

COALITION FOR A BETTER MEMPHIS

Shelby County Commissioner Candidate Questionnaire

Name: Manoj Jain, M.D.

District for which you are running: District 13

1. QUALIFICATIONS AND BACKGROUND

Describe your qualifications for holding the office of Shelby County Commissioner.

I am a passionate community leader, a local doctor and a respected columnist for The Commercial Appeal.

Over the past 20 years in Memphis I have worked to help found Healthy Memphis Common Table, a health improvement collaborative which has received more than \$5 million in grants and the Gandhi-King Conference, now in its 10th year.

I have written more than 200 articles in The Washington Post, The Commercial Appeal and the Shelby Sun Times, which have helped me to gain insight into the problems and issues which trouble our county's citizens. Also, my writings and public appearances have provided me with the skills to communicate clearly to a larger audience.

As a doctor, each and every day I serve many patients by compassionately talking with them, analysis critical data to help make the right diagnosis and then making difficult decisions with the patients' best interest in mind and heart. I wish to expand my efforts to serve the larger public.

I have also been a senior leader in Tennessee's Medicare Quality Improvement Organization for the last 15 years. I am also a small-business owner with 19 years of experience in running a business, managing people and overseeing a sound fiscal budget. My experience running a small business has also given me an appreciation for the need to make the Mid-South economy a favorable place for businesses and their employees. That is another reason that I am running for public office.

What events or experiences caused you to decide to run for this office?

My parents immigrated to America when I was 10 years old. After I completed my medical education and training in Boston, my wife and I moved to Memphis 20 years ago because Memphis offered us an opportunity. Now, I want to give back to the community.

Each day as a doctor I see patients with diabetes, obesity, heart disease and cancer. Many of these diseases are preventable, if we work to reduce the problem “upstream.” Most often the problems relate to socioeconomic factors that can be addressed by the county commission.

As a commissioner, I will bring fresh, innovative and practical ideas to county government for economic growth, educational progress and quality health care. I will base my decisions on proven, evidence-based policy. We need a business approach for process improvement strategies to bring a pragmatic “can-do” attitude to county government. I’m also passionate about the community where my family and I live. I feel a commitment to help Shelby County address its challenges in becoming the best place to live in America.

2. VISION AND STRATEGIES

In your opinion, what are the three greatest issues (problems or opportunities) facing Shelby County in the next four years?

Three of our greatest challenges are: economic growth, educational progress and quality health care, all of which are intricately related. Poor education and lack of educational opportunities lead to lower employability, which leads to poor economic and job growth, all of which lead to poor health outcomes.

For economic growth, we need to create employment and income opportunities for all Shelby County residents. We can address this by supporting existing institutions that actively pursue employers, grow small businesses and stimulate interest in entrepreneurship. The community’s focus on building an educated and trained workforce is an important step in the right direction. Similarly, providing the best mix of incentives to grow and attract new businesses is an important public initiative. Finally, we need to focus on international opportunities for generating employment and financial opportunities. As a small-business owner I know how important it is to support the business community, and I appreciate the role of county government in stimulating a thriving business community.

For educational progress, we need to make greater strides to achieve a higher graduation rate and increase the link between K-12 and higher education. The absence of adequate financial support for pre-K, K-12 and higher education is a problem for the community, which has a long history and can’t be resolved quickly.

I would help identify and bring pilot programs to Shelby County from communities across this nation and globally. Memphis is in competition with the rest of the world, and our students must be educated in a world-class school system.

We need to improve the quality of health and health care in Shelby County. Good health is essential for a fiscally and physically healthy community. Access to quality health care aids a productive workforce, the fundamental development of children

and overall reduction in the cost of care, which in turn affects individual success and overall economic well-being for the county. We need to work with the Tennessee Department of Health and the business community to bring innovative ideas from other communities to reduce childhood obesity and preventable chronic illnesses. One way we can do this is by integrating education and health.

How would you recommend we continue to pay down County debt and still fulfill the financial obligations of the County? What budget priorities must take precedence?

We are on the right path to debt reduction from \$1.8 billion in 2007 to \$1.4 billion in 2013. Yet we have a long way to go. The pay-as-we-go strategy will help, yet we need to look for bigger changes. We need to find greater efficiencies in government by reducing and eliminating waste. Efficiency can come by following business principles of process improvement science. Quality and efficiency go hand in hand. Model programs like Baldrige and Lean and other strategies can help us achieve these goals. Local businesses with a reputation for operational excellence like FedEx can guide the government in its journey toward total quality improvement and efficiency. Other innovative communities such as Coral Springs, Florida, and Dakota County in Minnesota have already started this journey and are reaping great benefits.

Budget Priorities:

Priorities must be divided into short-term and long-term goals. We must realize that disadvantaged communities need opportunity to get out of the cycle of poverty. In the short term we must maintain our budget in order to spur new business and make Shelby County attractive – yet we must fund essential services such as education, police and fire protection to make sure the community is safe, that we have a strong work force, and that we can reduce crime and incarcerations. While budgets are critical in priority setting – also important is leadership, fostering volunteerism and bringing efficiencies to government.

What are your views regarding the best way to fund public education of Shelby County and Memphis children?

Our property tax dollars help to fund public education. We must also look for private grants to help boost the quality of teachers. Just as universities can attract money from talented alumni, we need to seek alumni of Memphis schools and build a stronger bond with them, not just for fundraising but for building a network and bringing new ideas and resources to schools.

Some people believe that urban communities should adopt policies that encourage what is called “smart growth.” Do you believe Shelby County should have a general policy about new residential and commercial developments? If so, what should that policy be?

Smart growth is a theoretical concept that encourages urbanization in a walkable area. While such ideas are good in theory, we need to evaluate plans with the long-term vision in mind. Each neighborhood and region may have its own growth plan in place, so we would need to take those plans into consideration before making broad-based decisions.

While I am open to these ideas, I would take the same evidence-based approach of research, fact-finding and best-practice modeling on any smart-growth issues that I would for other decisions that impact our quality of life.

Are you satisfied with the economic growth (jobs and income) of Shelby County today? If not, what should the county government do to improve economic development efforts? What incentives would you support or oppose be used to attract future economic development?

Over the past several years Shelby County has seen growth. In 1999, about \$1.65 billion in new capital investment was made in our county, and over the past few years Shelby County has been a leader in economic growth in Tennessee. While we are recognized as America’s distribution center and are fast becoming North America’s logistics center, we have an opportunity to be a major manufacturing hub.

As an established commercial transportation center, with raw material coming in and finished products going out, we can reduce end-product cost by manufacturing products in Memphis. This will require a well-trained labor force that can manufacture products for 21st century consumers. A concerted effort with a pilot program in several manufacturing industries can be promising for the Memphis economy.

In Shelby County, we also have a strong medical industry with Regional One Health, Baptist, Methodist and St. Francis hospitals. This industry employs more than 30,000 persons. We have an opportunity to be the medical tourism place for the South, attracting patients for elective orthopedic and spinal surgeries. This would be attractive paired with our world-class Campbell Clinic and Semmes-Murphy Clinic doctors in Memphis.

Memphis is a premier port on the Mississippi River. The power of the river is not just a transportation asset, but also a tourist attraction, which cannot be forgotten. Downtown Memphis as the front door to Tennessee and the Greater Memphis community must be maintained and promoted. The Bass Pro/Pyramid site, FedEx

Forum, St. Jude, Mud Island, Beale Street, Civil Rights Museum, South Memphis food and entertainment district, and many other assets should be promoted to make a thriving downtown Memphis the signature entrance to the Mid-South and Delta region.

3. IMPROVING THE SYSTEM OF GOVERNMENT

What do you regard as the greatest obstacle or barrier to economic growth in Shelby County today? What can the County Commission do to reduce that impediment?

Job creation is done by attracting new businesses to the county and by helping existing businesses grow. We need to build a trained and educated workforce to sustain both new and existing businesses.

We can appeal to new businesses by creating an attractive economic environment for them in Shelby County. To grow existing businesses, we need to provide reliable and timely information, best practices and peer mentoring. We also need to reduce unnecessary and costly procedures and processes that are bureaucratic time-wasters. Often businesses are caught up in a survival mode or status quo mode. Training, informational resources and networking – championed by the county government – can help these businesses grow to their maximum potential.

The Greater Memphis area has more than 50,000 businesses, small and large. I started and operate one of them. I have attended the standing-room-only Memphis Chamber Luncheon Learning session and seen first-hand the desire among Memphis entrepreneurs to learn and grow their businesses. The County Commission needs to work closely toward the common purpose of economic growth.

2. What is your philosophy about offering incentives to companies that are considering major new investments or job expansions in Shelby County?

I believe incentives are a powerful tool to attract and expand local businesses. Too often businesses are not aware of the incentives that are available to them and do not know they have access to lawmakers to request the incentives. I would raise awareness about these available incentives and help improve access to them. I would encourage each commissioner to become a champion of attracting and expanding new business. As county commissioners, it's our responsibility to be visible and to be connected with the community, and as part of our job, I would encourage each commissioner to approach businesses and market the incentives offered by the county.

At the same time, we need to be good stewards of public funds. We need to be sure that the investment of incentives clearly has a positive payback to Shelby County in

the form of more jobs, tax revenue and the attraction of other related businesses tied to the new business receiving the incentive. We need to create win-win strategies for businesses and our community with our long-term growth goals in mind.

3. What is your position on consolidation of city and county governments?

I would favor such a proposal if there is sufficient evidence that such a transformative move would bring efficiency and cost savings with fair representation to our residents. Other cities such as Nashville have gone through this process, and we need to evaluate their success.

When you complete your service as commissioner, what do you want your legacy to be?

My legacy will be a fresh, innovative and pragmatic voice on the County Commission. I will have introduced evidence-based policymaking into the thought process. I will begin our journey toward excellence through the Baldrige quality criteria: leadership, strategic planning, customer focus, measurement, analysis, knowledge management, workforce focus, process management and results.

I will have helped improve the graduation rate by innovative projects and greatly enhanced our efforts that will result in the decline in childhood obesity.