

## Colorado River Tea Party Minutes April 7, 2022

**Jim** called the meeting to order at 6:01 PM

**Cecil** gave the invocation

**Carl** led us in the Pledge of Allegiance

**Jim** read the Mission Statement

**Jim** reminded the membership that on Saturday, April 16 yard signs for your favorite candidate will be available for pick up from 11am to 3pm at the Yuma Civic Center, Ramada # 11 (at the entrance to the parking lot). Volunteers are needed to help disburse the signs.

Our speakers for the evening are the candidates running for Yuma City Council.

**Russ Clark**, our moderator, introduced the following candidates: **Bill Craft, Robert Scarborough, Brandon Freeman, Shanna Bowman, Gary Knight, Edward Thomas, Nicole Wilkinson and Art Morales**. Russ informed the rules for the forum would be a two minute opening statement by each candidate and a one minute response statement for each question.

### **Question #1**

**Do you think the city should help with housing the illegals?**

The consensus for this question was “Absolutely Not” or an adamant **NO!** No candidate was in support of housing illegals. Brendon said “We can’t even house our own people”. Shanna said “We need to develop our lobbying arm in Yuma, this is a Federal problem”. Gary said “Not on my watch, illegal is illegal and they broke the law”. Nicole indicated that Ron Hamm is our lobbyist for the state of Arizona. She works on the border in Calexico and the illegals steal equipment daily. This is a federal problem.

### **Question #2**

**Given the corruption issues we have seen with our last 2 city administrators, how will the incoming council members insure accountability and transparency with leadership?**

Bill, Edward, Art and Robert all basically said we need to select the right people to begin with and have the councilmen meet with the appropriate people to convey their expectations and then match the best candidate. Shanna felt putting time in, reading, being transparent and communicating with staff were important issues and Brandon feels staff doesn’t feel heard by current leadership and we need strong leadership. Gary said he discussed with the mayor that he and the council could be evaluated by city employees anonymously. Nicole said a lack of action and no accountability taken to fire the last administrator when morale was at an all time low.

### **Question #3**

#### **What are your plans to attract new industry since 2015-2017 and we haven't seen anything new since Almark Foods?**

The overall consensus from the candidates is that we need a better educated and degreed work force to draw candidates for what we offer. Gary said Julie Engel with EDC is working with ASU and NAU to add more courses with Bachelor Degrees and also Daniel Corr with AWC. The work force is already here but we need to keep people here through education. Nicole has been involved in working with Almark Foods and the Economic Development Corp (EDC) is too busy not doing their job and needs to look into bringing a second healthcare option for Yuma. Bill felt we need to invest and make it worthwhile to draw big companies and suggested giving up a year or 2 of taxes as an incentive. Robert is not a fan of big business and feels small business drives the economy. Brandon feels we should look at expanding our older companies like what we did with Dole. Art is concerned with education but also protecting our water and resources.

### **Question # 4**

#### **Inflation is nearly 10%. Do we cut expenses or raise taxes?**

All candidates but one were in agreement that we should cut expenses to be fiscally responsible as that is the city council objective and position. Expenses must match revenue. Nicole said there is a need to look at what is essential and what is not. There are overlapping administrator positions that may be non essential. Bill felt somewhere in the middle and in favor of doing both.

### **Question # 5**

#### **A 2% Hospitality tax will be sun-setting during the next council term. Are you in favor of getting this on the ballot?**

All candidates but one felt it was essential to maintain the 2% Hospitality tax to maintain our parks and recreation, arts, tourism, softball and soccer games for our kids. A large percentage of this revenue comes from our visitors who frequent bars, restaurants, hotels, and our golf courses. We need quality of life and economic development in Yuma and it will be difficult to attract new business if we eliminate our parks and recreation programs.

### **Question # 6**

**Our roads are looking like 3<sup>rd</sup> world roads. Will you be in favor of a ½ cent sales tax that can only be used for repair and maintenance of existing city streets?**

Several candidates felt we should make fixing our roads a priority that must be addressed and we have to quit “kicking the can down the road”. Gary and Edward said it is up to the taxpayer to tax yourselves if you want better roads. The last increase was in 1991 and the gas tax has not been raised since. The money would stay in Yuma. Bill said the funds would come from the same account as the increase to pay our police so we either fix the roads or pay our cops. Brandon and Shanna both felt we should get the money from the state.

### **Question # 7**

**YPD has lost many officers. We don't have enough patrol officers, Some crimes are being reported by email and traffic accidents are growing in number. What can council do to give YPD the tool it needs to protect the community?**

All candidates responded that in order to maintain our police force we must pay them what they are worth and competitively in order to keep them in Yuma. Candidates who offered additional suggestions of more time off for quality of life were Art and Brandon. Nicole coupled that with scheduling, mentors, health care and recruit from outside.

### **Question # 8**

**How will you fight for our water rights?**

Most candidates agreed that we have no authority to regulate water rights. Others felt we need to lobby for water rights on a state level. Art felt we needed to get a group together to go to Maricopa county to support our water rights and educate legislators. Gary said we have a water attorney for rights already on the city payroll for city and county. The attorney attends all meetings. We also have a state and federal lobbyist advocating for water issues. Nicole said it goes beyond water rights. We need to be concerned about our water treatment and quality also.

## **2 Minute Opening and Wrap Up**

### **Bill Craft**

**Opening :** Running for reelection for the City Council. Retired military after 20 years service and retired Wells Fargo Mortgage Loan Officer for 20 years.

**Closing Statement:** If you want someone who has the ability to understand budget, unified council and working together, I have been there and done that.

**Robert Scarborough**

**Opening:** Small businessman, Owner Green Trees Grocery Outlet and Furniture Depot. A Constitutional Conservative.

**Closing Statement:** I am a Statesman and will never deviate from what I say.

**Brandon Freeman**

**Opening:** Realtor, small business owner. Attend City Council meetings and an active member in the Yuma community.

**Closing Statement:** I represent ordinary people. I am available, accessible, open minded and I listen to people.

**Shanna Bowman**

**Opening:** Multi generation Yuman. Columbia MBA law degree. Wall Street law firm, Phoenix Attorney, currently with family farming company in business law and everything else involved with farming business. Want to bring large city concepts and experience to help a growing smaller city.

**Closing Statement:** I have a personal agenda to make Yuma nicer and a better quality growing city. Background in engineering and law. My door is always open.

**Gary Knight**

**Opening:** Yuma native. Owned my own business for 32 years. On City Council since 2014. Governor Ducey appointed to State Transportation Board. Contributed to project of widening the road on 95 to YPG. ADOT liaison with Tim Dunn.

**Closing Statement:** Last City Administrator was not my first choice. Retired and will work full time for the City Council. I have been happy in my position as a member of the City Council for the past 8 ½ years. Involved with a new park on 6E and other projects.

**Edward Thomas**

**Opening:** Employed with a federal government agency. Advocate for keeping property taxes low, transparency, fixing our roads, increasing salary of our police force to maintain the force, enforce tax payer money not funding illegals.

**Closing Statement:** I love our city. I will keep property taxes low, use tax payer money wisely, fix our roads, support our police and firemen, no support for illegals.

**Nicole Wilkinson**

**Opening:** I have resided in Yuma for 30 years. Only one of two licensed female architects in Yuma. I am familiar with every department in the City Council.

Construction Manager for Government agency. Covid prompted me to run as I do not support face masks or forced vaccines, we have lost many on board and want to rebuild city staff. I support small business.

**Closing Statement:** I defend the Constitution and I am the only candidate who will wave my salary. I have handled large budgets as an architect, much larger than Yuma's.

### **Art Morales**

**Opening:** Involved with the Chamber of Commerce for 6 years. Commercial Banker with Wells Fargo and I communicate with business owners daily. I take time to focus on the community. I have a 21 year old daughter and a 4 year old daughter and I want both to stay and also grow up in our community.

**Closing Statement:** Yuma is my home. I support military. I choose to stay here and give back to the local community. I have served 10 years supporting the Yuma community and I want to attract companies and give back to local business.

**Jim** motioned that we forego the Secretary and Treasurers reports. Motion was seconded and passed.

**Gilbert** discussed shortage of Precinct Committeemen and the shortage here in Yuma. We have 309 Republican slots to fill and have filled 106. Gilbert has forms tonight to be completed for those interested. The deadline to sign up is April 18<sup>th</sup>. Friday, April 15<sup>th</sup> is the deadline if application is taken to the Republican party headquarters.

**Jim** thanked all of our candidates for their participation in tonight's forum and their informative answers to the tough questions they were given. Jim made a motion to adjourn. Motion was seconded and passed and we all slipped out in the warm spring night.

Respectfully Submitted,

Nikki Pollard

