

Daily



TWO SECTIONS, 16 PAGES

OCT. 2, 2008

Election08

Hamrick defends record, blasts coalition, King

By ED HOWELL
Eagle Senior Writer

Walker County Commission Chairman Bruce Hamrick made a spirited defense of his board's record Tuesday night at a Democratic Party rally, making pointed remarks about the Walker County Political Accountability Coalition and state Attorney General Troy King.

Hamrick is on the Nov. 4 ballot against Republican Jerry Bishop, whom he also addressed.

"We've got a great bunch of elected officials in Walker County," Hamrick said. "We're all Democrats. We all work together. That's what it's all about. It's teamwork. You know, if my opponent were to get in, I think teamwork would go down the drain. We want to keep the good team we've got in place."

Hamrick then took a slap at the coalition, which received Democratic criticism when one of its officials implied all the other Democratic candidates in the county had been invited to a coalition meeting, when many had not.

"You know, I'm disappointed. I really thought Bucky Rizzo would be here tonight," Hamrick said, tongue-in-cheek, referring to the coalition's chairman. "Are you shocked that he's not? He's the head of a bipartisan coalition. Gee, he came to the Republican rally but he don't come to the Democrat (rally). That don't sound very bipartisan to me."

Someone in the audience humorously asked if Hamrick invited him.

"Gee, he got me," Hamrick said to the amusement of onlookers. "I apologize to Bucky for not inviting him. That's all I'm going to say about Bucky, other than 'No to Rizzo.' That's a good little rhyme I picked up."

Many Democrats have tried to brand the coalition as a front for Republican activism, although the coalition continues to deny this claim and says it will look at possibly endorsing candidates from both parties.

Taking on a serious tone, Hamrick criticized Attorney



Bruce Hamrick

See HAMRICK, A8 ►

\$

WA
lar fa
bailou
ning l
ing gr
oppos
Ser
with t
passir
before
tions.

In t
ishly
to pus
lawma
er ven
the gl

A

Tubbs County

Hamrick

From A1

General Troy King, who attended last week's Republican Party rally.

Hamrick said Sheriff John Mark Tirey and District Attorney Charles Baker tried early on to get King involved in the Walker County electronic bingo issue.

"He took a hands-off approach on bingo," he said.

Hamrick then defended the county's actions on bingo, as the commission has maintained it did not have the right to stop electronic bingo in the county as the city of Jasper did, saying top city officials have more authority than county commissions.

Hamrick pointed out materials on the front table referring to bingo, including a 1997 Attorney General's opinion issued under former Republican Attorney General Bill Pryor. Pryor was asked if the city of Hartselle had authority to decline to permit or prohibit bingo operations authorized by state constitutional amendment 599 and Act No. 96-648, or was its power limited to the authority to regulate it.

Pryor ruled "the City of Hartselle does not have the authority to decline to permit bingo operations by qualified organizations, but that its power is limited to the authority to regulate bingo operations." The opinion does not mention if the matter concerned only paper bingo or also included electronic bingo in 1997.

Also available on the table was an edited version of King's December 2004 press release concerning his findings on gambling in the state, which is on the Attorney General's Office Web site.

King is quoted in the piece as saying that despite his opposition to gambling, he goes by the law. King reviews how bingo evolved to an electronic game and how electronic bingo must contain elements of traditional bingo.

"It cannot be concluded, as some have, that just because the game is being played on video consoles, it is not 'bingo,' King said. Just as no one would contend that e-mails are any less a form of correspondence than are letters written with a quill pen, but instead represent a technological evolution in correspondence, similarly, bingo games



Daily Mountain Eagle -Ed Howell

District 1 Walker County Commissioner Dual Tubbs (left) and Commission Chairman Bruce Hamrick (right) talk with Walker County Circuit Clerk Susie Odom just before Odom moderated Tuesday's local Democratic Party rally in Jasper.

that are depicted on a video console can still be bingo — albeit a technologically advanced form of bingo — but bingo nonetheless."

The release quoted King's conclusion that, as a matter of law, "machines that operate in the manner described above are permissible under the broad language of Amendment 743 relating to Greene County and Amendment 744 relating to Macon County," although Tuesday's release only mentioned "counties 'operating under a valid constitutional amendment."

Tuesday's release left out the next statement from the original release: "Attorney General King warned that 'under no circumstances, however, should anyone construe my comments here today to mean that Class III gaming, as defined under the Indian Gaming Regulatory Act, is permissible in the state of Alabama. Machines that do not operate as I have described are not bingo and violate state law."

Hamrick said, "It's funny to me that the top law enforcement officer in the state of Alabama can come to Walker County and hammer the county commission about not shutting down bingo or not doing something about bingo when we do not carry guns and we do not drive cars with blue lights on. So there's something wrong with this picture.

"But you know, I would have been real disappointed if

the Republican attorney general had not come up here and supported all of his Republican candidates. We're talking about politics as usual."

Hamrick said any organization has to conduct itself in an orderly manner.

"Bingo will be decided in court sometime in the near future, I hope," Hamrick said, adding that Jefferson County Circuit Judge Robert Vance Jr. had been appointed to take over the stalled bingo suits in the local courts. "So maybe things will get going in the right direction again."

Hamrick also pointed out a financial report on the table that was issued Aug. 31. He said the county has \$5.5 million in certificates of deposit.

"That does not sound like a county that is going to go bankrupt," Hamrick said, responding to District 2 Republican county commission candidate Sandy Grace Pennington's assertion that the county faces "certain bankruptcy."

"This county commission has been very proactive to increase law enforcement, health care, benefits for employees, renovations for the courthouse, and I can go on and on," Hamrick said.

He said when he came into office, county officials were "wading water" in the basement of the old courthouse selling tags. He said the county purchased the old First National Bank building to allow the probate judge to move his offices there, and

helped Revenue Commissioner Jerry Guthrie find more space.

"It's been a team effort of everyone trying to work together and accomplish things together and not butt heads," Hamrick said.

Hamrick said a neighbor of his said if others wanted to know about him, they could ask people in the community.

"What we need to do is ask about me and ask about Jerry Bishop, and you can make up your own mind," he said.

Hamrick pointed out a flyer, credited to the United Mine Workers of America, endorsing all the current members of the commission and Democrat Dan Wright, who is running to replace the retiring District 2 Commissioner Larry Farris.

Hamrick said he worked 25 years in the coal mines, the majority of the time in management. During that time, "I was a working man and I treated people like I wanted to be treated. That's the same way I am today. I will never forget where I came from."

He mentioned he was also a Vietnam veteran.

"I walked around in the jungle with a rifle. I slept in the rain. I fought folks. I got shot at. I dragged dead bodies and put them on helicopters," he said. "That's the proudest thing that God has ever allowed me to accomplish, to be a veteran and survive something like that, and allow me the pleasure of fighting for this great country."

Tubbs