

Emmert announces bid for Horsepasture seat

J.B. Emmert

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A thriving and progressive area is J.B. Emmert's vision for Henry County and Martinsville.

Emmert, 64, of Preston, announced Friday that he will challenge incumbent Debra Buchanan for the Horsepasture District seat on the Henry County Board of Supervisors in the Nov. 6 election.

"There comes a time in our lives when we stop to look around us and see things in a different light and in a different way," Emmert said. That time came for him recently, and has prompted him to run for the office.

"After being approached by members of my community, talking to them and looking at the county as a whole, I see a desperate need to change the shape and image" of Henry County, he said of a change that is "essential to preserve what we have for our children and for generations to come."

To that end, Emmert believes it is "vital that Henry County and Martinsville work together for the benefit" of residents.

Together, the localities can better address the economic needs of both areas and return to the glory days "when furniture and textile industries were king" of the local economy, Emmert said.

Several state and federal projects in the works can help accomplish that growth, he said of efforts on education, transportation, economic development, conservation and tourism.

The Bristol, Tenn., native moved to Martinsville in 1969. He taught school for 10 years and has spent the past 27 years in automotive services.

"My father was an elementary school principal in Tennessee and I'm married to a school teacher," Emmert said. "I believe in education very strongly" and is "extremely interested" in the continued progress of local education.

To that end, he believes the two localities "should work with the local school systems, Patrick Henry Community College and the New College Institute ... and use these

scholastic centers to promote our community image” and breathe new life into the area.

On Interstate 73, which is proposed to pass through Henry County as part of its route from Detroit, Mich., to Myrtle Beach, S.C., “we need to be aggressive and follow up with our state and federal officials and the Virginia Department of Transportation (VDOT) to ensure this project is being pursued as strongly as it can be,” Emmert said.

On completion of the U.S. 58 widening project west of Stuart, “we need to work with the counties west of us and VDOT to see what can be done to get this project finished,” he said.

As the only county where I-73 and U.S. 58 will intersect, “and considering the shipment of goods coming due west from the ports of Norfolk,” Emmert said the area is poised to “become the center of a logistical hub from which goods can be distributed north, south and west.”

To maintain the current business base, “we should work with our local businesses ... (and) listen to their needs,” Emmert said.

“When they want to create new jobs” and/or expand, he said existing businesses should be helped “as much as outside companies” considering relocating to Martinsville and Henry County because the existing businesses are “are committed and trying to keep jobs here, not ship them offshore.”

Promoting the use of the Blue Ridge Airport and its future expansion goes along with supporting local businesses, Emmert said.

Conserving natural resources also ranks high on his list of priorities, with “assets such as the Smith River, Philpott Lake, the Mayo River and the state parks and forests” enhancing the quality of life for local residents and attracting tourists.

Emmert also said he believes there is room for a city and a county, each able to help make the other stronger.

“We need to work toward a stronger community, so Martinsville can remain a city and not have to become a town,” he said.

One of the most important skills Emmert said he will bring to the post is listening.

“There’s an old saying, ‘Listen to the trees, they’ve been here a long time,’” he said. “Maybe we should say, ‘Listen to our people ... They’ve been here a long time, too.’”

Elected officials “should communicate with the voter, listen” to the voter “and stop promoting private agendas,” he said.

Emmert and his wife, Susan, have been married for 34 years and have two sons, Jason Emmert and Justin Emmert.