

Montour County Commissioner Candidate Responses

Ten questions were mailed to all registered candidates for Montour County Commissioner on March 16, 2015. The questions were developed by the Joint Governmental Affairs Committee of the Columbia Montour Chamber of Commerce and Columbia-Montour Visitors Bureau. The following are responses submitted by April 1. Responses have been reformatted only for aggregation and consistency of presentation, but otherwise not edited. The following candidates submitted responses:

Frank J. Dombroski (R)
Dan W. Hartman (R)
Kenneth A. Holdren (R)
Michael Kuziak (R)

The responses from Frank Dombroski and Michael Kuziak have been removed as they are not on the November ballot. Trevor Finn (D) did not submit responses.

1) As a Commissioner, what is the process by which one should gather information and set goals and priorities?

Hartman: One should be involved in and attend as many community affairs as possible, should be well read and aware of Federal, State and Local happenings, opportunities, available grants. It behooves one to poll the public to ferret out the priorities which are most important to the individual townships as well as the entire county. One must then determine which are the most important questions and opportunities relevant to the local government.

Holdren: The success that I have experienced in my business career has been the result of seeking input, being a good listener, evaluating all sides of an issue and then working together to build consensus around the best option to address the opportunity/issue. As a County Commissioner, I will continue to use these personal attributes. I will reach out to my constituents to understand their issues and concerns to work with my fellow commissioners to establish the goals and priorities for Montour County.

2) How do you define “quality of life” for the citizens of the county, and what is the role of the Commissioners in sustaining/improving the quality of life in the county?

Hartman: Quality of life is a broad term which may be best boiled down to a general well being--of individuals and community, including physical, mental, spiritual and social aspects. The Commissioners role is to maintain the current level while attempting to improve the level of health care, employment, leisure activities, family activities and economic status of the citizenry.

Holdren: I define “quality of life” as having an environment where one can enjoy all of God’s beauty and have the opportunity to raise your family without fear of crime or personal harm while providing your children with as many positive opportunities as possible.

Montour County has this environment. Montour County’s strengths are the work ethic of its citizens, world class health care, the proximity of Bloomsburg, Bucknell and Penn State universities the natural beauty of the farmlands, hillsides, Susquehanna River, and low crime rates that make this one of the most attractive counties in the Commonwealth for both economic and population growth. As a fiscal

conservative, I believe maintaining a low tax structure and growing the tax base is the key to the future success of Montour County and my goal as Commissioner will be to sustain/expand the quality of life in the county and bring more growth to the county.

3) Are you in favor of special tax levies to support community assets such as public libraries, nature areas/trails, etc.?

Hartman: When speaking about possible taxes one must tread lightly. My understanding is that the vast majority of the people of Montour County are quite excited about the recreational facilities and sponsored events of the Montour Area Recreational Commission (MARC) and have indicated that they would support hiking trails, the library, etc. The River Towns Race Series has been well attended by people from out of state as well as local participants.

Holdren: I am very supportive of community assets such as public libraries, nature areas and trails. These resources are essential for promoting the right environment for population and economic growth. As a fiscal conservative, my goal as commissioner will be to maintain a stable and low tax base. Using my 37 years of financial management experience, I will seek any and all opportunities to run the leanest, most cost effective county government possible while maintaining the quality of the essential services for the citizens of Montour County. Various organizations have done an outstanding job of developing these resources within the county such as the Montour Area Recreation Committee under Bob Stoudt's leadership and the Susquehanna Greenway Partnerships. As commissioner, I would work with my fellow commissioners to assist these efforts by seeking grant and other public and private funding sources to continue to grow and expand these resources.

4) In your opinion, what are the most important existing economic development assets in the county?

Hartman: Some may not consider it but the work ethic which exists in this area is one of our greatest attributes. I consider it a great commodity unlike that of other areas. Our agricultural heritage and industrial development throughout our history has taught us, who like myself are 7th and 8th generation "locals" how to work, share and give back to the community through service-- and how making an honest living reaps benefits far greater than merely financial independence. With these positive attitudes it is easy to develop greater business, volunteerism and quality of life.

Holdren: Montour County's strengths are the work ethic of its citizens, world class health care, the proximity of Bloomsburg, Bucknell and Penn State universities, the natural beauty of the farmlands, hillsides, Susquehanna River, and low crime rates that make this one of the most attractive counties in the Commonwealth for both economic and population growth.

5) What specific local financial incentives do you think should be used to stimulate responsible economic development? What is the role of the Commissioners in encouraging job growth?

Hartman: Tax break incentives should be offered to local and non-local industry, manufacturing and commercial endeavors to entice corporations to locate in the area. Financial institutions should offer reduced interest rates for new business construction and expansion. Federal, State and local grants should be obtained to promote commerce.

Holdren: Encouraging job growth is one of the most important roles of the commissioner. If elected commissioner, I would work with my fellow commissioners and the various economic development

authorities to use any incentives that make economic sense for all the citizens of Montour County.

6) Do you support the growth of natural gas drilling and distribution in the region?

Hartman: It's interesting to see the position of those who will not benefit financially from natural gas drilling versus those who do benefit from the drilling. "Not in my back yard" seems to raise its head in reference to the drilling. We all like the benefits, increased quality of life and additional income that domestic fuels afford, however when it interferes with our health and well being it creates quite a dilemma. Proponents from both sides have made statements which seem quite contrary. Those in favor of speak of the number of possible jobs which is quickly refuted by those opposed. The additional employment would be well received but with the positive comes the negative.

Holdren: Yes, I support the growth of natural gas drilling and distribution in the region as long as it is achieved while ensuring that the natural resources of Montour County are maintained including the natural beauty water quality of the region.

7) Please share your views on the optimum approach to developing tourism in the county and how strategic, long-term investment of the county's portion of room tax revenue could support this effort.

Hartman: I feel that MARC and the Columbia-Montour Visitors Bureau has done an exemplary job in promoting tourism. I will push for additional events for Montour County. I personally enjoyed (among other events) the Destination Blues Music Festival, will be there again in 2016 and hope to bring similar attractions to the area. There are many events which need to be promoted by the Commissioners in both counties through testimonials, advertising and public announcements in the local papers, radio and television. Promotions to offer a few passes to local and non-local residents sponsored by local businesses, restaurants and motels could bring additional revenue to the area.

Holdren: I support developing tourism in the county. The ColumbiaMontour Visitors Bureau and the Montour Area Recreation Committee have done an outstanding job of developing and growing tourism in the County. If elected commissioner, I would work with my fellow commissioners to ensure that the county's portion of room tax revenue continues to be utilized in the most cost effective way possible with the best return on investment for the county.

8) In what areas should there be consolidation or municipal cooperation within the county/region (i.e. municipal services, human services, zoning, corrections, etc.)? Do you feel the number of local municipalities are necessary to adequately provide services and local representation?

Hartman: It is important to build on the strengths and eliminate weaknesses of each entity or authority. I do believe that some mergers would benefit the entire region. It appears as though the merger of the Columbia and Montour County Domestic Relations Offices has been successful. I would like to see more regionalization when economically and logistically logical. Some areas will be insurmountable because of egos. But there may come a time when merger is the best approach. We see it in the corporate world all the time. I feel that all avenues should be explored and if it is a win/win situation I don't see why we shouldn't take advantage of cutting expenses and improving services. The commissioners are currently looking into a merger of transit for the counties and I understand that the Columbia County Commissioners are amenable.

Holdren: I support the efforts that have already been initiated by the commissioners of Montour and

Columbia counties to investigate potential areas for the consolidation of services. At Geisinger, I led the consolidation of services in a number of areas. My approach was to evaluate the service, identify the opportunity for savings and then develop the plan including a customer service agreement to ensure that the end users needs were met. I believe a similar approach would work well for these services as long as the needs of the citizens of Montour County were not put at risk in any manner. At this time, I do not have an opinion on the number of local municipalities. This is a broad issue that would require more study and analysis.

9) Should the county engage in more public/private partnerships to provide services and growth opportunities? If so, can you give examples where this approach now works well and/or would work well?

Hartman: Laissez faire. I understand that the Federal government had little choice but to step in when GM declared bankruptcy in June of 2009 and the need to take some ownership in Citicorp, AIG, Fannie Mae, etc.—HOWEVER it is a slippery slope when the government utilizes tax payer money to bail out private practice. When they do step in the government should restructure these entities to assure the greater good for the public—and get out of ownership/control as soon as financially possible. Local county government has little wherewithal to get involved and I know of no other examples that work or would work well.

“A 1998 Congressional Joint Economic Committee study concluded the optimal size of government to maximize economic growth was about 18% of gross domestic product. Even before today’s unprecedented debt and spending, all levels of government in the U.S. controlled 37% of GDP. Recent federal spending will drive up government’s share to more than 40%. A single federal health-care plan would gobble up another 16%, putting more than 50% of the economy in government’s hands.”*

*From Business Week, May, 2009; Byron Schломach, Goldwater Institute

Holdren: I believe the county should engage in more public/private partnerships to provide services and growth opportunities. At Geisinger, I worked with Bucknell and Evangelical Health Systems to develop a better approach for providing better student health care on Bucknell’s Campus. I believe these type of opportunities for public/private/academic partnerships exist to provide services to the citizens of Montour County. If elected commissioner, I would work with my fellow commissioners to explore these opportunities.

10) What do you see as the county’s role in flood protection and mitigation and what efforts would you pursue as commissioner in these areas?

Hartman: Traditional approaches have seemed to shift the damage from flooding rather than mitigate the damage. The county’s role is to determine what areas are affected by flood waters and seek funding to develop elimination of future damage I would seek help from any means available, FEMA, IFM, etc. There are some programs available through FEMA that when instituted can decrease flood insurance premiums. It would also be advantageous to mitigate the loss of real estate values in flood zones because of the increased flood insurance premiums. Climate change is out of our control however increased population pressures could be managed through the county and the maintaining of the ecosystem and mitigation of its degradation can help eliminate some of the flooding.

Holdren: The county has a very important role in flood protection and mitigation. As commissioner I would continue to seek cost effective ways to build on the work that has already been done to enhance

flood control and protection for Montour County.