

HALL

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happens. The preparation begins months in advance.

“We’ve really been working on this all semester,” said Braelyn Spalding, one of the student moderators. “We got all assigned, about a couple months ago, a politician to call. I, myself, called Eddie McGuire. We all made sure we got those phone calls done, and then we also made up several questions that we wanted to make sure we got to ask, and then we also took questions from the public. And it’s also been this really great learning experience of what it takes to actually put an event together.”

The fall 2025 event kicked off at 6 p.m. Tuesday, Dec. 16. Originally set for Dec. 1, the event was rescheduled due to the risk of inclement weather.

The panel consisted of county Judge/Executive Kevin Spraggs; Commissioners Monti Collins, Marty Barrett and Eddie McGuire; County Attorney Jason Darnall; 42nd Judicial Circuit Court Judge Andrea Moore; Calvert City Mayor Gene Colburn; Benton City Council member

Kevin Farley; and State Legislators Chris Freeland and Danny Carroll.

Kerrick screened questions from those in attendance before giving them to the student moderators. The topics discussed ranged from city and county development, the potential impact of upcoming gaming facility Marshall Yards, accusations of gerrymandering in other states, substance use and mental health services, and many more.

Among the first questions was one for Carroll and Freeland regarding their views on redistricting efforts in other states accused of gerrymandering. Both legislators expressed their opposition to gerrymandering in general, with Carroll specifically noting his opposition to the changes brought to District 1 during the most recent redistricting effort.

“We’re not Frankfort,” said Carroll. “Our way of life is different, everything is different down here, and so I didn’t support that. I was vocal and not- nothing against Congressman Comer, I consider him a good friend, I support him, I hope he’s our next governor, so nothing against him at all. But I wasn’t in favor of that, and I don’t. I think it’s going to be

having a negative impact on us.”

Moore was asked what trends she has seen in cases coming into her courtroom, to which she said primarily she has been seeing fentanyl related cases. However, she noted that in 2025 she had seen a slight decrease in the number of cases. Moore also presides over the Marshall and Calloway County drug court programs, which she said has been effective for many individuals.

Carroll also noted that he sits on the state Child Fatality and Near Fatality Review Panel, and that the panel has reviewed a considerable number of pediatric deaths related to ingestion of illegal drugs.

A question was brought regarding the rates of domestic violence and child abuse in the county. Darnall and McGuire both stated that the number of resources for those situations has increased in recent years, and that Marshall County has a higher prosecution rate on those offenses, but noted that a higher rate of prosecution should not be equated to a higher rate of those crimes. McGuire also specifically noted the role that financial abuse plays in those relation-

ships, stating that many individuals want to leave their situation but cannot afford to.

Farley was asked why the property taxes in Benton are increasing, and why citizens have not been informed. Farley noted that in recent years the council has taken the compensating tax rate, which is expected to provide the city with the same amount of revenue as the previous year, but that if a property is reevaluated, an individual may have a higher bill due to an increased value. Farley also stated that the council meetings are open to the public and livestreamed on Facebook, so the information is available to the public.

Colburn also spoke to the tax question, and noted that the Department of Local Government provides cities with a variety of tax rates, but that cities have a duty to “hang with the status quo” so as to not fall behind, but also noted that if cities take the minimum for an extended amount of time, it can cause issues if a particular need were to arise.

Colburn was also asked about increased levels of copper and lead in Calvert City water. His response was that those levels were related to an older distribution

system, and were tested as a part of an effort to ensure clean drinking water. Colburn stated that the city’s water was well within the levels outlined by the state.

The topic of roundabouts being implemented in Draffenville and Calvert City was once again asked. Spraggs noted that the Kentucky Transportation Cabinet was proceeding with that plan, but that he was working with the cabinet to ensure that the final plan will still be effective for the needs of the community. This has included adding a turn lane near Central Elementary, and not placing barriers in the median of U.S. 68 through Draffenville. The project is also expected to be completed in stages so as to not totally disrupt traffic.

Freeland and Carroll were also asked how the continued decrease in income taxes at the state level may be handled in a way to not impact the state budget. The state legislature has continued to decrease the income tax rate in recent years. Both representatives shared that conversations were ongoing, but the need had not arisen, and the budget was relatively stable.

Carroll referenced the methods used in Tennessee, including high-

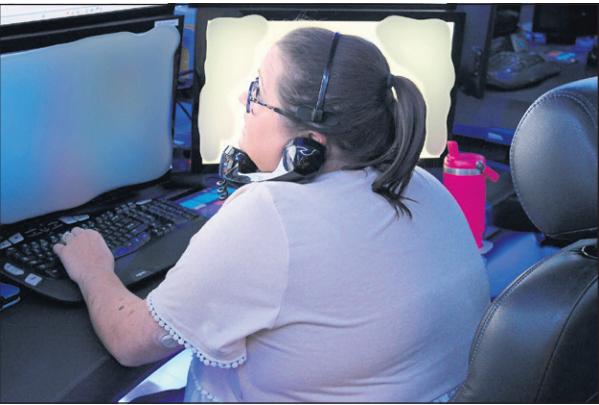
er sales taxes, and taxes on groceries. However, Carroll also noted that he did not believe most constituents would be in favor of those solutions.

Following a brief intermission, the panel returned with a discussion of mental health needs in the area. Moore answered by sharing that the state has begun a mental health court in a similar fashion to the existing drug court program. The program is operational in McCracken County, though Moore said Marshall and Calloway counties are able to use that program.

Darnall followed Moore’s answer by saying that he believes the future of the court system is individualized and specialized courts like family court, drug court, and mental health court. Darnall called Marshall County’s drug court program “one of the best things since sliced bread.” Darnall also noted that veterans’ courts have also begun operating in the state.

Carroll and Freeland were asked if they would support a proposed bill that would require local law enforcement to work alongside Immigration and Customs Enforcement. Both said they would be in favor of it,

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Dispatchers take a variety of calls on their shifts, both from the emergency and nonemergency lines.

DISPATCHERS

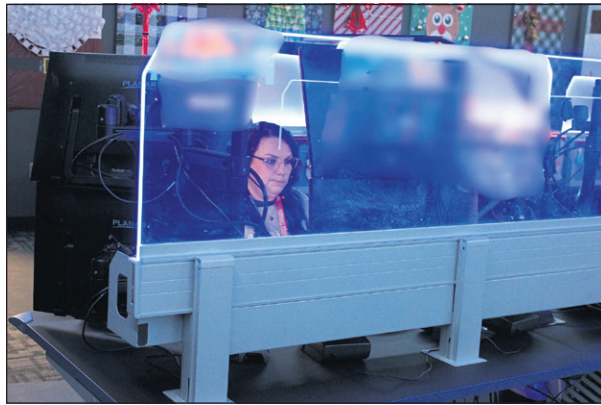
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staffing needs of the E911 center, Spraggs, the county fiscal court, and other county officials have also put in considerable work to complete a full communications system upgrade.

“The biggest positive change I think we’ve made, or at least one of them, is we’ve got our communication system fixed,” said Spraggs. “It’s plagued the first responders, sheriff’s department, dispatchers for 15 years. I mean, when you can’t hear

the person on the other end, it’s very frustrating, very frustrating for officers and very frustrating for dispatchers. And we pretty well have that problem resolved. I’m very, very proud of that. We worked on that for a long time. Sheriff [Matt] Hillbrecht, Commissioner [Eddie] McGuire, and myself started working on that six months before we all took office.”

The communications system upgrade included updating the radios inside sheriff’s department vehicles, updating handheld radios, updating the necessary towers, and adding new towers to provide service in



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Dispatchers handle contact for over 10 different agencies within the county in order to respond to emergencies.

areas where it was previously unavailable.

As the county pushes forward and continues to expand E911 operations, the differences between hiring certified dispatchers and untrained individuals comes into the conversation. While the county will hire both, the process of training a new dispatcher can be long and costly.

“If you hire someone certified, [it is] just a matter of a couple weeks, letting them get real familiar with our equipment, then they’re, you know, they’re pretty well good to work,” said Spraggs. “But if you hire someone not certified, they have to shadow

with one of our senior dispatchers for three to six months, it depends on their abilities and their progress. Then they’re sent to the academy in Richmond to get their certification. That is a monthlong course that they take, and once they return back from that, usually within one to two weeks, and they’re good to go on their own.”

Spraggs is also working to secure grant funding for other projects in the county, and expects to see construction on the inclusive playground for the Miracle League Field of Dreams complex at Mike Miller Park begin in the spring.

THE FIRST AMENDMENT

Congress shall make no law respecting an establishment of religion, or prohibiting the free exercise thereof; or abridging the freedom of speech, or of the press; or the right of the people peaceably to assemble, and to petition the government for a redress of grievances.

THE TRIB

HISTORY
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CONTACT US
All departments: 270-527-3162 • Fax: 270-527-4567

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