

State prison employees facing criminal charges

BY TOM LATEK
KENTUCKY TODAY

FRANKFORT — The Kentucky State Police say current and former employees at two Kentucky state prisons are among those facing charges stemming from separate investigations.

After Eastern Kentucky Correctional Complex officials discovered illegal drugs inside the prison at West Liberty, the KSP, in conjunction with the HIDTA Gateway Area Drug Task Force, arrested five individuals on 22 charges related to drug trafficking, official misconduct and other offenses.

On Sept. 7, 2025, EKCC contacted KSP and a joint investigation was initiated into suspected drug trafficking, money laundering, promoting contraband and organized criminal activity connected to the facility.

Investigators say William Caudill and Dwayne Skaggs, former correctional officers at EKCC, distributed illegal narcotics in the facility.

Two inmates housed at the facility, Shane Wilder and Challis Davis, also allegedly were involved in

distributing illegal narcotics. The investigation further claims that Donnie Wilder, mother of inmate Shane Wilder, assisted in the operation.

All five are accused of promoting contraband, trafficking in controlled substances and engaging in organized crime. In addition, Caudill and Skaggs also face charges of official misconduct.

In the other case, KSP at the Mayfield Post arrested a caseworker employed at the Kentucky State Penitentiary in Eddyville after investigating a report of an inappropriate relationship with an inmate.

KSP received a call Monday from the Kentucky State Penitentiary saying that an employee had been observed on security footage engaging in sexual intercourse with an inmate. The employee has been identified as Alysta Mathis, 26, of Dawson Springs.

Based upon the preliminary investigation, including review of video footage, Mathis was arrested and charged with third-degree rape and third-degree sodomy. She was lodged in the Crittenden County Jail.

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6% over the last year, according to the mayor.

Gregory gave credit to the continued efforts of the Elizabethtown Police Department as well as new, safer road designs. The Transportation Cabinet has implemented J-turns along Dixie Avenue and multiple roundabouts designed to improve traffic flow as well as cut the risk and severity of crashes.

“We’re seeing the accident number go down, which is a good thing, especially as everybody can tell, we have more traffic on the road than we’ve ever had in Elizabethtown,” Gregory said. “That’s quite an accomplishment.”

Last year, the city constructed and improved more than 2,000 feet of sidewalks. The mayor and council have budgeted \$350,000 a year to continue such improvements and to build sidewalks in older parts of town where none exist.

Gregory said copies of the annual report, with additional information included, are available at City Hall.

Construction activity boomed in the previous year to the tune of more than \$195 million according to the report.

During their meeting Monday, council members sat through the first readings of several ordinances that included amendments to

zoning.

A request has been made and approved by the planning commission for property at 106 E. Memorial Drive to be rezoned from C-1 (Neighborhood Office) to C-2 (Neighborhood Commercial) and for property at 237 W. Poplar St. to be amended from R-4 (Urban Residential) to C-5 (Downtown Mixed Use).

An ordinance also was read involving the annexation of 17 acres of property along Leitchfield Road near Cecilia. Upon doing so, the property owned by Delta Living Trust and CharSiya will be zoned regional commercial. It includes an existing Dollar General store.

Council members approved a municipal order accepting a bid from Schroeder Construction not to exceed the amount of \$497,833 for the West Railroad Avenue project.

“This is a really good project,” Gregory said. “We’re trying to replace some aging infrastructure.”

The two-block section of West Railroad is part of the Community Development Block Grant area north of downtown, and involves upgrading sidewalks, reconnection of sewer lines, drainage repairs and street improvements.

The next meeting of the Elizabethtown City Council will be 4:30 p.m. Monday at City Council chambers at 200 W. Dixie Ave. adjacent to City Hall. It also will be live-streamed on the city’s Facebook page.



GREG THOMPSON/The News-Enterprise

A 38,000-pound meter vault is lifted off a flatbed trailer Tuesday as part of collaborative project of the City of Vine Grove and Hardin County Water District No. 1.

VINE

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off the flatbed, slowly swung around and placed into position.

Later this week, a water district crew will connect it to their water main. Once that portion is completed, Vine Grove Public Works will finalize the project by connecting the pipe to their water main.

Railroad crossing safety legislation passes House

BY THE NEWS-ENTERPRISE



ANDREW WEST/Legislative Research Commission

State Rep. Nancy Tate speaks on behalf of House Bill 311 which is designed to improve visibility at railroad crossings.

Two local legislators have shepherded a bill born of local tragedy through the state House of Representatives.

Members of the House voted Monday to pass legislation that would improve safety at railroad crossings across Kentucky. HB 311 now heads to the Senate for consideration.

In previous committee testimony, Rep. Josh Calloway, R-Irvington, and Rep. Nancy Tate, R-Brandenburg, pointed to the 2020 death of Hunter Serna as impetus behind House Bill 311, which requires railroad companies to clear obstructive vegetation along public railroad-highway grade crossings.

“Overgrown vegetation can block a driver’s view at railroad crossings, making it difficult to see approaching trains,” said Calloway, the primary sponsor. “House Bill 311 would make railroad crossings in Kentucky safer by requiring railroads to remove obstructive vegetation.”

Since her 19-year-old son’s death at the Kraft Road

crossing near Rineyville, Tanya Serna of Vine Grove has dedicated herself to raising awareness about dangers at railroad crossings and advocating for legislation to prevent similar tragedies. She joined the local legislators

in advocating for the bill in committee.

HB 311 would require a railroad company to destroy or remove plants, trees, brush or other obstructive vegetation along its tracks at each public railroad-highway grade

crossing for 250 feet in each direction.

A railroad company, however, would not be authorized or required to enter private property to remove vegetation located on private property. If conditions make compliance impossible, impractical or unnecessary, the railroad company would be allowed to petition the Kentucky Transportation Cabinet to waive or modify the requirements by providing written notice.

Similar laws exist in 34 other states, according to information from the House Majority Caucus.

At the point, the governmental entity would clear the vegetation and bill the railroad for the cost of mowing and related services.

“Obstructive vegetation has led to preventable accidents and tragedies at railroad crossings in our state,” said Tate, a co-sponsor of the bill. “Holding railroad companies responsible for maintaining visibility at railroad crossings is a key step toward reducing accidents and saving lives.”

GOP Senate candidates talk immigration, Iran war in first debate

BY MCKENNA HORSLEY
KENTUCKY LANTERN

LOUISVILLE — Kentucky’s top three Republican U.S. Senate candidates largely agreed that illegal immigration is a major issue for Kentuckians, but they strongly disagreed about which of them would best handle it.

The candidates — U.S. Rep. Andy Barr, former state Attorney General Daniel Cameron and businessman Nate Morris — faced each other in their first debate of the primary season Monday night. Hosted by the Jefferson County Republican Party and TV station WDRB, the debate was held in front of party faithful and elected officials, including state lawmakers, at The Henry Clay in downtown Louisville.

Candidates largely had equal time to answer questions. Barr and Morris got heated a few times, talking over each other while rebutting the other’s attacks. Before a TV break halfway through the debate, Morris and Barr clashed over immigration policies following a question about workforce and labor.

In his answer, Barr said that “border security is something that I prioritize with this president” in Congress, adding that he favors securing the country’s borders while streamlining legal immigration programs.

“Securing the border is not incompatible or mutually exclusive with the idea that we are a nation of immi-

grants,” Barr said. “We are a nation of laws, and we are a nation of immigrants.”

Barr then accused Morris of hiring foreign workers instead of Americans. The Barr campaign previously highlighted this point in a campaign ad, mentioning Rubicon Global, the waste and recycling company Morris founded.

Morris said Barr was called “Amnesty Andy” in Washington, D.C., and then referred to a 2018 vote Barr gave in support of a Republican-backed bill on immigration. Barr responded that President Donald Trump had supported the measure.

After more back-and-forth between Morris and Barr, Morris criticized Barr for supporting admitting Afghan refugees who had helped U.S. forces and said that unvetted Afghan immigrants were responsible for a Thanksgiving Day attack on West Virginia National Guardsmen. The Afghan man charged in that incident served in an elite counterterrorism unit operated by the CIA.

“Andy, you’ve got blood on your hands,” Morris said. Cameron took some jabs at both of his opponents, though he didn’t receive many attacks in return.

In response to a question about his electability following his 2023 loss to Democratic Gov. Andy Beshear, Cameron said that he, Barr and Morris “believe in second chances.”

“Congressman Barr asked for a second chance when he first lost to Ben Chandler, and he got that second

opportunity,” Cameron said, referring to the Democratic congressman who previously held Barr’s seat. “Nate Morris had a company, Rubicon, that was delisted from the stock exchange. Now, he’s asking you for an opportunity to serve in the United States Senate. So, we all believe in second chances. I would be honored to have your help and support.”

Trump’s recent war on Iran was a theme throughout the night, and the three candidates said they agree with the president’s actions. Two Kentuckians have died in the military conflict, Tech Sgt. Ashley B. Pruitt, 34, of Bardstown, and Sgt. Benjamin N. Pennington, 26, of Glendale.

Barr recently voted against a war powers resolution backed by U.S. Rep. Thomas Massie, another Kentucky Republican, that would have blocked Trump from furthering the war in Iran without congressional authorization. Barr said Monday evening that the resolution “would have been a gift to our adversaries.”

“I will never, ever put the American people at risk by blocking the commander-in-chief’s ability — this president’s ability — to protect the American people from a nuclear weapon, from a ballistic missile or conventional capabilities,” Barr said.

Asked directly if he would support American boots on the ground in Iran, Barr said he would support Trump’s decision “and I have full faith and confidence that this

president will make the right decision.”

Morris also said he would back Trump’s decisions about the Iran war.

“I trust the president because of the results that he’s got for the American people, and I stand by him 100%,” Morris said. “And he has been so surgical, so tactical in the way that he’s gone after all these foreign governments, and I think that we’re going to get great results for the American people.”

Cameron was critical of former Democratic Presidents Joe Biden and Barack Obama for a “disastrous evacuation of Afghanistan” in previous years.

“President Trump is about decisive action on behalf of the American people to ensure our national security. I’m grateful for President Trump and support his efforts in Iran — and also let’s look at what he did with Maduro and taking out a narco-terrorist in Venezuela. This president is on the right track, and I’m grateful for his leadership,” Cameron said, referring to the January U.S. capture of Venezuelan President Nicolás Maduro. He and his wife were brought to New York on narco-terrorism and conspiracy charges.

Kentucky’s primary is Tuesday, May 19. Republican voters will see 12 names on the ballot but the only other candidate to report any fundraising or campaign expenditures if Mike Faris, a businessman from Elizabethtown.

Military report: 'one-in-a-million' malfunction rains shrapnel on California highway

BY CHRISTOPHER WEBER
ASSOCIATED PRESS

LOS ANGELES — A “one in a million” malfunction during a live fire demonstration over Camp Pendleton last October led to a misfire that rained shrapnel on Interstate 5, striking two California Highway Patrol vehicles, a U.S. Marine Corps investigation found.

An artillery shell exploded over the highway that serves as the main corridor between Los Angeles and San Diego during a celebration of the 250th anniversary of the Marine Corps, attended by Vice President JD Vance and Defense Secretary Pete Hegseth. Nobody was hurt, and investigators ruled out any negligence or wrongdoing

by Corps members.

The day before the event, Democratic Gov. Gavin Newsom called the planned demonstration with live artillery dangerous and unnecessary, and he ordered I-5 to be closed during it. That closure drew condemnation from the White House and other Republicans, and the Marine Corps said the exercises wouldn’t endanger motorists.

In a 666-page report dated Dec. 19 and first reported on Monday, the Marines concluded that there “is no definitive answer” to why an M795 high explosive round detonated early at an altitude of about 1,480 feet during the Oct. 18 demonstration. Such a premature detonation is “beyond reasonable expect-

tations and should not have happened, but it did,” the report says.

“It is manufactured to a tolerance of one defect in a million,” according to the report.

Organizers planned to fire 60 rounds of live artillery in 5 minutes over the highway, using six howitzer weapons, according to the report. But a round in the first volley of shots failed and detonated early, and the rest of the demonstration was canceled, the report said.

Days after the malfunction, 26 California U.S. House members and the state’s two senators sent a letter to Hegseth asking who decided to shoot live artillery over the freeway and how authorities prepared for the safety risks.

“We’re thankful to the Marines for their thorough and precise investigation — in stark contrast to the dangerous and performative demands by JD Vance and Pete Hegseth to shoot live ammunition over a civilian area for their entertainment,” Diana Crofts-Pelayo, a spokesperson for Newsom’s office, said in an email Tuesday.

Newsom announced the highway closure in a statement after practice rounds were fired a day ahead of the celebration. The governor described the live fire exercise as a show of force meant to intimidate Trump’s opponent, thousands of whom were demonstrating at “No Kings” protests in and around San Diego that day.