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Robert Chody has edge in Williamson County sheriff's race

OPINION By Editorial Board



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Williamson County voters are fortunate to have four good candidates from which to choose a new sheriff, including three with solid law enforcement backgrounds.

Since the candidates, all Republican, mostly are in agreement in naming and solving the law enforcement challenges in one of the nation's fastest growing counties, our endorsement came down to who is best-prepared to build a department of the future and capable of responding to continued population growth, demographic shifts and encroaching urbanization. The next sheriff must balance the tensions between those shifts. No Democrats are running, so whoever wins the GOP primary will be sheriff.

We believe that two people are best suited for those challenges: Williamson County Precinct 1 Constable Robert Chody, 45, and Randy Elliston, 58, a former Department of Public Safety trooper and director within the Texas Department of Motor Vehicles. Between the two, Chody has the edge, but voters could not go wrong with Elliston.

Both are qualified, though they bring different skills and experiences to the job.

Where Chody is high-energy and ambitious, Elliston is poised and more deliberate. Both share a future-looking vision, encourage body cameras and support some diversion programs that give first-time offenders who commit nonviolent crimes a second chance. And both are candid that the department needs greater resources, such as technology upgrades, to better serve Williamson County residents.



On immigration, Chody and Elliston said they would cooperate with U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement officials by honoring ICE requests to detain inmates booked in the county jail who are in the country illegally.

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Robert Chody, Republican candidate for Williamson County sheriff

The other candidates vying to replace outgoing Sheriff James Wilson for the office he has held since 2004 are Mike Cowie, a lieutenant and veteran officer in the department whom Wilson endorsed, and Bill Keiberlau, who retired from a 30-year career as a Navy intelligence officer and a 28-year career

with Texas Instruments and Raytheon.

Chody has been the Precinct 1 constable since 2008. Before that, he was an Austin police officer from 1996 through 2001. He left the department after he and his wife won millions of dollars in the lottery. But instead of retiring or traveling the world, Chody returned to law enforcement, demonstrating a commitment to improving the profession.



Randy Elliston, Republican candidate for Williamson County sheriff

High on his list is addressing low pay and morale of sheriff's deputies and corrections officers, who he said earn \$10,000 less on average than their peers in Travis County.

Those factors, he said, contribute to high turnover. He wants to create a career path as a way of lifting morale, but also says he would work with the Williamson County Commissioners Court — which controls budgets for county departments, including the sheriff's office — to solve that problem. Before asking taxpayers for more money, Chody said he would look to the department's expenditures on overtime, which he said,

was \$900,000 in the past year.

As the American-Statesman has reported, a lawsuit was filed in 2001 while Chody was still an Austin police officer, claiming that he used excessive force on a young man during a 1998 call to a fight in East Austin. The lawsuit ultimately was settled.

Elliston, who managed 2,700 troopers and 1,200 civilian workers while with DPS, said if elected he would do a full assessment of the sheriff's office before making changes, as well as an analysis of the county to determine exactly how many deputies and corrections officers are needed and where the need is greatest so as to better match the department's resources with the county's needs.

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