

Iler faces Sykes in GOP primary

Brunswick commissioner challenging Iler for NC House seat he's held since 2009

By Makenzie Holland

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BRUNSWICK COUNTY — Brunswick County Commissioner Pat Sykes is challenging incumbent and fellow Republican Rep. Frank Iler for the N.C. House District 17 seat.

Iler has held the District 17 seat since 2009, while Sykes was sworn in for her second term as a county commissioner in 2016. Whoever wins the primary will face Democratic candidate Tom Simmons in November.

Members of the N.C. House, of which there are 120, serve two-year terms and are are paid a base salary of \$13,951, plus \$559 per month for expenses.

Early voting ends May 5 and Primary Election Day is May 8.

How do you plan to address continued concerns over emerging contaminants in the Cape Fear River?

Iler: I, along with my colleagues on the River Quality Committee, have gotten a bill passed unanimously that is awaiting final votes. It will give the Dept. of Environmental Quality (DEQ) an ultra-high resolution mass spectrometer to analyze samples for known and unknown compounds. More action is expected in the short session in May. The particular GenX levels in Brunswick are now in single digits. I plan to support local and state efforts to continue to identify and correct known and unknown contaminants.

Sykes: As a commissioner I have supported the county hiring highly qualified consultants to provide the most economical and effective longterm treatment improvements and hiring legal counsel to seek financial responsibility. As a member of the legislature I will work to ensure that DEQ monitors and enforces all laws and regulations and provide guidance to assist local water providers. I would also assist those utilities impacted by this issue in obtaining state funds for capital improvements.

As the fastest growing county in the state, how do you propose to bring better-paying jobs to Brunswick?

Iler: We on the Transportation Appropriations Committee have already invested in our ports to upgrade and expand their services and our economy. This is helping our

rural areas to export their products to the global market, as well as our cities in importing goods to our retail centers ... Across the county and state, the lower taxes on small businesses are helping them to expand and hire more workers and pay them better. I propose to continue this effort to lower taxes on families and small businesses, and promote industries that add to Brunswick productivity.

Sykes: Rapid growth in Brunswick County has outpaced transportation infrastructure. Economic growth is dependent on the ability to move goods and people easily. To be able to bring industries to Brunswick County or to other areas in the state transportation infrastructure is a must. Industries will locate where there is a trained work force; support of education; and training programs to keep our workforce job ready is essential. At present the corporate tax rate is at 3%, as a state representative I will work to keep the corporate tax low or eliminate the tax to attract industries.

What ideas do you have to address transportation needs in the growing county?

Iler: We have invested heavily in the transportation budget in resurfacing of our primary and secondary roads, as well as bridge maintenance. The county has gotten a large share of that. The opening of I-140 bypassing Wilmington was a time saving boost to our citizens driving north and our visitors coming south. Now we are focusing on the southern connector to South Carolina known as the Carolina Bays Parkway. I plan to continue to work on all this and continue to make sure Brunswick is well represented on these transportation committees.

Sykes: Implementing the transportation plan would be one of my key objectives. Good highways, maintained bridges along with rail are essentials to our growing economy. During my 6 years as county commissioner I have worked well with the Department of Transportation and if elected as a state representative I hope to be placed on the Board of Transportation.

Do you think the state should help pay to maintain Brunswick's inlets?

Iler: Yes. We passed a recent budget that increased the state match for local dredging funds ... We are now looking at alternatives for the state to get more into the dredging business as the federal government and the Army Corps of Engineers is slowing down on meeting the needs of our shallow draft inlets. The dredge material should also be put onto our beaches, when it is beach quality sand. Our inlets are important to our commercial fishing industry, and to the recreational fishermen that enhance our tourism and our economy.

Sykes: Yes, during the 201314, SB 58 increased vessel numbering and titling to provide additional funding for dredging. With these increases and the funds being set aside to maintain the inlets, then the state should provide resources to assist the counties and coastal towns. The coast and inlets are resources enjoyed by the

citizens and visitors of the state. The responsibility for maintenance should not fall entirely upon our local citizens.

Name two challenges you foresee in Brunswick's future and how you plan to address them?

Iler: One challenge is the safety of our children and another is the safety of our water. Brunswick County authorities are doing an outstanding job of school safety, with the Sheriff's School Resource Officer program and other measures. The state and county need to continue to support that, and increase the support. I am fighting for that on the House Select Committee on School Safety and in the budget. The water issue is addressed in a previous answer, but it is a top priority that must be supported by the state immediately in the short session and long term.

Sykes: One of the challenges of a growing county ... is providing fire services ... I am the vice chairman of the fire commission and working with a leadership group to support our fire departments and improve services for citizens. As a member of the House I will work with the county to help bring forth policies (or legislation if warranted) that will improve fire services. Another challenge will be the support of a growing senior population many of whom are veterans ... in the house I will work to protect veteran and senior property tax exemptions and deferments.

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