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Utah County commission race is tight one

By Mark Eddington
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PROVO - Since he's facing a political veteran with a weighty Republican résumé who notched more votes at the county GOP convention, Utah County Commissioner Jerry Grover is running hard for a fourth term.

But he isn't running scared.

Grover is proud of his 12-year record. **The Utah Taxpayers Association honored him in 2005 with the Excellence in Public Service Award and hails the county as one of the most efficiently run in the nation.**

"The county has the lowest certified tax rate of any county in the state," Grover said.

But his rival in the June 27 Republican primary, former Utah County Commissioner Gary Anderson, labels Grover a poor leader who has alienated local and state officials.

"Utah County is in danger of becoming a second-class county," Anderson said. "I like the incumbent; he's a good guy. What he's not is a leader."

The record says otherwise, Grover counters.

The incumbent says he helped the county comply with federal clean-air standards and get rid of oxygenated fuel. He also was instrumental in cutting restaurant taxes by 30 percent and spearheading efforts to privatize tourism and economic development.

"Departments are free to go outside to private providers if they don't think they are getting a good deal from an internal department," Grover said. "That tends to make government . . . become more efficient."

Grover knows some are unhappy with the commission's decision to defect from the Mountainland Association of Governments (MAG), the regional agency that oversees

transportation planning and aging services in Utah, Weber and Summit counties.

But he says Anderson's effort to paint him as an agitator disliked by mayors and legislators is untrue. He also refuses to weigh in on his opponent's political past, including Anderson's stint as a commissioner overseeing Timpanogos Mental Health during a funding scandal in the late 1980s.

If re-elected (no Democrat is running for his seat), Grover pledges to redouble efforts to solve the county's transportation needs. He plans to lobby legislators to allow counties to build regional parkways that propel traffic by limiting stoplights. Another goal is to align the county with the Wasatch Front Regional Council on transportation issues.

Although both candidates favor putting a proposed transportation tax on the ballot, Anderson blames Grover for the delay in Utah's second-most-populous county getting commuter rail. He adds that the county's decision to leave MAG and its failed effort to take over the agency's services for the elderly haven't helped. He also insists the commission is shorting the sheriff's office on funding to keep Utah Lake and the county's canyons safe.

"I want to drive [away] the people from Salt Lake and Davis counties, who have come down here to prey on our canyons," he said. "I want to retake our lake, our canyons and our county." Anderson says the county needs to go back to secure its future - back to the leadership he provided as a county commissioner. That means no more micromanagement by requiring two commissioners to sign every purchase order.

"There has to be oversight," he said. "But my philosophy of governing is that you get good people in there and you get out of their way."

Anderson argues the county managed just fine with him at the helm. He touts his commission role in installing a flood-control system. He further lauds his leadership in bolstering employee benefits and morale.

If elected, Anderson vows to tap government grants to put booster stations in the canyons so deputies responding to crimes can maintain radio contact. He pledges to renew county ties with MAG and work cooperatively with mayors, legislative leaders and state officials to gain commuter rail and to build additional roads to Saratoga Springs and Eagle Mountain.

"We can solve these transportation problems," he said. "But we can't have the arrogance of isolation we've had."

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Jerry Grover

- * Age: 43
- * Career: A licensed professional engineer and geologist and a former small-business owner
- * Political experience: Three-term county commissioner
- * Education: Bachelor's in geological engineering from Brigham Young University, master's in civil engineering from the University of Utah
- * Personal: He and his wife, Miriam, are parents of five children
- * Fun fact: Restores classic cars, collects "Sesame Street" Grover dolls and once appeared on Taiwan's version of "The Dating Game"

Gary Anderson

* Age: 59

* Career: Springville attorney

* Political experience: Utah County commissioner, 1983-89

* Education: Bachelor's from Brigham Young University, law degree from Southwestern University School of Law

* Personal: He and his wife, Molly, have 10 children and seven grandchildren

* Fun fact: High school fullback and team's MVP, ran the 100-yard dash in 10.2 seconds, jokes friends now rib him that he couldn't cover that distance in one hour and two minutes