

Horton says he'll run for chairman in 2012

By Rob Peecher- The Oconee Leader

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Oconee County Commissioner Chuck Horton announced last week that he will run for the commission chairman's seat in the 2012 election.

For the campaign-weary voter, who breathed a sigh of relief on November 3, it may seem a bit early for such an announcement, but Horton doesn't think so.

"The election will be here before you know it, we're almost into 2011," Horton said. "I had a lot of folks asking me last (election) to run, and I chose not to. My thing was, let's get moving in the right direction and I'll make a decision on down the road. I still get asked all the time if I'm going to run for chairman, and I'd just rather go ahead and say, 'Yeah, that's my intentions,' and get it said and done."

Horton, who served as chief of police for the University of Georgia, said he has the time to take on the full-time chairman's job.

"I'm doing a lot of volunteer stuff; I'm retired from the university, so I have the time to do it. I can run, it's not going to interfere with anything that I do."

In explaining his desire to be commission



Horton

chairman, Horton reiterated a complaint he and other commissioners have made that the sitting commission chairman, Melvin Davis, has not been as communicative with the other commissioners as they would like. This criti-

cism led the board in 2008 to change the structure of the chairman's position to provide the other four commissioners with more oversight in day-to-day activities.

"We're at a point where we've made some changes and have had some positives from it, but I think in the role of chairman you've got to have someone there who's willing to work with the commissioners. That doesn't mean you have to agree, but you've got to be willing for us to work through issues. Right now, we just don't have that," Horton said.

Horton said his differences with Davis "may be philosophical."

"Commissioners should not be looked at as being the enemy," Horton said. "We're elected by the people, too, and the govern-

ment is not just the chairman's government. We need somebody that's willing to help change the culture (on the board)."

A former board of education chairman, Horton said he has a good perspective to run for the chairman's seat.

"I know both sides," Horton said. Prior to a four-year term as school board chair, Horton served four years on the school board, and he is in his second four-year term on the county commission.

Horton also said that if he is elected chairman he will routinely vote on issues, not only in the case of a tie.

"I think if you've got your hands on everything, folks need to know where you stand," he said.

Davis said last week he has not yet made a decision if he will seek reelection.

"In my opinion, it's far too early to make that decision," Davis said.

Davis said any number of issues could come up in the next year – from health to family issues – that could affect a decision to run for office, and his decision could still be more than a year from coming.

"A lot of issues could take place between now and then that could impact such a deci-

sion. You never know what could be in the future for any person. I normally make those decisions some time around the first of the year that we qualify. So, that would be about a year and a couple of months from now," he said.

Nevertheless, Davis said he is proud of where the county is now compared to when he first took office.

"If I were to make a decision today, there is no doubt in my mind what that decision would be, but I'm not going to discuss that at this time," he said. "I think in Oconee County we've accomplished a significant amount since 2001 when I came into office, not by me but by a team effort. We've had assistance from commissioners, staff and a vision of what we had and where we are going.

"For the most part, I think we've been very successful addressing all phases: water needs, sewer needs, transportation needs and economic needs. I feel like we've provided good quality for the dollars with which we've been entrusted."

Mike Sprayberry contributed to this report.