

Monday October 24, 2011

7:23 And we're live from Ben Robertson Community Center.

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7:25 The candidates have been introduced. Now moderator Rep. Ed Setzler takes the podium.

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7:26 Format: Four general questions to be asked to all candidates, and two individual questions to each candidate.

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7:27 This will be followed by a Q&A from the audience.

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7:27 Now 3-minute opening remarks from all the candidates.

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7:27 Mayor Mark Mathews takes the podium

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7:28 Mathews: Four years ago, ran on platform of "building our hometown."

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7:28 Mathews: With hard economic times, budget has been reduced by 12 percent.

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7:29 "Thank you very much for the opportunity tonight. I look forward to answering your questions."

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7:29 Next, City Council challenger Jimmy Dickens, Post 2, takes the podium.

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7:29 I'm concerned about our community. I want to be part of it...

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7:29 Dickens: Currently running three mentoring programs.

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7:30 Dickens: I have eight kids, beautiful wife.

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7:30 Councilman Tim Killingsworth, Post 2: been in Kennesaw for 15 years. Retired from Marine Corps.

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7:31 "We changed a lot of attitudes about the way people look at politics and look at leaders here in Kennesaw."

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7:32 "One of my passions being a retired Marine is to follow and stay with the veterans groups."

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7:32 "We've got a lot of things happening and a lot of things about to happen."

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7:32 "We haven't raised your taxes, and we don't plan to do that anytime soon."

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7:33 Councilwoman Cris Eaton-Welsh, Post 1, takes the podium.

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7:33 "I work here, I live here, my husband Steve and I have chosen to raise our family here."

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7:33 "We have got a \$1 million renovation going on with the old Cowboys location."

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7:34 "I'm very proud of this mayor and council for the relationships that they've built."

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7:34 First group question: There's been a lot of talk for the need for economic development in downtown Kennesaw. What's your vision for downtown? How will you get there?

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7:35 Eaton-Welsh: That's my vision for downtown—a walking breathing downtown

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7:36 Killingsworth: The development that she's talked about, everybody has seen the Underpass under the railroad tracks. All that land on the other side of that street has been put together by the Development Authority. Now we've got Camp MacDonald. That's gonna be a passive park. Plus 4-story parking deck.

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7:37 Killingsworth: Our downtown is moving. We've got development already happening. Kennesaw right now is staged and prepared to be on the front of the stage.

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7:38 Jimmy Dickens: Trackside was a good start. Me personally, I would like to see more restaurants downtown.

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7:38 Right now, other than the Trackside, there's not a lot of restaurants.

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7:38 People want to be in downtown Kennesaw. If you look at Pigs and Peaches and the big festivals that we have. I would want to redevelop downtown so we're more family friendly.

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7:39 Mark Mathews: The vision that we've got for Kennesaw is shared by the entire council at this present time.

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7:40 Downtown on Main Street, there is a rendering as well where we have assembled a property behind City Hall. That is intended to be a mixed use facility. One of the big problems we have—lack of parking. Once we address parking problem, we should have influx of additional business, restaurants and shops opening up in downtown. That vision is well underway and being executed as we speak. The biggest hindrance right now is the economy. I envision over next two or three years, we will start seeing drastic, drastic changes.

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7:44 Individual questions for Eaton-Welsh: With your stated focus on communications, how have you helped increase communication between city and residents? With what tangible results? Eaton-Welsh:

Communication is the key to everything. The first thing I did when I came into office is I put together a blog. Then we started doing Facebook. Now Parks and Rec has Facebook, Police dept. has facebook. Favorite thing is electronic newsletter. We've got a good percentage of people that have signed up and staying on top of what's going on. Started doing Survey Monkeys and got great feedback.

Next question: Which of projects currently in development would take first priority for completion if you are re-elected? Eaton-Welsh: The Sanctuary over at McCollum, everything coming together perfectly for this parking garage and downtown development.

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7:44 Group Question: Do you support passage of the TSPLOST? Specifically the proposed mass transit system from Kennesaw to midtown Atlanta.

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7:45 Killingsworth: I would have to say I do support it.

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7:46 They (Roundtable) all had to work together. You've got all these county commissioners, you've got these mayors, they're all trying to figure out a way to make it work.

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7:47 I'm here to tell you that they did a pretty good job when they started butting heads and getting together. Tim Lee and Mark Mathews came up here, and they started talking to Cobb County. Everybody knows how that went. Then they went back to drawing table and got in the trenches again. If you look at return on the dollar, I think Cobb County fared pretty well.

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7:47 In the event that it comes down to it, I'd probably have to vote yes. Because in 15 years, we're gonna be in trouble if we don't do something.

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7:48 Jimmy Dickens: I'm gonna give it to you straight. Yes, I do support it. I do think it should have been done years ago. Now's a bad time because of the economy.

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7:49 Ten years ago, something should have been in place then. If you look down the road, the congestion of traffic, we need to do something now.

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7:49 I do support it, but I want to make sure the monies are gonna go exactly where they say they're gonna go.

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7:50 Mark Mathews: No ifs, ands or buts is a little unfair. I've maintained my position since we adopted the final project list. It is too early for me, there are too many unanswered questions that require the state legislature to take action, specifically on the transit piece.

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7:50 Without a regional transit governance model in place to oversee that...if that's not in place, I can't support it.

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7:50 But assuming it's in place, will support it.

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7:51 I didn't have the choice to say yes or no as to when we would do it. All I had was the choice to be involved in the project list.

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7:51 Alternatives analysis study will take 18 months to complete—won't be complete until after the vote.

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7:52 Once study is done, then we can move forward with whatever that recommendation is.

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7:53 Eaton-Welsh: I do actually support it—something has got to be done about transportation. I've got to commend Mark. He put his neck out there. You know something needs to be done about transportation.

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7:53 Question for Jimmy Dickens: As Kennesaw business owner, why are you running for office? Why now?

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7:54 Dickens: I'm not just a business owner. I'm a father. I hear the complaints. I hear from customers, from knocking on doors. I hear

needs people are asking for. People want somebody that's real. Instead of just complaining about the stuff that Kennesaw needs—get involved. I think the best way to get involved is to get on the side making decisions.

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7:54 Dickens: I want to do whatever it takes on your behalf.

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7:55 Question: If elected to council, what are first changes you would make to what current leadership is doing?

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7:55 Dickens: The main thing I want is communication. I feel there is a link missing from the needs of the people and what's currently going on in some of the positions on the Kennesaw Council.

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7:55 I want to be the one that's listening to you because it's you that makes Kennesaw. Without all of you, Kennesaw wouldn't be what it is.

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7:56 As a business owner, I learned a long time ago that the people are my boss. I don't have a supervisor, I don't have a manager. The customers are what makes the business run.

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7:56 You all would be my boss.

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7:57 Question: In a struggling economy, what is your plan of action for bringing jobs to Kennesaw?

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7:57 Dickens: We have to first make Kennesaw attractive. We need to work with KBA to have something to attract more business. We need to redevelop downtown Kennesaw so businesses will want to invest.

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7:58 Mathews: The plan of action for bringing jobs to Kennesaw is really a multi-fold solution. I've been asked to work on economic development plan and identify key opportunities we currently don't take advantage of. Results should be back by end of year. There's initiative called One Georgia at state level. Once we get those plans in place, we can focus on industry or trade best suited for our area.

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7:59 So, our plan is really mainly just to continue focus on economic development in downtown, the student housing projects, continuing to partner with KSU.

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7:59 Eaton-Welsh: Our job as councilmembers is to promote Kennesaw inside Kennesaw.

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8:00 With Economic Development Department, we've got all these developments coming in. Cowboys will bring 40-50 jobs into the area.

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8:01 Killingsworth: One of the things that we want to be sure to look at is Kennesaw State University. Putting together student housing facility. KSU is gonna start doing something they call football. When football comes in, that's gonna bring a lot more people into Kennesaw.

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8:02 We're working with the museum. One little project I've been doing is looking at our hometown heroes. One of the things we've started doing is interviewing people who are real close to right here—you have a Pearl Harbor survivor, a D-Day survivor, the first female Post Master General right at the end of Moon Station.

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8:02 One of my dreams is to interview these people and having them digitized and having them on these tapes, so our grandchildren will be able to say, 'Hey, they lived right here.'

Monday October 24, 2011 8:02

8:03 Individual question for Killingsworth: You've talked about importance of partnerships and thinking regionally as a city. What is partnership you've helped establish? To what benefit? Killingsworth: When this council looked at me and asked if we could get Marine Corp Platoon here. We got em here twice.

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8:05 Question: If re-elected name at least one project you hope to complete in your next term that will benefit Kennesaw in the long-run.

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8:06 Killingsworth: Camp MacDonald Park, first African American museum. That's the kind of impact we're making. We're gonna make an impact. That gun law will only take us so far.

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8:06 Final group question: KSU is third largest university in Georgia. While KSU is not in city limits, how does university fit into larger picture?

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8:07 Eaton--Welsh: There's really two groups of people in economy that have money—seniors who are retired and college students.

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8:07 Purpose-built student housing is gonna be great. Also working closely with KSU and having great relationships with KSU.

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8:08 Killingsworth: One of the things Kennesaw State's gonna be doing is bringing football. This Wednesday, meeting with new athletic director. Actually getting to meet with these people and talk with these people. Dr. Papp has embraced the city government and city of Kennesaw.

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8:09 They are asking for our help.

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8:09 Dickens: Student housing—we need to give kids something attractive so that they'll want to be part of Kennesaw. Give them something they can gravitate to.

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8:10 We need to work on developing downtown area. That will draw them also.

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8:10 Mathews: Some of the things we've already put into place at KSU—I was asked by President Papp to be on Citizens Advisory Board.

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8:10 We've got two choices: we can either partner with KSU, or we can ignore it.

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8:11 Up until last four years, we've ignored it. What we've been able to do in last four years has been amazing.

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8:11 We've had high-level discussions with the team, the president's cabinet, to talk about additional housing in or around downtown.

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8:11 If I'm allowed to stay in office, we will continue to cultivate that relationship.

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8:14 Question to Mathews: Taxes and trash pickup are higher within city limits. Benefits of parks and rec available to nonresidents. What are benefits of living in city?

Mathews: People do pay nonresident fee. Looking at creating more fees for nonresidents. The areas within the city that we stand out: our police services, the protection we offer you. The average police response time in Cobb County—20 minutes. In Kennesaw—2 minutes.

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8:15 Kennesaw is in a unique position. Kennesaw's age is actually getting younger. Not just because of KSU. It's because we've created a family-friendly environment.

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8:16 Question: If re-elected as mayor, what will be your number one priority?

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8:16 Mathews: To continue building our hometown.

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8:16 One of the key steps is having property available and having cooperative land owners.

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8:17 We can't make people sell, or open business here. All we can do is try and provide the connections and try and facilitate some of these deals to actually be completed. If elected again, one of key projects will be to continue that downtown development.

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8:17 The Pedestrian Underpass is one key piece. If downtown is mall, our job is to create the anchor stores. I think we've done that with the museum. We've created framework for pedestrian-friendly downtown.

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8:18 We have to have something that's drawing people downtown if they don't live here. Things like Dinner at the Depot (food trucks that come in Monday night in downtown area).

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8:18 This city has become successful because of the volunteer boards. Much bigger than just the mayor and council.

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8:19 Now, starting Audience Q&A.

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8:31 First question for all candidates: Kennesaw Elementary School enjoys great relationship with city of Kennesaw. What would you do to strengthen relationship?

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8:31 Mathews: The only way to improve that, in my opinion, is to improve communication.

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8:31 Dickens: I have two kids that go to Kennesaw Elementary. I see that there's a great link that needs to be set forth.

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8:32 Killingsworth: In middle of November, got contacted to help in Jump Rope for Heart.

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8:33 Eaton-Welsh: My daughter goes there. I serve on their legislative committee. I'd like to see kids get involved.

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8:33 Question: Trash services have been reduced, while costs remain the same. Are you open to competitors?

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8:34 Eaton-Welsh: If we bring people in, I think it will be a big mess. A lot of these places dump illegally.

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8:35 Dickens: Myself, I would agree to have competition come in. No one should have a monopoly. I think the competition is good.

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8:36 Mathews: Sanitation is one of our services. We have tremendous recycling effort going on. As we continue to recycle more, those costs will go down. In order to reduce rate, we have to increase recycling.

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8:36 Long and short of it is: Increase recycling and sanitation fees will go down.

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8:36 We surveyed residents: overwhelmingly, people opted for reduction in service rather than increase in monthly bill.

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8:38 Sorry, had some connection issues. Now we're back on.

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8:40 Why should large company with more than 100 jobs bring them to Kennesaw?

Mathews: Primarily—quality of life for the employees.

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8:41 You can go from beginning to end and never have to leave Kennesaw.

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8:42 Eaton-Welsh: We've got great economic incentives. We have a fantastic university system, we're right on 75 and we're developing relationship with Cobb Chamber.

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8:43 Question: With growth, comes diversity. What would you do about Wildman's business if you were going to develop downtown?

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8:43 Eaton-Welsh: He and my father have butted heads for 20 years. When Wildman called me and asked me for a yard sign, my jaw dropped. Great thing about community—we can agree to disagree. We've just got to build everything beautiful around him.

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8:44 Killingsworth: I don't agree with him, but we have to let him stay where he is. As Cris said, we will grow around him. He won't be here forever. And we'll grow around him.

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8:45 Dickens: Knocking on doors and talking to you all, I've been asked this question a lot. My response is, I've had lunch with Dent a few times. He's even come by my barbershop. It's not Dent Myers that concerns me the most. You see his views a mile away. But it's people who have it in their hearts that you can't see that I'm concerned about. Maybe they're serving on a board or are a policeman—that's the scariest thing.

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8:46 My concern is beautifying downtown. We must be concerned about overall Kennesaw, not just Dent.

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8:46 Mathews: He is a business owner and deserves same respect that any other business owner deserves. As long as he stays within standards we've set, he's just as entitled to be there as anybody else is.

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8:46 I see him as just another piece of that diverse landscape we have here.

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8:47 He is a prime example of a diverse business.

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8:47 Closing Remarks

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8:48 Mathews: I want to thank the Patch for putting this event together. I think it's very unfortunate that all the candidates didn't choose to show up.

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8:48 We've got a lot of things that need to continue to stay in place and to maintain that focus so that we can come out of this strong on the other side.

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8:50 Dickens: I do ask you for my vote on Nov. 8 so your ideas, your voice, can be heard and passed along.

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8:51 Killingsworth: Who wouldn't want to be part of this? Who wouldn't want to be part of a great team? We've been able to assemble

great people. We've been able to hear your voice. A lot of ideas we've moved forward with have come from you.

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8:51 Eaton-Welsh: It has been an absolute pleasure. I would humbly ask you not only to get out and vote but get your neighbors to vote.

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