

LMT endorsements

LAREDO MORNING TIMES

Laredo Morning Times is endorsing local candidates in contested races only.

State Senator, District 21

This one is a clear no-brainer. Sen. Judith Zaffirini has extensive experience, a 100-percent voting and attendance record and high ranking in the Texas State Senate that has served Laredo well. Her accomplishments are legendary, and what she has done to help Laredo — as well as this state's most needy — would fill a book.

She has spearheaded the funding for Texas A&M International University as well as for the University of Texas at San Antonio Health Science Center Laredo Campus, among countless other projects. She helps the mentally ill, the disability challenged, impoverish children — and students of all ages.

Zaffirini has our resounding vote of confidence.

District Attorney

This is a tough job, made even tougher after the recent corruption trouble in this city. It's going to take someone who not only wants to make changes, but who can get the job done.

We believe Fausto Sosa is that man. With his experience on both sides of the courtroom — prosecution and defense — he knows what it takes. As someone who has the respect of the Laredo legal and law enforcement community, he can help the various agencies work together to the benefit of Laredo and Zapata.

He has the ideas and the will to transform the District Attorney's Office into a force that bring drug traffickers and other criminals into line. Fausto Sosa is the right choice for district attorney.

Sheriff

Rick Flores started out great, promoting many things. Unfortunately, his ego got in the way. He seems to believe that because he was elected, he is no longer subject to questions. He has a short fuse when it comes to what he calls "attacks," which are nothing less than the public's attempt to ensure he kept his promise of transparency. That didn't happen. He is filled with contradictions. He supported Civil Service, but three years after he's been in office, it still hasn't happened. Even if it's not his fault that the system hasn't been implemented, he could easily have started his own version that employed the same unbiased, merit-based evaluations. He hasn't. He says he believes the current jail should be retrofitted, that it has a life expectancy of 20 years, yet he still wants to get a multi-million bond issue passed for a new jail. He says agencies need to work together to battle crime, but he has blasted Mexico as corrupt in a wholesale condemnation that can't help but impede any help we might get from law-abiding law officers in our neighbor to the south.

It's time for another change. Martín Cuellar has 26 years as a law enforcement officer with the Texas Department of Public Safety, a widely respected law agency.

Cuellar spent several years in intelligence, including work with Mexican agents and, yes, the bad guys, too — all of which bodes well for a department that needs to know what's going on at all levels and who's not only willing but able to work with Mexico as well as with federal agencies to help protect the people.

His plans for restructuring Crime Stoppers to include multi-agency participation and his call for a County Highway Patrol Unit, perhaps bolstered by deputy constables (our idea, not his), would be an important step forward.

He's not flashy, and he may not look like a movie cowboy, but Martín Cuellar has the experience, ideas and attitude it will take to be a

County attorney

Homero Ramirez is a self-assuming, unassuming public servant. He doesn't take to the limelight, and he's not often the center of attention. But he is quietly, solidly doing a difficult job.

Many people may not realize that a good 80 percent of the county attorney's job is handling juvenile criminal cases, which, by their very nature, are not public and not often publicized.

But when he starts talking about the needs of this county's young people — not for coddling, but for real tough love — his passion shines clearly.

There may be times when officials don't get what they want from him immediately, but he has a great many things on his plate.

Overall, Homero Ramirez has earned the right to another term.

County tax assessor-collector

Anyone who has spent any time — and you won't have to wait long — in tax assessor-collector's office under the administration of Patricia Barrera can attest to her commitment to customer service.

Barrera's customer service is consistently excellent, unmatched by just about anybody else in the county. A strong-willed person who believes in hard work and honesty, Barrera showed she could run a major office and do it well.

Her problem with the Attorney General's Office last year — when her office computers were confiscated amid a much-publicized "raid" after accusations that employees were conducting raffles to benefit her campaign on county time — appears to have fizzled. She has denied the charges. What we'd like to see now is her taking the lead in getting rid of all these fundraisers, no matter how worthy the cause, on county property. She could do it.

Patricia Barrera is a top-notch public servant, and we're proud to support her bid for reelection.

County commissioner, Precinct 1

Frank Sciaraffa was one of the commissioners who helped pass some ridiculously high salary increases at the end of then-County Judge Louis Bruni's term. He was called to account on that then, and he's being called to account for it now at the voting booth.

Sciaraffa has shown that he is not a good steward of the county's money. He talks a good game, but there's little to show for it.

We recommend Raul Reyes, the young man who as mayor of El Cenizo, has shown a remarkable ability to weather a storm and do much with little. He has vision, which is a rare commodity these days, and the drive to get things done. Precinct 1 would be well represented by this committed public servant.

County commissioner, Precinct 3

Jerry Garza was another one of the commissioners who helped pass those raises — tens of thousands of dollars per person in some cases — and he, too, has shown that he doesn't know how to handle the purse strings. He has had two people on staff for more than a year for his Buenos Aires Community Center, which has yet to open.

No, Webb County needs dedicated people who know what it means to be a cost-efficient administrator. Precinct 5 would be well served by elected C.Y. Benavides III. His business experience as well as his desire to serve the people of this county — just look at the great things he's done for the Boys & Girls Clubs of Laredo — show that he has the mettle to help lead the county.

Endorsements for constables, justices of the peace and the Democratic County Chair will be in Tuesday's paper.

After all is said and done, the voting is done by the people at the polls. Early voting begins today and continues through Feb. 29. Election Day is March 4. Get out and vote!