

Parris asks for earlier council meeting time

By **BOB WILSON**
Valley Press Staff Writer

LANCASTER — Mayor R. Rex Parris is asking the City Council to consider re-arranging how and when it meets.

"What I see as a problem is we have people making decisions that affect all of your lives in ways that you oftentimes don't appreciate," Parris told residents at the council's May 13 meeting. "Those decisions are sometimes being made at 10 or 11 o'clock at night by people who get up sometimes at 5 o'clock in the morning," Parris said. "That makes no sense to me."

"What I want to do is figure out a way where we can start the meetings earlier in

the afternoon and then have the public comment later in the evening, so we can get rid of the two hours where people aren't going to be commenting," he said. "It seems to me that you folks don't want to sit here for two hours listening to a bunch of nonsense to get to the part you wanted to comment on or wanted to be involved in."

"I don't want evergreen contracts being voted on at 11 o'clock at night, and I don't want decisions that lead to recalls being voted on at 11 o'clock at night when people are not functioning as best as they can," Parris said. "I'm trying to increase the ability of all of us to make better decisions."

Residents Scott Pelka and Cleo Goss

said they were opposed to scheduling the council's meetings for an earlier time.

Pelka said he was opposed because people who work outside the Antelope Valley already have a difficult time arriving by the council's 6 p.m. start time.

Vice Mayor Ron Smith said adjusting the council's schedule "could be appropriate now that we are on the Internet and streaming and since we are on the television, assuming they can get cable."

"If we started all the business and the awards and the boilerplate ... and give people an opportunity to be able to make their comments at 6 o'clock rather than 10 o'clock, then there is some merit to this

item," Smith said.

Those who want to comment on an action item on the council's agenda also may contact the city via e-mail, he said.

City Attorney Dave McEwen suggested allowing residents to comment through the city's Web page as well as by e-mail.

When alerted to a resident's interest, an item from the council's early agenda could be held for comment by the public and a vote under the later agenda, Parris said.

Goss said she would be "very disappointed if I couldn't hear all the comments on all of the agenda items" being considered.

"If you want to do your awards at a different time, that's perfectly fine. I can't get

here any sooner than the time I already arrive, and I cannot spend my time at work e-mailing you," Goss said. "So I would very much oppose a change in time."

Councilman Ed Sileo said most cities start meetings between 5 and 7 p.m. If the council conducted a portion of its meeting during the afternoon, it would conflict with his employer's work schedule, Sileo said.

"Tell me what you are able to do and what you think is appropriate," Parris said.

The mayor said he would consider all comments made "and come up with a suggestion for a future council meeting."

bwilson@avpress.com

Debate for Assembly seat highlights differences

By **CHARLES F. BOSTWICK**
Valley Press Managing Editor



PALMDALE Republican 36th Assembly District candidates Steve Fox, Stephen Knight and James Ledford agreed on cracking down on illegal immigration, restricting where registered sex offenders may live, opposing gay marriage and allowing responsible, law-abiding citizens to carry guns.

But, at an election debate Monday night, Ledford and Knight clashed over campaign mailers, with Ledford demanding that Knight disavow a California Republican Assembly mailer Ledford said was inaccurate and Knight saying he had nothing to do with the mailer and that Ledford sent out his own mailer inaccurately criticizing Knight.

All three candidates disagreed over who has the proper experience to best represent the Antelope and Victor valleys in Sacramento.

"I have more experience, more knowledge, more ability to grasp these issues," said Ledford, Palmdale's mayor since 1992 and, before that, a councilman and planning commissioner.

"I have been a police officer for almost 18 years. I have experience at making a decision in a split second," said Knight, a Palmdale

councilman since 2005.

"I've been in office longer than the other two combined," said Fox, an Antelope Valley College trustee who formerly sat on the Antelope Valley Hospital board and, before that, on the West Los Angeles County Resource Conservation District board.

Campaigning for the Assembly seat from which Sharon Runner must retire because of the state's term-limits law, the three faced off Monday night in a 90-minute forum presented by the Palmdale Woman's Club and moderated by Antelope Valley Hispanic Chamber of Commerce president Sylvia Duarte. Club leaders plan to conduct a forum for Democratic candidates Linda K. Jones and Maggie Campbell before the June 3 primary election, but no date has been set.

Fox, Knight and Ledford said illegal immigration hurts California's schools, hospitals and state budget deficit. They said the state's government should do nothing to make illegal im-

migrants more welcome, such as giving them driver's licenses.

"There has to be a change in attitudes. They have broken the law and they have to face the consequences of going back," Knight said.

Knight said: "I have no problem telling a family, 'Your child can stay; your child is an American citizen.' We're going to take care of him somehow. But you're going to have to go."

Fox said California should empty its prisons of illegal immigrants and send them back to their home countries. American troops should be brought back from Iraq and stationed along U.S. borders, he said.

"We've got to go step by step and show that we're serious," Fox said.

Ledford said American businesses must wean themselves of dependence on cheap labor supplied by illegal immigrants. Illegal immigration crowds schools and reduces job opportunities for young Americans, he said.

"Anywhere you want to mention, I believe our country is better off if we develop an Americans-first policy," Ledford said.

Ledford added: "I agree with everything we're all saying. It's a matter of how you're going to push

See **DEBATE** on A5



FIELDING QUESTIONS — Republican Assembly candidates for the 36th District had a debate Monday, evening presented by the Palmdale Woman's Club. Candidates are, from left, Steve Fox, Steve Knight and Jim Ledford.

RON SIDOLE/Valley Press

Board delays response on alleged remarks

By **JULIE DRAKE**
Valley Press Staff Writer

PALMDALE — Members of the Antelope Valley Human Relations Task Force will have to wait at least one more month to hear an official response from Eastside Union School District trustees regarding alleged sexist and racist remarks from one board member to another.

In April, an unidentified Eastside trustee complained to the task force that a fellow trustee referred to female trustees as "girls" who follow his directions and also said African Americans are only good at sports, according to a task force official.

After an investigation, task force President Darren Parker said the group would recommend Eastside trustees undergo diversity and sensitivity training. He also asked that trustees attend Monday's meeting to report what measures the board took to address the complaints.

Eastside President J. Altin Ginn was expected at Monday's meeting, but he was in Sacramento on a lobbying trip, Parker said.

"Unfortunately, most of the members of the board could not be with us tonight," he said. "They made every effort to try to get down here, at least most of the members that were absent."

Eastside trustee Shawntrice Watkins, who also is a task force member, said on an individual basis she appreciates the task force's efforts.

"Being part of the board, I hope that we can work with this task force to get some of these

issues at Eastside addressed and come up with some solutions that will benefit everybody in the Antelope Valley," Watkins said.

After Parker informed the board of the allegations at Eastside's April 28 meeting, the board immediately met in closed session and discussed the allegations.

Parker asked Watkins, without going into details, if she could provide the task force with the outcome of that meeting.

"The resolve was to work with the task force, not to speak about closed-session items, but it is to work with the task force," Watkins said.

Watkins, who was elected in November, said it's important to remember that she is new to the board and that they are used to taking care of issues among themselves.

"The diversity that's among the board right now, we definitely need some training on how to address other people of different backgrounds..."

"The diversity that's among the board right now, we definitely need some training on how to address other people of different backgrounds..."

— Shawntrice Watkins, Eastside Union School District trustee

"We sincerely, need training in that to be effective as a school board."

Parker said he believes the issue should be handled under the Brown Act to give trustees the opportunity to address the issues within its own structure. He said after the initial complaint became public, the task force hot line received several more complaints and concerns from teachers and parents.

"We are very concerned with the parents and teachers that we're hearing from in the school

district, so it lets us know there's something there that needs to be brought to the attention and a cure thus applied," Parker said.

The task force also heard from Ryan Hensley, a member of the Eastside Teachers Association, who said there have been inappropriate closed-door comments made to staff members.

"I've personally seen some of the board members treating other board members inappropriately and heard things that were inappropriate, and other people have felt that way, too," said Hensley, who characterized the comments as racial and sexist.

Parker said the task force has the resources and the tools to grow from such situations once they are recognized and the willing parties want to move forward.

He said he has offered Eastside trustees the Anti-Defamation League and the Museum of Tolerance as references.

Antelope Valley Union High School District trustee Donita Winn also told Watkins to let her know if the high school district could provide any help.

"I hope that the board is moving toward diversity training, some sensitivity training," Parker said.

Parker said the task force's credibility lies in ensuring that all of the individuals involved in a conflict have the right to testify to the group, so he deferred the issue to the task force's next meeting on Monday, June 16.

"Issues like this we believe should not fester in the community because they gain their own energy," Parker said. "We would like to see a quick resolve, or at least the efforts to move forward, something that is concrete and specific."

jdrake@avpress.com

JetHawks game to honor AV Best firms

Valley Press

LANCASTER — The Lancaster JetHawks and the Boston Red Sox organization are taking this year's top Antelope Valley businesses and their owners out to a ballgame.

The JetHawks will honor the 120-plus Antelope Valley Press 2008 AV Best winners prior to tonight's game at Clear Channel Stadium.

For more than 15 years, the Valley Press has honored area businesses and business leaders who strive to be the best of the best in quality, service and commitment to their customers.

Hundreds of businesses, professions and services in the Valley take part in this annual survey because they know competition is great, and Valley Press readers' opinions raise the bar among competitors.

AV Best winners were featured in the April 16 AV Best special section, distributed to readers inside the Valley Press.

The annual special edition is divided into numerous categories — Best Business



& Money, Best Home, Garden & Family, Best Services, Best Shopping, Best Food, and Best Entertainment.

Like the television, music and movie industry awards, AV Best is the People's Choice Awards of Antelope Valley businesses. Each winning business was voted AV Best by Valley consumers.

The businesses will be honored by the Red Sox organization and JetHawks General Manager Brad Seymour on the field prior to the 7 p.m. baseball game against the Stockton Ports.

For details, call the JetHawks at (661) 726-5400.

Showdown Rodeo kicks off