

5/5/2011

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Rick Barron
Williamson County Elections
301 SE Inner Loop Ste 104
Georgetown TX 78626

Commissioners' Court
County Courthouse
Georgetown TX 78626

Dear Judge Gattis and Commissioners Birkman, Long, Covey and Morrison:

I approached Judge Gattis in late January about an exciting professional development opportunity through the Kennedy School at Harvard College. The course is entitled Senior Executives in State and Local Government. The Faculty Chair and an instructor in the program is Dr. David King, who directed the Task Force on Election Administration for the National Commission on Election Reform that was chaired by Presidents Gerald Ford and Jimmy Carter. The result of the commission's work was the Help America Vote Act signed by President Bush in 2002. Further, Dr. King evaluated the Elections Department for Boston, MA and helped restructure the office in order to improve management.

Judge Gattis encouraged me to apply, and he told me about his experience at Penn in a similar program and how valuable it had been for him in many ways. I also spoke to Tax Assessor-Collector, Deborah Hunt. Ms. Hunt was supportive as long as it came from discretionary funds, and as long as I stayed with Williamson County for some time thereafter. I assured them both that I had sufficient monies in the 376 Elections Discretionary Fund to pay for the course.

The Elections Discretionary Fund is authorized in the Texas Election Code. Section 31.100(d) provides the authority to assess a 10% administrative fee to jurisdictions that contract with the Elections Department.

Brian Hamon, the Williamson County Democratic Party Chair, called me regarding an elections matter, which enabled me to run it by him as well. He was supportive as long as the funds were from discretionary monies.

I applied to this program because I want to succeed, flourish and grow in this position. I plan to stay with Williamson County. I need continuing education that is stimulating and challenging, surrounded by peers from all aspects of state and local government to develop my skills.



Learning from shared experiences with people from divergent backgrounds within the public sector will enhance my ability to handle different situations.

I learn new things on my job every day. I want to improve how I handle this non-partisan position; how my decisions affect key stakeholders; how I can manage the budget as efficiently as possible; how I can strategically involve the private sector in elections in various ways and how I can improve as a leader and supervisor.

The program has several dimensions, including a focus on leadership, negotiations, microeconomics, behavioral decision making, cooperative governance and public/private partnerships. Students learn via the case method. Real-life situations prompt students to solve problems on management and leadership issues. In addition, Dr. King's credentials in the area of elections are impressive. I want to study under him and learn from his experiences.

I have led this department through 17 successful elections cycles, which includes more than 150 individual elections jointly held; have had zero turnover of staff in three years; substantially increased the revenue into two funds from contracting political jurisdictions; revamped how we administer early voting and Election Day; reformed training several times in search of a successful methodology that is satisfactory for poll workers; implemented a new voter registration system; staffed polling locations consistently without an issue; increased our number of bilingual poll workers over two years; brought the coding of elections to our office rather than having the ballots coded in Omaha, NE by ES & S; reduced a portion of the cost of elections to political jurisdictions by doing things such as recording the audio for the sight-impaired units in-house and coding the elections here; implemented a staff cross-training schedule for 2011 that is almost complete; increased the efficiency of voter check-in through the introduction of laptops and new software; added on-line training; worked with IT in order to develop a tool for more friendly election night reporting; testified before the legislature on elections legislation; served on the Texas Association of Election Administrators legislation committee for two years; served as a short-term elections observer in Oskemen, Kazakhstan for the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe on my own vacation time; aided the US Election Assistance Commission in research on ES & S's M-100 logs; served as a Peer Reviewer for the US Election Assistance Commission to help determine who should be awarded federal grants on applications for the Pre-Election Logic and Accuracy Testing and Post-Election Audit Testing program; made sure that our web site, newsletters and other publications are in Spanish as well as English; launched a Facebook page and a Twitter account; added a voter education You Tube channel; implemented Help Desk software to track calls for better metrics; come in under budget overall in successive years, and finally, engaged staff in learning the Texas Election Code by offering to lead in-house study groups on various sections



every two weeks. Further, the morale in the department is much improved from when I took over in February 2007.

Finally, I believe that professional development is a valuable tool for an employer to invest in its people. My staff, for example, has three graduates of the Election Center, which is a non-profit based in Houston that partners with Auburn University to certify individuals as Certified Elections and Registration Administrators (CERA). By summer's end, a fourth staff member will be an Election Center graduate and in 2011, potentially another four individuals will graduate. This is a tremendous accomplishment for my department considering that less than 700 graduates exist nationwide out of more than 21,000 election professionals. An argument can be made that the low turnover in my department is partly due to the County's investment in them as professionals through the General Fund and the department's investment in them as professionals through the Discretionary Fund. Low turnover means better efficiency and lower costs for the County. I have been fortunate that Commissioner's Court has been supportive in funding for the line item Training, Seminars and Conferences. I have been able to supplement that funding with discretionary funds, when need be.

In closing, this professional development opportunity is reasonable in its price when you consider that it includes tuition, most meals, housing, an Outward Bound team-building day, its academically intensive nature, its unique nature and the curricular supplies. This request meets all of the directives for approval within the Texas Administrative Code Title 1, Part 4, Chapter 81, Subchapter H, Rule 81.161(b) and (c). I have provided a copy of this section of the Texas Administrative Code in the back-up, along with details about the seminar.

It is my hope that you will support me, my aims to improve myself and my future job performance, and approve the distribution of funds from Elections 376 for my attendance at this summer's seminar.

If you have any questions, please contact me at x31622.

Thank you for your consideration,

Rick Barron
Elections Administrator
Williamson County Elections