

Leatherwood well prepared for 7th District

Voters in the 7th Congressional District have two staunch conservatives to choose from, one with an unblemished record

By Staff Reports

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Republican voters in Tennessee's 7th Congressional District have two suitable candidates to choose from in the GOP primary Aug. 7 if their overriding concern is the promotion of core conservative values.

Ideologically speaking, there is little that separates incumbent Rep. Marsha Blackburn of Brentwood and Shelby County Register of Deeds Tom Leatherwood of Arlington.

Blackburn's willingness to blur the distinction between the public's business and her family's interests, however, argue for the selection of **TOM LEATHERWOOD** as the party's nominee in the general election.

Blackburn's suitability comes into question because of missteps in her campaign finance disclosures that have resulted in a \$1,500 fine by the Federal Election Commission and could eventually turn out to be a larger distraction for her.

The primary ethical concern revealed by the investigation is that Blackburn's daughter, Mary Morgan Ketchel, is receiving an income as a fundraiser for her mother's campaign.

That creates the impression that special interest groups contributing to the campaign may enjoy extraordinary leverage over the candidate.

Blackburn says this is a non-issue being raised by an opponent with nothing else to offer. But its relevance is something voters should decide for themselves.

Leatherwood has an unblemished record through eight years in the state Senate and almost eight years in the Register's office.

He comes highly recommended by a host of public officials in Shelby County who support him despite his audacity to challenge a sitting congresswoman from his own party.

Leatherwood has an impressive grasp of the issues that face the nation and understands the responsibility of attending to the needs of the entire 7th District, a sprawling mix of urban and rural territory that includes Memphis suburbs on its western edge and Nashville suburbs to the east.

Blackburn has an appealing personality and a gift for articulating the conservative agenda. Based in the Nashville area, she understands and has been an effective advocate for songwriters.

Her devotion to American military troops, especially among members of the 101st Airborne Division at Fort Campbell, is laudable. Her campaign to make Tennessee sales taxes deductible for federal taxpayers has been useful.

Although the "rising star" status she enjoyed after her first congressional victory in 2002 has dimmed somewhat, she is still impressive in radio and TV interviews and represents the district with flair.

This page has disagreed with a number of the positions she has taken on public policy issues: her opposition to a proposed expansion of the State Children's Health Insurance Program that would have benefited the financially struggling Regional Medical Center at Memphis; her opposition to comprehensive immigration reform; her support for an unproductive course in Iraq, and other issues.

Her fiercely partisan approach offers little encouragement that she will reach across party lines to accomplish goals important to Shelby County.

Leatherwood, on the other hand, expresses a willingness to work toward bipartisan consensus.

He has been fiscally responsible in the conduct of an important county office and would give the operation of the the 7th Congressional District office a needed fresh start.

