

# CEDRIC JACKSON



**1. 2023 saw an almost total meltdown of the Quorum Court operation and much of county government. What could you do (or what did you do) as JP to improve the situation? I respectfully disagree with the characterization of a "total meltdown." It's sad to see and witness certain individuals going to media outlets to discredit members of the Quorum Court and their procedures when it comes to running county government. As a current Justice of the Peace who has been a very dedicated member during my tenure on the Court, I have worked diligently with my colleagues and the county judge to make sure that each procedure has been followed and all principles have been upheld. Issues that we have had to overcome this year on the Quorum Court weren't issues that dealt with individuals not wanting to work together. There were issues where members of the court were forced to decide outside of what needed to be done when it came to supporting the elected officials and the community. The problems we encountered in 2023 primarily came as a result of the county judge wanting power over the elected officials such as what items being placed on and addressed on the monthly agendas. When it comes to the Quorum Court and the County Judge, we are supposed to assist one another, not control one another.**

**In 2023, we experienced a split court, which included having to deal with several lawsuits that were filed. During this time, we had to seek advice from the prosecuting attorney and retain legal counsel. This was a troubling time for the Court because we were provided with legal advice on guidelines related to the duties of the Court and those of the county judge.**

**We experienced even more pushback from the judge and the other Quorum Court members to the point where the judge disregarded any information that we provided from counsel. There were several discussions with the judge about procedures and the role of each member. Again, the judge disregarded the information we received from legal counsel and stated that the Quorum Court members violated the law. He then proceeded to do things his way. So, improving the situation is difficult due to the several attempts that have been made to resolve issues with the judge and other Quorum Court members. In reference to that, my role is to continue to work as an elected official by upholding the integrity of the law and to be dedicated to holding myself accountable as well as the other elected officials.**

**2. What are two goals you would have as a JP in the next term and how would you pay for them if financing is required? In my first term on the Court, I served as the Chair of the Educational Committee, but for some reason that committee was dissolved. My goals for the upcoming term will focus on education and programs for the youth. One of my goals is to enhance and improve relationships with the community, the county, and the local college institutions.**

This focus will assist the students with planning a better future once they complete high school. Some of the issues that I see are that students need to be better informed about their options and gain the necessary tools they need while in school. I have been employed by UAPB, my alma mater, for 20-plus years, and some of the things I hear the incoming students say is that they wish they were provided with more information and resources before enrolling in college. This also helps the county to provide a wider range of assistance when students are incorporated into the plan.

My next goal is to focus on programs that assist the youth with after-school programs along with activities that can be implemented during the summer months. This can help the youth find mentoring opportunities. Also, meals can be provided during these sessions, and certain education outlets can be provided for the youths, such as strategies to assist them with testing. These programs will give the youth much-needed support during the summer months so that their learning won't be stopped or delayed.

The funding for these initiatives can be through partnerships within educational institutions, the churches within the community, and grants. For this to work, there must be a joint effort between the Quorum Court and the County Judge. Considering the issues that we have had to overcome this past year; some type of mediation or conflict resolution strategy must be utilized if a problem arises. Because I have found that if some members or the judge don't support the efforts, your recommendation will not be put on the agenda. There have been certain disagreements between the members and the judge and all of us need to be on the same page.

**3. What are some of the key issues associated with your district and how would you address them?**

Some of the issues associated with my district are concerns with the court being transparent, the division between members of the court and the county judge, accountability of government funds,

and neglected roads that are in immediate need of repair. When it comes to transparency, it's important to have regular updates with the members and not wait until the meeting. This helps the members have a smooth transition during the meetings by having all questions that need to be asked about bills, payments, or any documentation that comes through the county. Allowing the members to see these documents can help us answer questions as a body and within the community. It's important that if something is being done or paid for by the county, the members are provided with the invoice or the necessary documents. Holding each member accountable is very important. Some procedures and policies focus on how the county should operate and how each elected official should handle their expenditures. Each elected official should be held accountable for their budgets and follow the necessary guidelines that are set in place. As we hold these individuals accountable, the yearly audits should be discussed in the monthly meeting after the members have received their copies so that the findings can be discussed. (There has been a motion every year since I've been on the Court to add these discussions to the agenda but the judge refuses to allow them to be added).

Being a member of the court and more importantly a citizen in my district for over 40 years, I'm dedicated to serving my community for another 40-plus years.

**4. We have heard complaints from county residents about the condition of the roads. Is the county doing enough to keep them in good shape? And what can a JP do to improve them? County roads have not been given the attention they need. It is assumed that the JPs are holding up the progress of the county roads. However, the county judge oversees the road department supervisor and the staff that administers the daily operations of the road department. During the previous administration, there have been a lot of open discussions in reference to the roads and why they haven't been fixed. In my opinion, there shouldn't be an issue with having the roads fixed or serviced if the reason is that we don't have the manpower to run the equipment.**

Due to the budget and monies that have been received, the work can be contracted out to agencies or businesses for people to be able to travel in safe conditions. Before the equipment is purchased, there is a need to make sure that you have the employees to operate it. There's another point of accountability. Overspending the budget has caused a major delay with these roads also, because not only will it cause the roads to be delayed, but the vendors are also not paid on time. The JPs can continue to pass ordinances, just as we have done previously related to road improvements. But it's left up to the county judge to make sure that the work is performed or carried out. Depending on what road or when that road will be worked on or repaired, is solely controlled by the county judge. This issue has raised a lot of turmoil within the Quorum Court, the members of the court respect the authority of the county judge. But it's disheartening for the judge to make statements accusing the JPs of holding up progress when it comes to the roads being repaired or fixed. (That control or decisions come solely from the Judge who then directs his staff).

5. One of the jobs of the Quorum Court is to levy the various millages in the county. This year, because of the dysfunction previously mentioned, the levying of taxes went down to the wire and was approved at the last minute, putting at risk all of these millages and the operations those tax dollars fund. School superintendents and mayors became highly concerned because the inaction of the Quorum Court would have had catastrophic consequences for their operations. Can you say how you reacted during this period as a JP and why OR say how you would have reacted as a JP during this period? To address the statement about the taxes going down to the wire, I have to say that statement is not accurate when it comes to the JPs approving the taxes. The JPs met, most of the members voted to approve these taxes in November and a few other members, along with the County Judge were not present. The tax was passed, but the county judge vetoed that item. Once the members were notified of the veto, we exercised our rights and overrode the veto.

So, it was clear that the taxes were passed in November. The reason for the meeting and addressing the taxes was for the judge to add an address other to the agenda that had already been denied by most of the members. We must agree that the taxes were passed on time, but like other pieces of legislation, the county judge refuses to place certain items on the agenda. Items that have been approved and passed by a majority vote of the Quorum Court members aren't recognized by the judge because again, he wants to have control of the Quorum Court proceedings.

6. Anything else you want to say?

2023 was a challenging year for me personally as a member of the Quorum Court. I had to endure personal attacks from a certain local radio personality on the air and in person, the county judge, members of the community on social media platforms, etc. These individuals have tried to defame my character and spread untrue statements. Along with myself, other elected officials have had to endure the same mistreatment along with not being able to operate smoothly in their positions by refusing to sign certain invoices and providing them with funding to function.

I'm seeking reelection for the same reason that gave me the drive to run in previous terms. Whether I opposed it or not, my hard work and consistency will still be matched with my determination to make sure the county is operated while holding everyone, including myself, accountable. As I stated in my recent address to the community, I come from a family of business-minded individuals who have provided great service to the community, and to add my 15-plus years as a businessman and over 20-plus years in education as well as providing services for the youth. My work speaks for itself. I am a dedicated member of my community and I want to continue to work for the citizens of Jefferson County. I hope that the people will re-elect me to continue the work I've started.

# JOSEPH O'NEAL

**1. 2023 saw an almost total meltdown of the Quorum Court operation and much of county government. What could you do (or what did you do) as JP to improve the situation? To know that the county government was on the brink of a shutdown was unsettling. And for what good reason? It was a perfect example of Community Treason. This was done by certain members of the Quorum Court. If I had been in the position of a JP, at that time, I would have without hesitation stood against the tyranny. I would've stressed the importance of not losing sight of what we were invested to do, and by whom. It doesn't take much to respect one another, even while resolving conflicts. It's perfectly fine to disagree but disagreements should never turn into personal tirades, nor should they hinder progress. If we create a positive environment, everyone benefits.**

**2. What are two goals you would have as a JP in the next term and how would you pay for them if financing is required? Seeing what took place over the course of this past year, two goals I would have are improving infrastructure and promoting understanding between the Justices. I would explore options for government grants, private-public partnerships, and also allocating funds from the county's budget. I understand how important it is to find cost-effective ways to make county goals a reality for the benefit of the community. And understanding would only cost us a little of our time and patience to listen to the next person.**

**3. What are some of the key issues associated with your district and how would you address them?**



**As I am still getting input on the needs, from the residents in my district. But I have been made aware and seeing many concerns and about the road conditions. I do believe that the County Judge has made great efforts to create plans to drastically minimize this issue and I would be dedicated to making sure that this issue along with any other concerns continues to get attention as long as the problem is valid. If necessary, I would also advocate for increased funding for road maintenance.**

**4. We have heard complaints from county residents about the condition of the roads. Is the county doing enough to keep them in good shape? And what can a JP do to improve them? See #3.**

**5. One of the jobs of the Quorum Court is to levy the various millages in the county. This year, because of the dysfunction previously mentioned, the levying of taxes went down to the wire and was approved at the last minute, putting at risk all of these millages and the operations those tax dollars fund. School superintendents and mayors became highly concerned because the inaction of the Quorum Court would have had catastrophic consequences for their operations. Can you say how you reacted during this period as a JP and why OR say how you would have reacted as a JP during this period?**

**Again, this County should have never experienced the dysfunction that caused the desertion of the Quorum Court's responsibility. Justices must prioritize the well-being of the community at all times. Citizens have put their trust, their lives and their families in our care. I take that very seriously and it would be an honor to be trusted with such responsibility. The smooth functioning of essential services is a must. The Quorum Court has to be proactive, communicate effectively, and ensure that the operations funded by these millages are not put at risk. I would be dedicated to making sure this does not happen again.**

**6. Anything else you'd like to say? We are all responsible for this County's wellness; every last resident. But there are a few that are tasked with the responsibility to lead. There must first be a genuine love for people. While in the capacity of a Justice of the Peace, the residents must come first at all times.**