

KEN CROKEN

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Q1 BIOGRAPHY: Please provide a brief bio that describes your background and the particular skills you would bring to the County Board of Supervisors.

I've held executive/leadership positions at Genesis Health System, Edelman Public Relations Worldwide, IBM Corporation and, now, TAG Communications. So, I understand how large organizations succeed. I've overseen large business development budgets, including Fujifilm N.A, and Save the Children Federation. And as a result, I know how to grow "mind share" and market share.

I've also managed both internal and external communications for large and diverse organizations across different industries relying on skills honed over 40 years. In fact, my innovative and results-driven communications, marketing and sales programs have been recognized nationally.

I also am an attorney with considerable background in public policy and decades of regulatory and legislative advocacy experience in Washington, D.C. and many state capitols, including Des Moines. In short, I will bring to the Board the "know-how" required to improve accountability, communication and transparency. But, "skills" alone are not enough. I also bring commitment to the future growth and prosperity of our community. And, my record of public service underscores that claim.

For example, as a long-serving leader of the Downtown Davenport Partnership: I've played an active role in the renaissance of our city center. And, as chairman of the Davenport Library Board; I have increased access to on-line training and employment opportunities. I also have demonstrated collaborative leadership as chairman of our annual "Red, White & Boom!" Independence Day celebration. And, I have been a leader in workforce and public health innovation with cost-effective programs, such as the FluFreeQC vaccination program, Scott County Mental Health Court and the QC Health Initiative, among others.

Q2 Are there areas of the County budget today – or on the horizon - that cause you particular concern? Yes/No. Please elaborate.

Yes. However, my concern for the county budget is not focused (so much) on the amount, but rather on priorities, approach and return on investment. Here's a few examples:

PRIORITIES: Current population demographic trends and slow economic development remain cause for concern and require sharper focus. The County has not communicated a comprehensive growth strategy. Consider this:

According to the U.S. Census Bureau, the population of Scott County grew by 4.4% between 2010 and 2017. But, this growth lags behind the nation (5.5%) as well as Johnson (14%), Linn (6.1%) or Polk (11.9%) Counties.

Census Bureau data also shows that between 2012 and 2016 Scott County has the lowest percentage of population with a bachelor's degree (31.9%), compared to Johnson (52.4%), Linn (32.2%) and Polk (35.6%) Counties.

The Bureau of Labor Statistics reports that YTY (4Q16-4Q17) growth of the average weekly wage of Scott County residents (1.7%) is disappointing compared to the nation (3.9%) as well as Johnson (2.2%), Linn (5.9%) and Polk (2.7%) Counties.

While BLS reports that the national unemployment rate edged down from 4.1% to 3.9% in April; the 4.2% unemployment rate for the Quad Cities MSA is higher than Iowa (3.9%) as well as the Cedar Rapids MSA (3.3%), the Des Moines MSA (2.9%) or the Iowa City MSA (2.1%).

Census Bureau data shows that the poverty rate in Scott County (13.4%) is higher than the nation (12.7%), the state (11.8%) as well as Linn (10%) and Polk (10.9%) Counties.

As a percentage of total population, between 2010 and 2017 Scott County had the fastest growing population of people 65+ (15.2%) among Iowa's largest counties, including Johnson (10.8%), Linn (14.9%) and Polk (12.3%) Counties, according to the U.S. Census Bureau

And finally, the U.S. Commerce Department gauges the national gross domestic product rose in 2015 by 2.4%, annually, and in 2016 by 1.5%, annually. During that same time the Des Moines MSA posted annual GDP growth of 3.8% and 2.1%, compared to the QC MSA (negative) growth rate of -2.1% and -1.9%.

We can do better. ...but, only through planning, collaboration and measurable goals.

APPROACH: The County needs to be more thoughtful in its approach to municipal service delivery and collaborate more.

For example, is there a worthy advantage in prohibiting our local health care systems from providing emergency transport services? Instead, the County maintains a budget line of hundreds of thousands of tax dollars to deliver a service that the private providers could and would provide as well without taxpayer obligation.

On another front, perhaps the County should transfer title of abandoned houses only to owner-occupied status, rather than permitting the sale of such property to out-of-state corporations that will use the property as loan collateral for investment elsewhere. In this way, we create incentive for improvement and create a more robust tax base.

ROI: The general lack of communication and transparency about County operations makes any meaningful analysis of efficacy or return on investment difficult. But, programs that are intended to eliminate costs; advance shared and measurable goals; or, improve quality of life should be measured and promoted. Spending and investment can only be evaluated on data. We need to move forward based on facts, not "feelings." Only then, can we determine if the current level of spending is adequate or appropriate.

Q3 Are there policies or practices you'd like to see the Board adopt, expand or eliminate to promote a stronger business climate in Scott County and the Quad Cities region?

Yes. The County is uniquely well-positioned to provide a "clearinghouse" role to obviate senseless competition among the cities and towns. While the County has "participated" in regional economic development activities; it has not been the "convener," a natural role.

The County also should play a greater role in the provision of appropriate, affordable housing that would accommodate new workers and their families without threat of lead poisoning and other environmental threats. Over time, the cost of remediation will out-weigh the lasting impact of the developmental damage done to our children.

The County also should focus on "livability" issues to enhance the appeal of our region. One minor suggestion, stop enforcement of antiquated Health Code violations and permit restaurant owners to create outdoor, pet-friendly seating areas. After all, "service" animals or pets called "service animals" are permitted open access to even indoor areas now. Also, the County might collaborate more with other local municipality to ensure the continued viability of cultural, entertainment and other amenities that make Scott County attractive to residents, newcomers and visitors.

Q4 In what circumstances do you support the use of Tax Increment Financing (TIF) and other economic development incentives?

TIF is an effective economic development tool. But, the issue does not lend itself to generalities. I enthusiastically support TIF as a means of revitalization of areas in a condition of deterioration that make re-development financially impractical, often referred to as "blight." TIF can not only make this re-development possible; but, it will also help us preserve "green space" and minimize "sprawl." I do not believe that TIF should be used simply to attract development from this local community to another, knowing that it would occur without TIF support. However, I do want to keep the TIF option available to entice development projects when the long-term fiscal advantages significantly outweigh the short-term loss of tax revenues. In other words, TIF projects need to be evaluated on case-by-case basis.

Q5 Do you support Scott County's investment in regional marketing, business attraction and economic development services through the Quad Cities Chamber / Quad Cities First? Yes/No. Please elaborate.

YES! While there is still much to do to improve the business climate and overall quality-of-life of Scott County; the County must collaborate with other governmental entities and the QC Chamber to "tell our story" now. There is a great deal to commend the QCA for business recruitment and we need to continue, maybe intensify, that effort.

Q6 Should Scott County play a greater role in regional economic development and, if so, in what ways?

Yes. I earlier made reference to the role of "convener." And, in collaboration with the Chamber, Scott County (along with Rock Island County) is positioned to serve as the "honest broker" of economic growth opportunities. And, rather than playing a merely supporting role, the County should take a leadership position in the development and implementation of a comprehensive and long-term population and economic growth strategy. Where do we want to be in five years? Ten years? Twenty years? And, more importantly, how will get there?

A regional funding mechanism, such as a temporary sales tax, should be explored as a possible means of strategy development and implementation. I also would support a self-assessment as a "first step" in that process. Using the Amazon HQ2 criteria, how would the Quad Cities region compare to other communities still in contention for that project?

Q7 What more could Scott County do to support mental health services for needy residents?

Again, it is not a question of what “more” the County could do. The real issue is the efficacy of what we’re doing now and what could we do better. Before any adjustment in the level of program funding is implemented, the County must re-consider its approach to meeting the needs of those struggling with mental disease or disorder. County focus on incarceration and acute care hospital confinement has only exacerbated the mental health crisis. Indeed, the “revolving door” nature of this approach IS the crisis. No one gets the real help they need, only repeated and expensive interventions with no lasting benefit.

The county must recognize that mental illness is a chronic condition. And, like other chronic conditions, such as diabetes or COPD; mental illness cannot to be “cured” by a two-week hospital stay or “rehabilitated” during a six-month jail sentence. We need to re-focus on early detection; out-patient care; and, community-based services that maintain mental health.

For example, it is disappointing that the proven success of our community-supported Mental Health Court pilot program has not yet been recognized by the County with on-going financial support. The cost of care under that program is dramatically less than the alternative, that is, incarceration. The same is true for out-patient medication clients and other services that help “maintain” the mental stability of those in need of support and encouragement.

As an early champion of the Mental Health Court and similar programs that truly help people; I propose we re-establish county priorities based on evidence-based outcomes. Only then can we determine the proper level of mental health services needed by the community and whether “more” is required.

Q8 Name two areas of governmental consolidation you would support and why these would be beneficial.

Because the County provides different levels of service to virtually every community within the County; this is complicated question. But, as a proponent of “regionalism,” my goal is to create a bi-partisan, inter-governmental, public-private commission to evaluate opportunities for cost-saving and service improvement consolidation; create a timetable for implementation; and, independently manage the process going forward. I do not want to pre-judge this process. But, a few possible opportunities for consideration come to mind quickly:

1. Is there truly a need for four independent library systems in a single county of fewer than 175,000 residents. I certainly support the number of branches and services we currently enjoy. However, I wonder if there are not “overhead” expenses that could be reduced to provide more library of other services.
 2. Is there an opportunity to expand public transportation by consolidating providers across the region to do more for less and improve service by expanding routes or hours of operation so that workers, shoppers and visitors have a more practical public transportation option.
 3. Is there an opportunity to reduce acquisition and maintenance costs for heavy equipment, such as road maintenance vehicles, by creating a regional “pool” that could deliver the right equipment to the right community at the right time, without maintaining idle equipment in multiple communities without a current need.
 4. The Scott County Emergency Response Center serves as an excellent example of consolidated services provided better for less. We need to look for other such opportunities or, maybe even, extend this model? Perhaps we need to evaluate consolidated public safety and other municipal services such as those provided in Miami-Dade and consolidated models elsewhere.
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Q9 If the taxing authority for the Quad Cities International Airport were to expand to include other local governing jurisdictions, would you be in favor of Scott County’s inclusion to strengthen air service in our community? Why or why not?

Yes. A well-run, truly “regional” airport connecting the QCA to larger national and international markets is an essential element of future growth. Participation by Scott County in the funding of airport operation also gives the County a voice in the quality of those operations, going forward. I believe both QCI and Scott County will benefit from such collaboration. For example, a more robust financial model for QCI would perhaps “open the door” to expansion, not just in air service, but access as well. Perhaps a light rail or other public transportation service connection from the airport to a Scott County location(s)? This concept might also apply to the new Moline rail station as well.

Q10 Where would you like the County Board to concentrate its regional efforts? Check all that apply.

Rock Island Arsenal/Strategic Defense Alliance ,

Implementation of Q2030 Regional Action Plan ,

Air Service/Quad Cities International Airport ,

Regional Economic Development ,

Tourism ,

Other (please describe):

Population growth that makes Scott County more competitive and creates a future tax base that is more stable and more robust.