

Longest-Serving School Board Member Challenged

By Chad Hunter

TIMES RECORD • CHUNTER@SWTIMES.COM

Motivated by his own public education, Fort Smith's longest-serving School Board member faces opposition Tuesday from a candidate whose



Wade



Hanesworth

concerns about the school

system prompted him to run.

Position 4 at-large School Board member Wyman R. "Rick" Wade Jr. will be challenged by Bill Hanesworth in Tuesday's annual school election.

Wade, 69, is the longest-

serving School Board member in Fort Smith history, having joined in 1993. He said that as the only child of a single, working mother, he owes his successes in life to a strong public education and to teachers "who saw

something salvageable in a young boy who otherwise could have gone in a very different direction."

"As a consequence, I strongly believe that it is my obligation to try to do for others," he said. "That

SEE ELECTION PAGE 3A

ELECTION: School Candidates Answer Questions On Issues

CONTINUED FROM PAGE 1A

has been my attitude for the 21 years I have been on the School Board, and it continues to be what motivates me to seek re-election."

Hanesworth, 65, said his decision to run "was personal in that I wanted to understand the things that were impacting my children's education."

"It's hard to separate what is reported and what is actually happening in the school system," he said. "The only way to truly understand is to get involved. Once I began to talk to parents about their concerns regarding the school system, I realized that I was not the only parent with similar concerns."

Wade is an attorney and partner at Daily & Woods PLLC in Fort Smith and assistant city attorney for the city of Fort Smith. Also, he served as city prosecutor from 1992 to 2007, and is an Air Force veteran of the Vietnam War.

Originally from Jacksonville, Fla., Wade holds a bachelor's degree from Florida State University, a master's degree in political science from the University of Arkansas at Fayetteville and a law degree with honors from the University of Arkansas School of Law.

His wife, Rosanne, taught for 28 years, the last several at Ballman Elementary School. He has two daughters who graduated from Southside and Northside high schools.

Hanesworth, 65, is retired from Rheem as vice president general manager and is currently the chief

operating officer at Littlefield Oil in Fort Smith.

Born in Baton Rouge, La., Hanesworth earned a degree in secondary education with post graduate work in administration and finance for nonfinancial managers. He also holds an HVAC certificate from Houston Technical Institute.

He and his wife, Melissa, have a daughter who attends Chaffin Junior High and a son who attends First Lutheran.

Wade and Hanesworth took part in a candidate Q&A, which included a question about the School Board's July vote to phase out Southside High School's Rebel mascot over the next year.

What do you hope to accomplish if elected/re-elected?

Wade: I have been fortunate to be part of a very productive and enthusiastic team of seven board members. Collectively, we have a vision for the future of this district. That vision includes advanced technology and innovative education to carry students into a global economy. While the actual or projected growth of our district will dictate real events, I, personally, will strive to move us toward expansion of our existing facilities as well as development of new facilities to handle what many believe will be the growth of our community in the next 20 to 30 years.

Hanesworth: Improve accessibility and transparency for the community with current and future strategies. Evaluate alternative academic programs that serve the

needs of all students. Highlight opportunities that exist between local businesses, UAFS and the school system to expand learning experiences. Create an environment that encourages involvement. Provide a safe, secure learning environment for all students and teachers.

What are the challenges ahead for Fort Smith public schools?

Wade: Thomas Jefferson said, "If a nation expects to be ignorant and free in a state of civilization, it expects what never was and never will be." As a nation and as a state, we have consciously chosen to educate not just our best and brightest, but all of our children. When those children differ in physical and/or mental ability, differ in spoken language, or differ in home life opportunities, the challenge to educate is immense. But, if we give the real educators, our teachers, the time and the flexibility to do what teachers do best, i.e., teach, we can meet those challenges. As Christa McAuliffe said, with pride, "I touch the future, I teach." Teachers will do their jobs if allowed to do so.

Hanesworth: There are many changes ahead that include decisions on needed investments in buildings and facilities, alternative education programs and budget constraints.

What is your stance on the retirement of Southside High School's Rebel mascot?

Wade: The night our Board cast its 7-0 vote to remove the symbols that

had been adopted in the midst of the Civil Rights era and only a few years after the U.S. Supreme Court's order to desegregate school systems, a large crowd presented opinions pro and con. When some who opposed what we were doing heard the emotional input of others, both black and white, about the negative impact of the symbols on them and/or their children or grandchildren, one could only wonder why you would want to continue with such emotionally divisive symbols for a public high school. As the father of a former SHS cheerleader, I am extremely proud of the accomplishments of SHS's students and will continue to be so — a change in nickname will never diminish those accomplishments or that pride.

Hanesworth: First, I think the process was flawed. The optics of the process have only served to polarize our community. I believe if open communication would occur, there is a possibility to reach an acceptable compromise solution for all.

Polls will be open from 7:30 a.m.-7:30 p.m. Tuesday. Early voting continues through today, then from 8 a.m. to 5 p.m. Monday at the courthouses in Fort Smith and Greenwood.

This year, two of the three School Board seats up for election are contested. Zone 1 position 6 incumbent Russell Owen will face Wade Gilkey. Yvonne Keaton-Martin is running unopposed.

All seats are three-year terms.