

By ROBERT PIERCE • Daily Leader Doug LaFreniere served on the Liberal City Commission for two terms, including a year as mayor, and now, he is looking for a seat on the Seward County Commission.



LaFreniere, who recently filed to run against incumbent District No. 4 commissioner Toby Hale, said one of his top priorities is to bring needed improvements to the area. “It’s to try to have a larger influence with the state and to work with other counties to really influence the issues of western Kansas I feel are not being addressed by Topeka,” he said. “The western counties could organize a little better and send a stronger message to Topeka, especially when they’re increasing taxes and they don’t have any input from us.”

Wind is a significant energy component in Southwest Kansas. LaFreniere said while bringing wind farms would be a good thing for the area, questions of how they will benefit local residents need to be addressed before bringing turbines to the region.

“As we saw with the coal fire plants, we put all our support behind them, sent resolutions, and what happens two months later?” he said. “We’re looking at a rate increase which is the largest in the state compared to others on electricity.”

LaFreniere said if support is going to be thrown behind wind farms, energy companies need to commit to not raising rates as has been seen with traditional energy companies in the past.

“It’s got to be something that also benefits the citizens, not just the electric company,” he said. “Everybody wants to go green, but I haven’t heard where this is going to benefit Seward County residents. Will we see lower rates? Nobody seems to ask that question. Those types of questions need to be asked rather than we’ve got all these wind farms, and there goes all the electricity out west. It’s just a matter of looking out for the folks.”

As candidates in other county commission races believe, LaFreniere also feels entities such as the county, the city and USD No. 480, along with non-profits and other groups, can work together to make a better community, and he said this begins by talking to each other.

“There’s not a lot of that going on anymore, and a lot of it is each entity has its own little issues that drives its agenda,” he said.

LaFreniere suggested entities get together to help each other, but he said this is sometimes easier said than done.

“Everybody gets pretty territorial over their responsibilities, and you really have to check your

ego at the door and look at what's best overall," he said. "Sometimes, if you get together and visit, maybe you can come up with a cheaper solution. It takes a lot of communication, and you've got to at least start communicating."