

J. W. “Bill” Ramsey, 75, and Greg Leding, 32, seek the Democratic nomination for state representative in House District 92 in the primary on May 19. The candidates responded to questions submitted to them. Their answers follow:

1. What three or four other issues — besides education and job creation, issues that have been supported during the campaign by both candidates — do you think are important to the voters in District 92? What will you do on these issues?

Leding: I feel voters in District 92 care a great deal about equality, our environment, and our economy. We’ve seen strong support from this district for issues like the Equal Rights Amendment and the Arkansas DREAM Act, and strong opposition to issues like Initiated Act 1, a recently struck-down law aimed at preventing same-sex couples from becoming foster parents.

I’ll work to continue the fight to pass the ERA. I’ll work to help make the Arkansas DREAM Act a reality, and I’ll work to ensure equality for our LGBT (lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender) community.

I’ll work to introduce more of the recommendations set forth in the report prepared by the Governor’s Commission on Global Warming.

I’ll work to protect our state’s water and to prevent construction of new coal power plants.

And I’ll work to help small businesses by streamlining the permitting process. I want to see more invested in research and development at the University of Arkansas so that we can continue to attract new jobs and keep more graduates here in Fayetteville.

Ramsey: 1. I think we have to include job retention. Fully 80 to 90 percent of new jobs come from employers that are already in the community. This applies to all businesses, both large and small.

Maria Haley, director of the Arkansas Economic Development Commission, continually stresses the importance of job retention and I agree.

2. Infrastructure Needs, Present and Future. If we do not address infrastructure needs, we are in danger of “choking on our own growth.” I favor looking at alternative transportation and including trails and sidewalks in our future transportation plans but we must take care of existing needs, in the meantime.

Arkansans love their automobiles and we must continue to educate and encourage car pooling, transit and study light rail as we look to the future. We need to sustain our growth and increase our revenue for the city by continuing efforts to gain better access to our mall/Washington Regional Medical Center / Steele Crossing area since this is where our major source of sales tax revenue comes from.

3. Arts and Entertainment: Fayetteville leads the region, if not the state, in this category. No one else has Dickson Street, Walton Arts Center, Fayetteville Farmers Market, First Thursday, 540 Film Fest, and the list goes on and on. Fayetteville is unique in this category and we must keep it that way. I am currently active with the Creative Economy Action Group, Seedling Film Association, 540 Film Fest and others. I have some specific plans for legislation here as well as continuing the good job of funding that the incumbent has done.

4. Sustainable Business Development: Fayetteville has an opportunity to become the “epicenter” of the sustainability movement and will become “Green Valley,” in my estimate.

We are already seeing evidence of this and with our Innovation Center, Genesis, and our Research Institution, the University of Arkansas, along with Walmart leading the movement, I don’t see how we can fail. We will have an opportunity to stop the “brain drain” and provide jobs for our graduates.

2. Why do you think you are best qualified?

Leding: I’m better qualified to represent District 92 because my views align much more closely with the prevailing politics of our district. I’ve got energy, determination, and I’m eager to be an outspoken advocate of progressive issues.

When voters established term limits, they did so to prevent a legislator from serving more than six years, and they were smart enough to know that in doing so, they would occasionally need to elect someone who had never before done the job.

Any good legislator never stops learning, and in a time where many of today’s top jobs didn’t even exist 10 years ago, learning on the job isn’t a weakness; it’s essential to success.

Ramsey: My biggest strengths are my wealth of experiences. I previously served in the Arkansas House for 18 years, before term limits. My previous seniority puts me at the front of the freshman class, if elected, and enables me to pretty much pick my committee assignments. I have lived the life of folks in District 92: I have been a small business owner, am a property owner, military veteran of the U. S. Air Force, husband/father/grandfather, community leader, young professionals advocate, arts/film advocate, transportation advocate, consultant, etc. I currently serve on a number of boards and commissions/councils: Fayetteville Community Foundation, Arkansas Good Roads and Transportation Council, NWA Naturals Advisory Board, Secretary of State’s Business Advisory Council, Bikes Blues & BBQ Board, as well as numerous past positions of leadership.

3. Why should voters pick you instead of your opponent?

Leding: Voters have a genuine choice to make in the race to represent District 92. I feel my views, goals, and politics are a much better match for our progressive district than those of Mr. Ramsey, who's recent support of the coal power plant planned for Hempstead County, indecision regarding same-sex marriage, and support of anti-immigrant measures proposed by Secure Arkansas stand at odds with the majority of our district. I'm tireless, willing to work, and eager to make Arkansas stronger.

Ramsey: Experience is the key difference in this campaign. I have not only the legislative experience but the contacts already established that will be required to be a successful. I visited the legislative session last year before totally deciding to run and I felt like I was back home because of the way I was welcomed. I have the contacts starting with our governor, who I served with in the Legislature, his chief of staff, who was my senator, as well as incumbent legislators, lobbyists and staff. A successful legislator must be a coalition builder, team player and know the art of compromise to be successful. If not, he will not be able to succeed, legislatively, and nothing happens, no matter how progressive the intent.

4. What specific legislation do you plan to introduce?

Leding: I want to help small businesses by streamlining the permitting process. I'll also work to introduce more of the proposals set forth in the report prepared by the Governor's Commission on Global Warming and those proposed by Accelerate Arkansas.

I also want to focus on helping families living with autism and improving child nutrition.

We also need to make sure the University of Arkansas and colleges across our state able to support the thousands of new students headed their way as a result of the Arkansas Scholarship Lottery.

Ramsey: As part of my Academic Partnering objective, I plan on legislation that will support Public Libraries. I plan on looking to a special license plate with the revenues going into a fund supporting libraries around the state. Fayetteville enjoys having probably the finest library in the state, and we need to continue funding and keeping it strong while giving other cities increased funding as well.

1. I want to make Pre-K available to all children in our state. This will require some creative financing and I have some ideas that are currently being considered. We may look at public/private partnerships.

2. I want to revisit legislation that would establish entertainment districts. The most obvious, in Fayetteville, would be Dickson Street.
3. Motion picture incentives that would make us competitive with other states and attract more film industry to Arkansas. I previously introduced the first Motion Picture Incentive Act in the nation that is now sunsetted and needs to be revisited.
4. I am looking at some women's issues, like stronger stalking laws and use of DNA evidence in rape cases where there is a present need.
5. I will continue to listen and consider other legislation of importance to the district.

5. In this weak economy, it's important to ask: If the revenues fail to meet projections, what specific spending cuts or tax increases will you support to balance the budget?

Leding: In handling revenue shortfalls, I feel the most important thing is to establish priorities. There will always be tough decisions to make. I do know that education will always be one of the very last places I look to make cuts, and it will always be among the first places I look to send revenue.

Ramsey: We have the greatest governor and chief of staff of any state, anywhere, and this is a tough one. When more than two thirds of your revenue goes to education and most of the rest to prisons there is not much of a place to cut that will make much difference. If this trend continues, our governor will take the lead and I will seriously consider his recommendations. Hopefully, the economy will continue to improve and we will not have to initiate cuts. If not, we will have to be creative and not raise taxes in this economy when our citizens are struggling to make ends meet.