



KENTUCKY LANTERN PHOTO BY MCKENNA HORSLEY/

Kentucky Secretary of State Michael Adams sits at his desk in Frankfort behind the John F. Kennedy Profile in Courage Award that he received in 2024 for increasing voting days in Kentucky and protecting election integrity.

Republican Michael Adams ponders a run for Kentucky governor

MCKENNA HORSLEY
KENTUCKY LANTERN

FRANKFORT — Thinking beyond this new year to 2027, Kentucky Republican Michael Adams is weighing a complicated question — could he be the type of candidate who gets Kentuckians to focus on the state’s challenges instead of the national politics of the day.

Adams, who was the top vote-getter in 2023 statewide elections and carried all but two of the state’s 120 counties, is about halfway through his second term as secretary of state, Kentucky’s top elections official. The 49-year-old from McCracken County earned praises from Republicans and Democrats alike on his election policies, but he told the Kentucky Lantern in a recent interview that he cares deeply about other issues too, like the state’s housing shortage and bettering education.

At the national level, “there’s only one brand” for the GOP, Adams said, but a Kentucky governor’s race is different.

“I feel like at the state level, there’s a little more room for a Republican official or candidate to have an identity of his own, to have a brand,” he said. “There’s a little more room to be a nice guy, and to be modest in your style, and to be substantive.”

Adams said Kentucky Republicans should not “nominate somebody for a governor who is going to be seen as angry or partisan or difficult or unpleasant, nasty.”

Controversies beset the last two Republican governors, he said, tarnishing their images, and both were defeated by Democrats named Beshear.

Kentuckians, Adams said, “want a nice guy to be the governor, to solve problems, to stay focused on state issues, to be the kind of person you can be proud of when there’s a disaster.”

“I think people, including Republicans, want a reasonable, decent person who will go do the job, and I feel like there’s an appetite for that, and we see that in who wins these races,” Adams told the Lantern. “But it

also comes down to: Would I have the funding available to get that message out right and remind people of what they like about me, and can I get voters to care about the stuff that I care about? I care about civics. I care about housing. I care about education. If we’re voting on stuff that’s not really about our state government, then I shouldn’t win.”

How will Kentuckians view Trump next year?

Some Kentucky political observers think Adams could have a chance if he decided to run for governor. Trey Grayson, a former Republican secretary of state, said that he jokes “that we secretaries of state are good enough to become credible candidates in our primary, but never good enough to win it.” After leaving office, he was his party’s nominee for U.S. Senate, as was former Democratic Secretary of State Alison Lundergan Grimes, and they did not win. Bob Babbage, another Democratic secretary of state, lost a primary bid for governor in 1995.

Yet, nationwide, secretaries of state have moved on to higher office. Grayson pointed to Georgia Republican Gov. Brian Kemp, who was previously a secretary of state.

Adams has had “a pretty high profile, probably the highest profile any of us have ever had in performing our job,” Grayson said. In Adams’ first term, he had to navigate access to elections amid the 2020 coronavirus pandemic, which was also a presidential election year.

Also while he’s not the “most MAGA” Republican, Grayson noted that Adams has previously endorsed President Donald Trump and supported policies Trump cares about, like enacting photo ID laws for voting.

“I think he’s got some credibility, having won a couple times,” Grayson said. “But the question becomes: can he convince people that he’s the kind of Republican that they want? And he won’t know until he tries.”

Danny Briscoe, a Democratic political consultant, told the Lantern that Adams has earned

respect across the aisle because he “hasn’t let politics interfere” with his job.

Briscoe added that nationwide, politics are changing, pointing to the election of Zohran Mamdani as the next mayor of New York City with more than 50% of the vote. That “wouldn’t have fit the bill of any previous mayoral election that I can remember,” Briscoe said.

Briscoe said U.S. Rep. James Comer would be “the Trump disciple” of a hypothetical 2027 GOP primary. The congressman has previously said he is interested in the 2027 race.

However, if Trump’s popularity in Kentucky changes by then, that could be a disadvantage for Trump-aligned candidates, Briscoe said. The president has won elections in the Bluegrass state for nearly a decade, though he will not be on the ballot in 2027 and Republicans are hoping to maintain control of Congress in the 2026 midterm elections.

“Whether (Adams) can get elected or not depends on the mood of this state, and I think it’s a little too early to judge that, because a lot of it depends on Trump’s positives and negatives,” Briscoe said. “If he’s still popular, Comer would be the one to beat. If he’s unpopular, maybe Adams could do it.”

Legislative session

Heading into what will be the final budget legislative session of his last term as secretary of state, Adams said he would focus on things that can be improved, such as increasing state funding to county clerks, strengthening laws around personating election officials and ensuring funding for the Safe At Home program which protects victims of domestic violence.

Kentucky county clerks have hoped to attract more poll workers in recent election cycles. A big issue that often comes up is increasing the pay for poll workers, Adams said. A state formula that determines how much money county clerks get for elections “was set in the ’80s, and it’s never been adjusted for inflation,” he added.

CROSSWORD

ACROSS

- 1 Important times

5 Tries for flies

10 Audition goal

11 Cry of terror

12 “Got it”

13 “Airport” author

14 Protesters, at times

16 Book sections

20 Office machine

23 Fade out

24 Berry of film

25 Sculpture in St. Peter’s

27 Mineral suffix

28 Twister shape

29 Gossips, say

32 Club documents

36 Hampers

39 Opera piece

40 Charm

41 Walk unevenly

42 “Taps” tooter

43 Reduced amount
- 2 Foolhardy

3 Open space

4 Lettering aid

5 Musical symbol

6 Cuff site

7 Trouble

8 Kicker’s aid

9 Sun setting

11 Cut off

15 Quaker’s pronoun

17 Unspoiled spot

18 Ceremony

19 Barking beast

20 Smart

21 Solemn promise

22 Entreaty

25 Contented sound

26 Load, as software

28 Big meal

30 Immune system component

31 Low digit

33 Buffalo’s lake

34 Borders

35 Easy targets

36 Bit of ointment

37 Outback runner

38 Pull gently

Crossword Puzzle answers can be found on Page 7

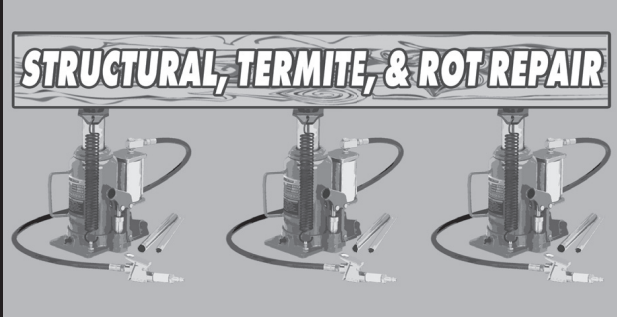
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PUBLIC NOTICE

24-P-00653
Estate of: Glenda Ann Campbell
Executor's: Ginger Elaine Stapp and Jody Lamar Campbell
Attorney: David F. Smith
Comes for a final settlement hearing on Tuesday, January 20th, 2026 @ 1:00PM in the Pulaski County Judicial Building.

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