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## Incidents at Hinds jail focal point at forum

### Candidates for sheriff spar over training, integrity

*Therese Apel*

Several questions from members of a packed audience during a Tuesday night political forum at Jackson City Hall focused on issues with the Hinds County jail.

The forum, sponsored by Women for Progress, featured Democratic candidates for sheriff, circuit clerk and tax assessor. But the lion's share of the attention was on the men who are vying to be the county's chief law enforcement officer.

Questions, from moderators and the audience, dealt with inmate abuse at the Hinds County Detention Center and the several jailers fired over it.

Retired Jackson police officer Tyrone Lewis, who once was police chief, said every jailer should have more than the minimum 80 hours of schooling required to ensure the person continues to improve as officers.

Johnny Bowden, a former Mississippi Bureau of Investigations investigator, pointed out that jailers represent the sheriff himself.

"They need to take their jobs very seriously," Bowden said. "Because they represent the sheriff, they need to report anything they see to him."

Incumbent Malcolm McMillin, who was first elected in 1991, said training is an emphasis within his jail.

In answer to the questions of abuse within the facility, he said he believes his actions speak for themselves.

"I was poorly represented by the people involved in those acts, and I terminated them, because I don't need that kind of representation in my jail," he said.

Another question, based on an alleged 300 percent increase in crime over the last 20 years, was what the candidates would do to help reduce crime in Hinds County.

**Bowden and Lewis each said cooperation and communication between law enforcement agencies, as well as a good intelligence division, can help identify problem groups and problem areas, and can prevent the problem before it gets out of control.**

McMillin said while cooperation between agencies is a great help, some of the crime problems are an unavoidable byproduct of changes in society.

"The disintegration of the family unit, the lack of father figures, the lack of mentors for our youth," he said. "Some of these problems we have can't necessarily be solved in the jail house. Some need to be solved in the church house."

At one point, Bowden talked about bringing integrity back to the sheriff's office, prompting McMillin to respond that he took it as an insult to the people who worked there to imply they had no integrity.

When an audience member later asked if sheriff's deputies only saturate the county during election years, Bowden said he didn't want to offend the sheriff again but that he had noticed the same thing.

"Don't be concerned about stepping on my toes, because I can get you off of them," McMillin said. "To say we emphasize law enforcement during an election is not factual, and I take issue with that."

Also attending the forum were Circuit Clerk Barbara Dunn, Tax Assessor Charles Stokes and one of his challengers, Joe Lewis.

Circuit clerk candidates Vikki Dillon-Mumford and Antonio Porter and tax assessor candidate Jeffrey Stallworth were not present. Mumford had a spokesman make a statement since she was involved in a board of education meeting.

Melody Light and her 15-year-old daughter, Christina, who recently relocated to the area, were at the forum.

"We wanted to see what people were talking about," Light said. "We got a chance to listen to some of what they had to say, and to be in close proximity to the people who were running for office."

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