

Board: Fine is owed

Assessor candidate Hargrove still disputes \$4,000

By Amritha Alladi

aalladi@thenewsstar.com

Ouachita Parish tax assessor candidate Paul Hargrove says the fines he owes the Board of Ethics represent the exact kind of "big government" and bureaucracy he stands against.

Hargrove owes the Board of Ethics \$4,000 for failure to file a supplemental campaign finance report in 2009 related to his 2007 run for the state House of Representatives.

The deadline to file the report was February of last year.

Hargrove said he filed an amended campaign finance report in 2009 for the 2008 calendar year. He did this so he wouldn't have to continue filing supplemental campaign finance reports each year after he pulled out of the 2007 race, he said.

This year, Hargrove is running against Deputy Assessor Stephanie Smith to fill the slot left open by retiring assessor Rich Bailey. The runoff election is this Saturday.

Reclassification

Hargrove was responding to issues raised in a letter to the editor of *The News-Star* submitted by resident Tony Cain last week. Cain, who spoke in support of Smith, stated in his letter that



Hargrove

1A

WEDNESDAY, NOVEMBER 16, 2011 7A

Fines

Continued from Page 1A

Hargrove was unethical because Hargrove falsely stated he had no outstanding fines on the affidavit he signed when qualifying for candidacy. He argues he shouldn't have to pay those fines.

Hargrove said he closed his 2007 campaign account after he pulled out of the race. He amended his 2008 supplemental campaign finance report to indicate he used personal funds during his campaign rather than issue a loan to himself, he said.

"That was my money I put into my campaign," he said. "I reported that initially as a loan to my campaign anticipating that I might be elected, that I might receive contributions and I might be able to pay myself back. But after going more than a year ... I didn't receive any contributions ... I didn't even have a campaign account. I closed the account."

Last week, Hargrove said it's likely he won't even have to pay the fines since the subsequent campaign finance reports shouldn't be necessary.

The board disagrees.

Fine stands

Regardless of the amended report Hargrove filed for 2008, the fines for failure to submit a supplemental campaign finance report for 2009 still stand, according to Chris Sommers, Board of Ethics' Campaign Finance and Lobbying Division director.

"That would not help,"

she said.

The fines will have no legal impact on the status of his current candidacy because Hargrove's case doesn't fit the criteria of "outstanding fines" as defined by state law.

Revised statute 18:462 states that an "outstanding fine, fee, or penalty pursuant to the Campaign Finance Disclosure Act shall mean a fine, fee or penalty ... that has been converted into a court order for which all appeals have been exhausted or a judgment of a district court assessing civil penalties pursuant to the Campaign Finance Disclosure Act and that has become executory...or a fine, fee or penalty ... imposed by the Board of Ethics for which all appeals have been exhausted."

Hargrove hasn't filed an appeal but told *The News-Star* if he receives notification that the fines still apply, he will file one.

"That doesn't make sense to me," Hargrove said "My campaign had no deficit, had no surplus, no debt, no cash on hand, no contributions or expenses."

"It's just not right. It's just one of those big government bureaucratic things that I'm against."

Pipeline lawsuit

He also addressed attacks from Cain regarding his role in granting pipeline companies an obsolescence adjustment.

Cain said Hargrove "championed" and voted to approve a "tax exemption" for the pipeline industry, which Cain said would have cost Ouachita Parish government entities \$300,000 per year in

perpetuity.

But Hargrove said it's in fact quite the opposite.

The pipeline issue dates to 1994, when three out-of-state pipeline companies — ANR, Southern Natural Gas and Tennessee Gas — filed a lawsuit arguing that they were being discriminated against under the interstate commerce clause, among other arguments, Hargrove said. The Tax Commission unanimously concluded that the pipeline companies were entitled to an obsolescence adjustment.

"My vote in support of the tax commission's order didn't cost Ouachita Parish a penny," Hargrove said Tuesday.

The case went through the 4th Judicial District Court, 2nd Circuit Court of Appeals and the state Supreme Court, which last month rejected the challenge by ANR, Southern Natural Gas and Tennessee Gas, ending their protest.

Last month, about \$1 million in local ad valorem taxes that had been held in escrow from the lawsuit were freed up after the companies agreed to settle. Hargrove said he was involved in putting together a group to reach an agreement because it was obvious the litigation was going nowhere, he said.

"All of those tax dollars had been in escrow for more than 16 years, they hadn't received a penny of that money, and largely through my efforts to bring this thing to some sort of reasonable conclusion, local governments across the state will receive all of the funds that had been in escrow for all of these years."