction). And, the County must come up with a huge, \$46,000,000, payment next year. I will work to obtain high quality financial advice for the County. I will do the work to ensure the advice is sound. I will help develop an overall long-term debt plan to straighten out the debt mess, before it sends taxes soaring. Many County Commissioners talk about reducing spending, but do not do the hard work, reading and analyzing thousands of pages of budget and audit reports, to make it happen. The result: County spending is up 25%, while inflation was 11% over five years. I have read the County budgets and the audit reports. There is plenty of waste in some county departments. This not only drives your taxes up, it steals money from important areas like schools. I will do the tough work to make sure citizens' hard-earned tax money is used wisely, and not wasted.

2. Jobs and Education - The County has spent more than \$10 million on Industrial Development (job creation) over the last four years. Yet, the County Commission has never held a meeting to solicit new ideas from the public on how to attract more jobs. I will work with the Commission and the Industrial Development Board to make JOBS a top priority. Over the last four years, the Commission has been reducing support for County schools. This year, China will

graduate ten times more engineers than our country. Our children's future depends on improving our educational system quickly. Innovative instructional programs, with measurable results, deserve the support of the County Commission. I will work with the teachers, the school administration, and the School Board to identify these programs and help assure they get funded. 3. Environment and Quality of Life - Balancing individual property rights and the good of the community involves tough choices. Citizens should have a say on these choices. The Planning Commission should be made up of a real cross-section of County citizens, who listen carefully, and follow the law. Once zoning rules are set, they should be enforced for everyone. I will encourage careful listening. I will work to assure that County planning and zoning activities involve a true cross section of county citizens. I will work to stop special exceptions for the "connected few".

10. Rapid development in Blount County has implications for the County budget, as well as for our air and water quality, scenic heritage and community character. If elected, what principles would guide your decisions regarding growth and development?

Common sense dictates that development should only take place where the school, road and utility infrastructure (particularly sewers) can support it. The scenic beauty of our County is precious to all our citizens. These will be my guiding principles in dealing with growth and development issues.

11. Do you support the extension of the Pellissippi Parkway (PPE) from Old Knoxville Highway (SR 33) to US 321?

a. **No**

b. Please explain *why* you support or oppose the extension, including any statistics or studies you may know of which support your opinion.

The school, road and sewer infrastructure does not exist to support the inevitable growth that would result from this extension. Creating that infrastructure would impose a huge additional tax burden on County citizens. I will not support such tax increases.

12. If the PPE is eventually built, how will you address the development pressures this potential new road will bring, including impacts on Blount County's secondary roads, schools, public services, air and water quality?

I do not support the PPE. I will not support any tax increase to build the

infrastructure imposed by this unnecessary project.

13. Which, if any, of the proposals presented by the Growth Management Advisory Committee (GMAC) would you recommend using to raise funds to purchase and preserve green space in the rural parts of the county?

1. Motel and Hotel Tax - This tax was increased in April 2009, to buy 10 acres next to the Townsend visitors center. When this land is paid for, a portion of this revenue could be used to preserve green space. After all, it is the beauty of our surroundings that attracts visitors to our County. 2. Real Estate Transfer Tax - Citizens who are trying to sell their homes in our current, highly depressed market do not need additional tax burdens. 3. Alternative or Option on recording or Transfer Fee - This is probably not viable in the current depressed real estate market for the reasons stated above. 4. Set Aside one cent on the tax rate - In these tough economic times I cannot support a tax increase. 5. Greenbelt Roll Back Taxes - This makes sense because the landholder has been given the benefit of low tax rates. When the land is taken out of greenbelt status for development, new infrastructure costs are imposed on all citizens, unless other offsetting green space is preserved. The only additional qualification, I would add is that the proceeds of any such tax would have to be used to purchase green space land in the SAME Commission District that generated the funds. 6. One half percent increase in the sales tax - In this depressed economy, the citizens do not need another regressive tax. 7. Donation box on property tax bill - Soliciting voluntary contributions to preserve the beauty of our County makes sense. 8. Special License Plate - This is a good way to raise funds toward this goal. 9. Wheel tax - The citizens of the County do not need any new taxes in this tough economy. 10. Windfall Revenue - Any unanticipated revenue must be used to reduce the County debt.

14. If elected, please describe how you would incorporate the Five Guiding Policies of the county's Policies Plan into your own decision-making process.

The Five Guiding Policies are a common sense guide to growth that should serve as a guide to any Commission decisions on planning or zoning matters.

15. What is your vision for Blount County in 20 years?

The County has spent a great deal of money on planning documents aimed at preserving the unique character of our environment. The goals are clear. Now, we must do the hard work of balancing individual property rights with the good of the community, to implement these plans. This effort will only be successful if everyone (not just the politically connected) have a seat at the table. It will be hard, but there is

nothing wrong in Blount County that cannot be cured by what is right with the County - THE PEOPLE OF THE COUNTY. If we are successful, the County will be as beautiful ten and twenty years from now as it is today.