
Candidates give thoughtful answers at campus forum

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VICTORVILLE — Five candidates vying for three Victor Valley College Board of Trustees seats fielded questions Thursday night on topics ranging from school security to student diversity and the future of the college.

The forum, sponsored by VVC's Associated Student Body and the Daily Press, took place in the Student Activities Center on campus and featured inquiries written by the ASB and Daily Press.

The following candidates are running in the first by-district election since the college scrapped its at-large system this year: for Area 2, incumbent Joseph W. Brady and retired sheriff's captain Richard Diggs, who was not present at the forum; for Area 4, incumbent Brandon A. Wood and retired data systems analyst Frank West; and for Area 5, incumbent Dennis Henderson and former VVC faculty member and interim superintendent/president Peter Allan.

Following are some of the more pertinent questions asked:

Q: How would you keep VVC safe in light of yesterday's incident?

The topic of security hit close to home as just a day before VVC and Excelsior Charter Schools' adjacent campus were evacuated due to a note found on campus threatening a school shooting.

All three incumbents said they believe that security has improved since prior years when the college first started out with just armed security guards. Now, every police officer is POST-certified, which is the standard for law enforcement agencies throughout the state.

Brady acknowledged that although the department is doing a great job, he felt it was “unfortunate” that certain protocols in place for this kind of incident weren’t used on Wednesday, but he didn’t elaborate.

West said he felt that “thinking outside the box” is necessary to adapt to handle any situation in case those protocols and procedures prove useless in reality.

Allan agreed that safety on campus had improved with Dr. Roger Wagner’s direction in maintaining the police force, but that nothing was guaranteed with an open campus, noting that doors can’t be locked from the inside to keep a possible threat out.

Q: What is the biggest looming threat to community college education?

Brady emphasized a disconnect that students experience between the first day, with the counseling process, and the end product, or when they should graduate. “Half the people take six years and they don’t finish and that’s unacceptable,” he said.

He also said he was concerned with the lack of a good workforce in the High Desert area, and the number of graduates from VVC who leave and don’t end up giving back economically.

West and Henderson also focused on educating students so they are trained for jobs that are available even with market changes. Henderson said the college should “always look to the future” and provide training for those occupations that may be created.

Wood said the biggest threat facing the college were mandated costs being increasingly imposed upon by California. “The state continues to push expenses off on us and they bankrupt us,” he said.

Allan also acknowledged mandated costs as a significant challenge, along with the state creating a statewide, online-only public college that may sway students away from physical campuses.

Q: What is your idea of student success?

“Student success is self-defined,” Wood said. He said he sees it as a student’s happiness with the outcome whether they’re taking a digital photography course to get better with a camera or taking a training class to obtain a better paying job.

In order to contribute to this outcome, he said he believes part of his job as a Trustee is also to “reduce frustration.” He noted that the current construction of the One Stop Student Services Center would definitely help make the process gentler by housing several support services such as counseling, financial aid, and admissions under one building.

Allan agreed with Wood’s self-definition, adding that a student should always have alternative plans in case one intended path didn’t work out and he sees VVC as offering several different options. He said he would focus on students who might not have further education in their plans and focus on programs that would provide “gainful employment” in other avenues.

Part of his plan to ensure student success is to ensure the college’s accreditation, too. Allan said he intends on keeping the college financially stable so it doesn’t slip back into probation like it had years before and find ways to make more revenue than expenses.

Brady said he believed his business acumen as head of a large commercial realty firm would help keep VVC on strong financial footing, acknowledging a “very strong headwind in front of us” that may threaten the college’s forward direction.

He also wants to focus on building a strong workforce in the High Desert by encouraging graduates to stay within the area and contribute to it by reaching out and solidifying stronger relationships with local employers. He sees the tackling of a “huge labor shortage” as a success for students that would significantly improve the community as well.

West reaffirmed his position that students should be trained adequately for the jobs that are in the market currently and in the future. As a former ROP teacher and certified in several fields, he said he knows the value of a technical education and the ability to adapt with changing technology and believes the college should mirror that evolution also.

Henderson expressed the sentiment held by Wood and Allan that a student's success lies in what they expect out of it. In his own experience as an educator, he said he loved "when you're done teaching a class, and you have people that come up to you and say, 'Wow, I really learned something.'"

As the longest serving trustee of the Board, he said he wanted to continue aiding in this mission of provoking these reactions by continuing to push the college in the positive direction he believes it is taking and giving students the opportunity to thrive.