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By ROBERT PIERCE • Daily Leader During Toby Hale's first term as Seward County commissioner, many projects were started, including the beginning of expansion on Southwest Medical Center and progress on bringing more wind power to the area.

If he is elected, Hale would like to continue working with those items as well as another top priority in Seward County – reducing the crime rate. Hale, who recently filed for a second term in Seward County's District No. 4, said a crime commission had been in place in the past, and he would like to see it reinstated and expanded upon.

"We've had a certain amount of success when they're reducing the crime rate with the way the juveniles are separated from the hard core and through the intake and assessment process at JCAPS," he said.

Hales serves on the board of the 26th Judicial District's Juvenile Corrections and Prevention Services office, and he said this gives him an excellent opportunity to have an impact on the crime rate. He said he would like to see more emphasis given to the prevention side of JCAPS.

"That'll involve working with younger kids before they're criminals," he said.

When he ran for the first time in 2006, Hale made one promise to his constituents – to know and do the wishes of the people in his district.

"This is what I've used as my guiding light, and I think I've been successful with that," he said.

Hale said something the county commission has done is particularly proud of is having the third lowest mill levy of the 105 counties in Kansas.

"That's something probably most people don't realize, but the money they're taxed to run this county is among the least amount of all the counties in the state," he said. "I'd like to see that continue, but I want the services. A lot of services, but not much tax. You're limited because of the tax burden on the people."

Hale said if he is elected again, this will be his last term.

"Naturally, I think that's long enough," he said. "It'd be eight years, but also, I'm not a kid anymore. I'll be looking to retire one of these days, but I'd like to put in four more years working for the county."

Work on upgrading the Seward County Fairgrounds is currently in progress, and Hale said he believes the county is on the right track with that area as well as use of the facilities at the

fairgrounds.

“We’ve had several discussions about the use and what they had to pay for them and what they didn’t if they wanted to use the facilities,” he said. “I think it’s in pretty good shape. They’re there to be used, but taxpayers shouldn’t have to pay the bill for those that do.”

Hale said work also needs to be done on remodeling and updating the Seward County Ag Building.

“I would like to leave this office with it in better shape than when I came,” he said. “We’re redoing right now the electrical part of that, and it’s going to be a rather expensive item. We’ve got to do something about the floors in the Ag Building.”

Hale said this is still up in the air, but something will likely get done before the end of 2010. He said fellow commissioner C.J. Wettstein has plans for landscape work on the fairgrounds as well as electrical outlets for campers.

“They’ve got some good plans for upgrading the facility,” Hale said. “We’d like to see some more things like the Gas Compressor Institute that are good for the whole community. All that stuff out there needs to be used, but at the same time, it shouldn’t be used at the taxpayers’ expense. I think user fees are the correct way to go.”

Hale said possibilities for bringing additional revenue to Seward County are already present.

“I think economic opportunities in this climate or any other have to do with using what the good lord gave us in the county,” he said. “He gave us a windy day, and we’re looking to bring the wind farms. He gave us good grain raising potential, so we have out east of town one of the larger ethanol plants. We’re on the right track there. The oil and gas industry need not be ignored. It’s not as big a deal as it has been in the past, but it’ll always be a big deal.”

Hale said entities such as Seward County need to work together with those from the City of Liberal and USD No. 480 in order for the community to succeed.

“Part of the reason for having the Council on Governments meet once a month when all taxing entities are invited to be a part of it in the county is to know and work together on any problems that come along,” he said.

Hale said a problem for Liberal is a problem for Seward County because most of the county’s residents live in Liberal.

“There’s no way to separate our jobs and responsibilities, and any time we don’t work together, we’re at fault,” he said.

Thus far, Hale is the only candidate to file for his district. The primary election will take place Aug. 3, with the general election set for Nov. 2.

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