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### **Candidate Questionnaire**

#### **Monroe County Commissioners - District 3**

### **About DFMC**

Democracy for Monroe County (DFMC) is a political action committee dedicated to recruiting, training, and supporting fiscally responsible and socially progressive candidates at the local and state levels. DFMC is part of a nationwide coalition of grassroots groups allied with Democracy for America, the political action committee inspired by the presidential campaign of Howard Dean. We meet every first Thursday of the month. For more information about our organization, visit our website below:

[www.democracyformonroecounty.org](http://www.democracyformonroecounty.org).

*DFMC: Building and training the progressive grassroots.*

**Please return this questionnaire to [chair@democracyformonroecounty.org](mailto:chair@democracyformonroecounty.org) by Monday, March 21<sup>st</sup> either in written form at our forum on that date, or send it to [robertdeppert@gmail.com](mailto:robertdeppert@gmail.com) and to [wellsec01@bluemarble.net](mailto:wellsec01@bluemarble.net).**

## **About You**

Name: John Whikehart

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Website (if available): whikehartforcommissioner.com

List of your support or campaign committee members: Attachment to questionnaire

**Question 1:** Why are you running for office?

I have spent my working career in public service positions: teaching in elementary through high school, working in the Monroe County Community Action Program, working in municipal and state government at administrative levels, directing one of the largest campuses of Indiana's community college here at Bloomington, serving as deputy mayor, and volunteering on 30 local non-profit and governmental boards and commissions... including the Foundation for Monroe County Community Schools, Bloomington Public Transit Corporation, Bloomington Utilities Service Board, Region 8-Workforce Board, Bloomington Board of Public Safety, and Monroe County Redevelopment Commission. I chaired a Monroe County United Way fundraising campaign, an American Heart Association Gala, and a Wonderlab annual fundraising event. As chancellor at Ivy Tech, I founded the first civic engagement initiative in the college's entire system. The model is based on instilling a sense that community service is a responsibility of the faculty, staff and students of the campus. I continuously "preached" that we owe something back to our communities through service. It wasn't empty rhetoric, and I believe that I still have a responsibility for service to Monroe County, which is our home. Iris Kiesling's decision to not seek re-election provided an opportunity to continue my commitment to service. I also pledge to serve as a full-time commissioner, because it's a full-time commitment on my part.

**Question 2:** List your political experience (here and elsewhere), including any grassroots activity in which you participated or led.

My first political campaign was the spring of my freshman year at IU-Kokomo when I became involved in the campaign of a Democratic candidate for county recorder, going door-to-door and working on GOTV efforts. As a junior at IU-Bloomington, I joined the Students for Kennedy campaign in the spring of 1968, and was among a group of students who traveled to Indianapolis on week-ends, going door-to-door on Saturdays, sleeping on the floor of Brebeuf gym on Saturday nights, and going door-to-door again on Sundays. As a recent IU graduate and then teacher in Indianapolis, I was a precinct committeeman and later a ward chairman for the Marion County Democratic Party in the suburb of Lawrence. When I returned to Kokomo to work in the city administration of a Democrat mayor, I was elected county chairman, where I served from 1982-1988, and was elected by the 28 county chairs and vice-chairs of the former 5<sup>th</sup> District to chair it from 1986-1991, when I served on the Indiana State Democratic Central Committee. I was elected as delegate to the several state conventions, and was an elected delegate to the 1988 national convention in Atlanta. Since returning to Bloomington in 2001, and while serving as Ivy Tech chancellor, I was a donor to Democratic candidates and co-hosted an event for John Gregg and Vi Simpson in 2012. In 2015, Linda and I served as one of the co-chairs of John Hamilton's campaign for mayor.

**Question 3:** In what way(s) do you consider yourself socially progressive?

I have been a proud Democratic liberal my entire college student and adult life. I never shrank from the term, even when it was not popular to embrace it. I was an anti-war protestor as an IU-B student in the 1960's, I came back to Bloomington to work in the former Monroe County Community Action Program Head Start and CETA programs in the 1970's, I added programs for employee and student mental health counseling to three different regional campuses in my 24 years at Ivy Tech, I repeatedly advocated (but unfortunately, not successfully) for expanding health benefits to domestic partners at Ivy Tech statewide, I actively opposed HJR 3 as chancellor at Bloomington, I actively supported the creation of "Campus Pride"...a student organization for LGBT students...at our Bloomington campus...the only one in the entire state system. I supported the addition of an environmental student organization, and of service learning projects for students in our science courses to support local clean water initiatives. In 2012, I was the recipient of the City of Bloomington's MLK Commission, "Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. Legacy Award". Most importantly, I have been a life-long advocate for recognizing that education, including early education, is a way in which we can break cycles of poverty and unemployment. I have lived that commitment in my career be it in Head Start, CETA, or as the chancellor of a progressive community campus in a conservative community college system environment. Under my leadership, our campus introduced arts programming at Fairview School, and provided free scholarships to our Ivy Arts for Kids programs for children on free and reduced lunch. Research demonstrated that the introduction of arts activity at early grades, including pre-school, improves reading, math and writing skills. Introducing these programs at early ages, and having families have success in bridging the gap to "college", makes the goal of college more attainable. The education and job skills, especially for first generation college students (as I was), can break cycles of poverty and unemployment.

And if passing along good genes helps define who I am, I am very proud that my youngest son, just elected to the city council at-large at Kokomo this past November, successfully sponsored the ordinance that extended LGBT rights to the Kokomo human rights ordinance this past month. It was a 5-4 vote, but he championed it and got it done.

**Question 4:** Describe your ideas for engaging citizens in more active participation in our community and our government.

As stated, I founded the civic engagement initiative and goal for the Ivy Tech Community College-Bloomington campus. I emphasized to students, faculty and staff that political participation was community service. In my service on 30 local boards and commissions, I have formed relationships with many individuals and leaders in the education, business and non-profit communities. I have practiced community openness and inclusion as chancellor of the Ivy Tech campus. Our O'Bannon Institute for Community Service events (now in its 13<sup>th</sup> year) is a free-to-the-public annual event where attendees hear and discuss numerous issues related to community concerns. I know how to conduct such outreach and engage citizens in active community participation. I have been a regular guest on local radio programs advocating for engagement with the college and the city, and would want to continue to do so as a commissioner.

**Question 5:** Do you pledge to publicly support all Democratic Party nominees, including your primary opponent(s), should he/she prevail in the May Primary Election?

Yes, of course.

**Question 6:** Do you believe the “Open Door Law” should be followed when conducting public policy (Yes or No)? If yes, what are your specific plans to make sure that the “Open Door Law” is followed and adhered to?

Yes, of course. Every meeting of the commissioners must not only be legally advertised and strictly followed regarding the “Open Door Law”, but we must make additional attempts using earned media opportunities as described above to make the public aware of meetings. We must also always be willing to examine our formal meeting time and location to make it as accessible as possible.

**Question 7:** Should “Staff Time Meetings” which occur on Tuesdays at 2:00 pm be changed to early evenings so that the working public can actually attend and participate in public policy decisions; and, should CATS (Cable Access Television Services) be allowed to film those meetings and broadcast them on TV? Explain how you will make our county government more open and transparent?

As previously stated, I am open to discussing and evaluating with the other two commissioners whether the schedule for the commissioners formal Friday meetings could be changed to early evenings for greater public access. Staff meeting times may have financial impact on the county if meetings held outside the regular workday, with participation from county employees, would have overtime pay consequences for departments. The staff meetings may also be times when personnel issues, and privileged discussion with county attorneys may occur, which may make CATS broadcasting inappropriate.

**Question 8:** What experiences do you have in communicating with business leaders about making their businesses more economical for both them and for our community? How will you bring in new businesses that pay good, living wage salaries, without using a Tax Abatement, or using a TIFD (Tax Incremental Finance District)?

I served on the board of directors of both the Greater Bloomington Chamber of Commerce (2001-2007) and the Bloomington Economic Development Corporation (2001-20014). I have relationships with business and elected leaders throughout our community, but additionally have created them in the other 7 counties served by Ivy Tech-Bloomington’s extended service area. I have been involved in numerous discussions in support of increasing the minimum wage, and providing job skills training to meet workforce needs and employ area residents. I support higher wages for employees, and support making wages a component of any incentive provided for attracting new business. Attraction is only one component. Retention and expansion of existing businesses, though not as attention grabbing as new business location, are as important if not more so. To be competitive, tax abatements are now a reality as a tool in the economic development toolbox. We cannot be competitive with other communities in Indiana and in other states if we are not willing to consider them. I supported them as a member of the Monroe County Redevelopment Commission. I would also be hard pressed to argue against using TIFD funding in support of improvements, when as chancellor at Ivy Tech I successfully advocated for their use in construction of the Indiana Life Sciences Building and the Marchant School of Nursing addition to our Bloomington campus. The result of those two investments has been skills training for local jobs in the health care and life science fields. Many of our life science graduates are former GE workers who cycled in and out of lay-off situations, and are now fully employed with companies such as Cook Pharmica, Bioconvergence and Baxter, all of which are in the same westside area served by the TIF.