

# Fawcett keeps focus local

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Although unsuccessful in last year's congressional race, Jay Fawcett is using feedback from 18 months of campaigning to help solve community concerns. Fawcett, a Democratic candidate for Colorado's 5th District congressional seat in 2006, on Thursday launched Colorado Springs' only think tank focusing on local issues.

The nonprofit and bipartisan Western Strategies Center will study and analyze key community concerns — such as health care infrastructure and the city's economic balance — and also present solutions to civic and political leaders, Fawcett said. "Many policy centers do basic research, but the piece we really could use is what we can do about the problems, and that's what we're focusing on — strategies we think can be implemented," he said.

The center has raised \$20,000 and set up an office at 711 S. Tejon St. Four staff members are volunteers until the organization can become self-sustaining, Fawcett said. For full annual operation, Fawcett's goal is to raise \$500,000 from local, state and federal grants, private donations and fees for services, such as seminars.

Fawcett is leading the center's first study, on health care infrastructure, which he expects to be completed Oct. 1. Research will "examine all sides of the issue," Fawcett said, and will include interviews with health care players in the community such as hospitals, government-sponsored services, nonprofits and religious groups that provide services and nursing schools.

"It's not about who pays for what but issues like why Colorado Springs doesn't have a veterans hospital when it has the fourth-largest veteran population or why the county health department has funding cutbacks yet demands, such as pandemic response, are increasing," Fawcett said.

A subsequent study will examine the city's economic balance. The local economy is dependent on Department of Defense dollars, said Fawcett, who graduated from the Air Force Academy and served 20 years in the military. It's a dangerous imbalance, he said, because "The DOD is the single largest block of discretionary spending in the federal budget." The center will also study water issues and education for students ages 13 to 20.

Results will be shared with those who participate in the study, as well as leading forces such as the Colorado Springs Economic Development Corp., local chambers of commerce, City Council members, county commissioners and others. The center will follow up six months and one year after a study is released to determine whether suggested actions have been carried out, although the center will not advocate for any particular solution, Fawcett said.

"The big question is whether this center is of value to the community. I think it is. Colorado Springs is moving from a village to a city, and we have to address the issues that being a big city brings," he said. "The community-based concept is consistent with the pioneer pragmatism that brought people here in the first place. They came together to solve problems crucial to everyone."

Board member Howard Brooks likes the concept.

"We need that bipartisan or multipartisan approach to solve key issues," said Brooks, vice president of community impact for Pikes Peak United Way. "That's why this registered Republican is on a nonprofit board driven by a Democrat."

After retiring from the Air Force in 1998 as a lieutenant colonel, Fawcett worked as a defense contractor with Science Applications International Corp. His family owns a UPS Store franchise at Fort Carson and is opening two more — one at Peterson Air Force Base and one at the Air Force Academy.

For more information, see [www.westernstrategies.org](http://www.westernstrategies.org).