

Ivey puts accent on race for governor

by John Fleming
Editor at Large
Jan 07, 2010

Kay Ivey gestures to her audience at the appropriate times, she makes eye contact, she smiles and she has a command of the issues, all the traits of a dynamic speaker. Add these talents to a soothing Black Belt accent and she has an audience at attention.

Of course, it helped on Wednesday that Ivey was among friends — a packed room of Cheaha Republican Women's Club members at Classic on Noble who had come out to hear this GOP candidate for governor.

After Mayor Gene Robinson tossed her some kind words and handed her a key to the city, Ivey proceeded to tell her audience why she is the best candidate in a crowded field of Republican hopefuls.

Ivey, who has served as state treasurer since she was first elected to the office in 2002, pointed out that she is the only constitutional officer on the ballot and that her background in business and in education makes her more qualified to lead the state than any of the other candidates.

“Do you want a political aspirant,” she asked her audience, “or someone with a political track record?”

On the issues, Ivey touched frequently on the role of government, particularly the size of it. Government, she said repeatedly, doesn't have to be large to be effective.

There were 61 employees in the state treasurer's office when she arrived in 2002, she said. “Now, we have 47 employees. Some people retired, a couple of them died and others moved on. Now just because I was allocated those positions didn't mean I had to fill them.”

This, Ivey says, is just an example of how effective she can be at cost-cutting if she is elected governor.

Later, during a meeting with Star editors, she added that she had cut some \$5 million from her office's overhead since she was elected.

Ivey also took questions at The Star about problems in the state's pre-paid college tuition program, or PACT, a program the treasurer's office oversees. Since the onset of the economic crisis in fall 2008, the program has been in crisis. Early last year, PACT stopped accepting new subscribers.

Ivey said no matter who is going to be the next governor, the problem has to be addressed.

“The PACT program needs a solution,” she said. “I don't know about the legal obligations, but there is no doubt that the state has a moral obligation to make sure that everyone in the program is taken care of.”

She went on to say that she does not believe the program is working and that after all the students currently in the program finish — about 18 years from now — the state should close the program down.

A number of other similar programs are already in existence that parents could participate in, she noted, including so-called 529 tax-advantaged college savings programs administered by the states. Ivey also addressed the issue of constitutional reform, including home rule.

She supports reform incrementally, she said, but is opposed to a convention to re-write the state's 1901 Constitution, and that includes allowing the people of state to vote on whether to have a convention.

“If the Legislature passed a bill allowing a referendum (on a constitutional convention), they would have to override my veto,” she said.

On home rule, she supports a county's right to make many decisions, including those involving planning and zoning, but she opposes a county's ability to raise taxes without the Legislature's approval.

Near the close of the meeting at Classic on Noble, Ivey was asked if she thought Calhoun County should start a Tea Party (a grass roots organization devoted to small government often critical of the Obama administration).

She responded by saying, “I'll be your first speaker.”

Robinson thanked Ivey for coming to Anniston, noting that “we need to take back our county and make it Republican again.”

The state's only woman candidate for governor, however, consistently came back to the issues of small government, stressing over and over that “the great state of Alabama,” can achieve greatness not with raising taxes but with cost-cutting and better management.”



In that particular Wilcox County accent, she said to Robinson of their similarities: “We manage the money pretty tight.”