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- Leader & Times

With the large number of potential newcomers to the Liberal City Commission, there are plenty of opportunities for new ideas for Liberal.

“Liberal has always been a great place for me. My family moved here in 1998, and since then, I’ve gone through the educational system,” Liberal City Commission candidate Justin Varnes said. “I graduated from Liberal High School, I spent three semesters at Seward County

Community College, which provided me the opportunity to come back to Liberal to work post-college, and it brought my wife to USD 480 from Michigan, so Liberal's been a great place for me. I decided to run for the city commission because I wanted to give back – give my time, give my talents, and give back to the community that's invested so much in me.”

Varnes said his family is what prompted him to run, and said running for the commission was a goal of his for a long time.

“I spoke with my parents, they've always been great supporters of me and thought it would be a good idea,” Varnes said. “Then I talked with my wife and sat down and asked ‘Is this something you think I'd be good at and would you support me in this?’ and she said ‘100 percent yes, I think you'd be great.’ I talked to some other close family and friends who thought I would be a good fit. I always told myself when I moved back in 2010 that I wanted to serve on the commission, but I wanted to wait until I had some more life experiences, like with business background and that type of thing. I told myself when I turned 30, I would do it, and I'm 31 now, so here I am.”

Overall, it is important for the city to continue moving forward, Varnes added.

“There's great economic development going on, you can't drive past any part of the city without seeing bulldozers and dirt and concrete and signs going up, and I think that's amazing,” Varnes said. “So continuing that economic development portion for sure, continuing to empower our city leaders and city staff to make great decisions and ways to attract new amenities to Liberal, those are some of the things I would like to keep going as a commissioner. Especially in that area with the new Old Chicago and the plans for another potential eating establishment there and the hotel, that's going to make that area of Liberal look really nice, and people driving on U.S. Highway 83 are going to want to stop and see there's more than just Walmart out there. I think it's great, I think it's exciting. It kind of puts a barricade right there, an invisible barricade that stops people from going north to Garden City, which, sadly, a lot of people do. They just have a lot more to offer right now like with Target and Home Depot and Starbucks, those types of things. So I think it puts that invisible barricade there like ‘You don't need to go as far as you have been, you can stay right here in Liberal!’ which everyone knows. When people shop here, more tax dollars are spent here, our schools are improved, our parks are improved, and our city has funding to do more things like dog parks and food truck venues, those types of things.”

With this being his first time running for office, Varnes said he is excited for the remainder of the

campaign.

“It makes me feel excited. There’s past commissioners who want to come back on and want to go at this again and continue what’s been started, there’s current commissioners who want to keep going in the direction they feel is best for the city, and then there’s new people like myself, and I think that’s fantastic,” Varnes said. “It makes me nervous, and I think it makes the race even more exciting and challenging. As a newcomer, you’re trying to get your name out there and at least get people to recognize who you are, and with someone who’s served before the city, the voters already know who they are. But I like the larger pool – of course, I wish we didn’t have to go to the primary, but it’s exciting and it’s neat to be part of this generation and this time in Liberal and seeing so many people wanting to get involved and give back.”

Varnes also encouraged the community to get out and vote during the upcoming primary and the November general election.

“I think I would be a good fit because I represent a different generation than what’s currently serving on the commission,” Varnes said. “Not that any of the current commissioners don’t have those types of views ... I have very young children, a 3-year-old and a 10-month-old, so my decisions today will directly impact not only when they’re adults, but also when they’re going through the school system, when they’re teenagers. I bring that unique diversity in that I am younger, I do have new ideas, I do want to challenge certain things. I love Liberal, Liberal is an amazing place. I’ve never been one to talk bad about Liberal or talk down on Liberal. I love Liberal, I have an extreme passion for this city, and I’m here for the long haul. If I never had to move from Liberal, I would be completely fine with that. I love Liberal, I’m passionate, I want to give back to it, I want to see it succeed, I want to see it prosper.”