

3 Democrats competing to face NC Rep. Grange

Bauer, Cohen and Shipman looking to move on to November

NEW HANOVER COUNTY — The Democratic primary for the 20th N.C. House District drew three challengers hoping to be selected to move on to face incumbent state Rep. Holly Grange, R-New Hanover.

John Bauer, a former Pender County manager, activist Leslie Cohen and Wilmington attorney Gary Shipman, a former county Democratic Party chairman, all are hoping Democratic primary voters check the boxes next to their names either during early voting, which ends May 5, or on the May 8 Primary Election Day.

Grange won a Republican primary in 2016 against Tammy Covil and assumed office in summer 2016 after drawing no general election opponent.

The position has a base salary of \$13,951 plus \$559 per month for expenses. Members of the General Assembly selected to top leadership positions can earn higher salaries.

1. What is the most important issue facing constituents in the 20th House

District?

Bauer: Constituents don't like traffic jams, over-crowded schools, pollution, nor everblossoming apartments. Population out-paces infrastructure. Folks ask: What can be done to slow growth? Don't we pay enough in taxes to have the capital facilities in place to accommodate the incoming residents? "Growth management" is desired. We live in a great region.

Cohen: Our education system is key to our future. We need a system that prepares our children for the challenges and opportunities they face, but quality education is also an economic issue. If we want to attract good-paying, 21st-century jobs, then we must have the infrastructure to attract them. Businesses look for cities where their employees will want to live, places with strong schools. We need a fully-funded education system with reasonable class sizes, competitive teacher pay, and well-rounded programs. We need to move our schools forward again, and give every child the opportunity to succeed.

Shipman: GenX and funding for public schools. Voters in the 20th House District are left with more questions than answers regarding GenX, due in large part to the failure on the part of the General Assembly to appropriate one penny to the N.C. Division of Environmental Quality to not only independently study the issue but hold Chemours accountable. Taking teacher pay and per pupil funding to the national average is the single most important economic development tool ... to

attract the type of good paying jobs to Southeastern N.C. that will help working families do more than just get along, but get ahead.

2. What would be your first legislative goal if elected?

Bauer: I will introduce a bill to create a public bank. North Carolina expects to spend between \$700 million to \$1.8 billion in interest alone to finance its 2016 \$2 billion bond. If (North Carolina) had its own public bank, it could save over \$300 million in interest, and the bank would earn a profit to support more public projects.

Cohen: I will work tirelessly to fix our election maps and the gerrymandered districts that keep us from having our voices heard in Raleigh. We cannot continue to let our legislators pick their own constituents. I will put forth legislation calling for a state constitutional amendment changing the way that we draw our election maps. We need to address this issue in a permanent way so that we are not repeatedly facing these problems every ten years. Other states have successfully done this and voters of both parties overwhelmingly support fair election maps.

Shipman: Taking teacher pay and per pupil funding to the national average. North Carolina ranks 34th in

teacher pay and 43rd in per-pupil funding. In the past several years the number of personnel per student in public schools has fallen roughly 10 percent, services (including mental health services) for students have been reduced and the number of low-performing schools in the state have increased. The N.C. Legislature will undertake consideration of legislation regarding the funding formulas for our public schools, and in conjunction with that issue, I'll ensure that it also undertakes consideration of teacher pay.

3. What actual, tangible steps could a state representative for the 20th District take on the issue of seismic testing or oil exploration off the Atlantic Coast?

Bauer: We have great coastal resources which the 20th District accesses. The environmental costs of oil exploration off our coast exceed the dollar benefits. We do not need to create the conditions for another Deep Water Horizon oil spill. As the district's representative, I would take whatever legal steps necessary to block seismic testing or oil exploration.

Cohen: The unique shape and characteristics of North Carolina's coastal environments represent an enhanced risk of hazards and spills. Offshore drilling may feel like a federal problem, but we do have options. We can write and enforce appropriate state-level environmental and regulatory standards. Oil and gas development is subject to N.C. legislation, such as the N.C. Oil Pollution and Hazardous Substance Control Act. State legislators can use these tools to help protect us from the devastation caused by oil spills.

Shipman: The N.C. General Assembly has the authority to appropriate funds for the governor to retain outside counsel to bring an action against the United States. Given the cuts to the budget of the N.C. Attorney General's Office and the impracticality of it taking on such important litigation, I'll introduce legislation authorizing the appropriation of funds to retain experienced outside counsel to join other states affected by a plan that threatens the economic vitality of this state in litigation against the United States to stop the threat that this dangerous plan poses.

4. List one way you believe you are different than your primary opponents.

Bauer: A 35-year career as an appointed public administrator. I'm the only one who has produced tangible public goods (including) upgrading facilities (and) successful bond referendums to fund schools' construction, libraries, other facilities. I have managed hundreds of employees and millions of dollars, leaving wherever I worked, better off than when I arrived. I am ready, willing, and able to do the same in the N.C. General Assembly.

Cohen: My opponents and I share many of the same values and the same goals. The difference is our background and our political philosophies. I am the candidate who was asked to run by voters in District 20 because I have been working shoulder-to-shoulder with members of our community to effect change locally, statewide, and nationally on issues that we all care about. I will continue to work closely with voters to take their concerns to the legislature and I expect them to hold me accountable.

Shipman: Experience. I've spent over 35 years as a husband, father, small business owner and lawyer in this county, fighting for the rights, liberties and values of the thousands of people that I've been so honored to represent. Both of my primary opponents are not from this county, and have only recently called Wilmington home. There is no substitute for my experience listening, understanding and acting on the concerns of the citizens of this county. I will not have to learn on the job; I've been on the job.

For more information and to see candidate profiles, visit www.StarNewsOnline.com/news/politics.