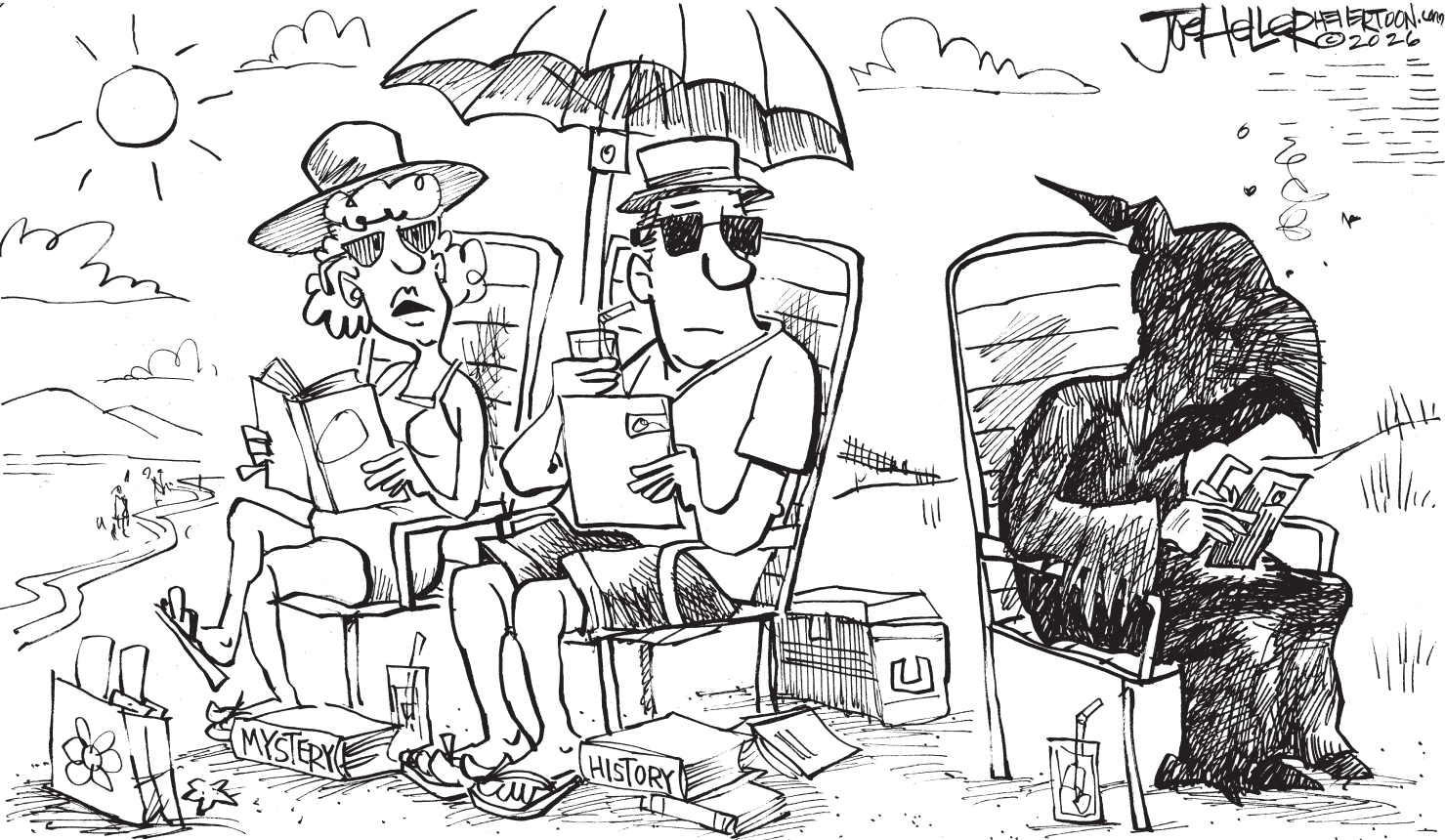


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The Herald News

OPINION

August 26, 2026



EDITORIALS:



BY **JEFF JOBE**
COMMUNITY PUBLISHER

Voter Identification Should Not Be Controversial



Of the 14 states that do not require voters to present an identification document at the polls, the Democratic presidential candidate carried 12 in 2024.

That does not prove wrongdoing, but it raises a legitimate question: Why should verifying a voter’s identity be controversial?

Kentucky demonstrates that voter-identification laws do not prevent Democrats from winning. Gov. Andy Beshear and other Democratic candidates have prevailed in statewide and local races because they earned the support of voters.

I have many friends who are Democrats and care deeply about their communities. Unfortunately, national party positions such as opposition to voter identification can hurt the party as a whole—including its candidates and grassroots organizations here at home.

The Constitution gives states primary responsibility for establishing the times, places, and manner of congressional elections, while reserving authority for Congress to alter those regulations. That division of responsibility does not excuse weak safeguards. After everything the Founders endured to establish this nation, it is inconceivable that they intended state authority to become an excuse for tolerating cheating or election fraud.

Only American citizens may vote in federal elections. Reasonable identification at the polls and reliable proof of citizenship during registration are practical safeguards that should transcend party politics. Americans must be able to trust their

elections, just as we do in Kentucky. That means ensuring every lawful vote is counted, and every ballot is cast by someone legally entitled to vote.

Voter identification should never be controversial.

How Kentucky Local Governments Establish Property Tax Rates

Kentucky cities, counties, school boards and special taxing districts are entering the annual property tax-setting season, when officials determine how much revenue to collect from property owners.

Under Kentucky’s House Bill 44, taxing districts generally have three choices:

Adopt the compensating rate

Adopt a rate producing up to 4% more revenue from existing real property; or

Adopt a rate producing more than 4% additional revenue, making the excess subject to voter recall.

The 4% provision applies to a district’s total revenue from existing real property. It does not necessarily mean the numerical tax rate will increase by 4%, nor does it limit an individual property owner’s bill to a 4% increase.

How taxes are calculated

Real property includes land, homes, commercial buildings and permanent improvements. Rates are commonly expressed in cents per \$100 of assessed value. A rate of 20 cents per \$100 produces a \$200 tax on property assessed at \$100,000.

A property tax bill may include separate rates established by the state, county, city, school board and special districts such as libraries, fire departments, health departments and extension services. Property inside a city is generally subject to both city and county taxes.

The county property valuation administrator establishes most local assessments. Fiscal courts, city councils, school boards and special-district boards establish their respective tax rates.

The compensating rate

The compensating rate is designed

to produce approximately the same revenue from real property that existed during both the previous and current tax years.

When assessments on existing property rise, the compensating rate generally decreases to offset that increase. The district still receives additional revenue from qualifying new property added to the tax rolls.

New property may include newly constructed homes and businesses, major improvements, newly taxable property and certain property annexed into the jurisdiction. A higher assessment on an existing home caused by changing market values is not treated the same as new construction.

The compensating rate should not be described as producing no additional revenue. In a growing community, it maintains approximately the same revenue from existing property while generating additional taxes from new development.

The 4% option

The 4% rate allows a district to collect approximately 4% more from existing real property than it would receive under the compensating calculation. Revenue from new property is added to that amount.

Suppose a district collected \$300,000 from existing real property last year and expects \$15,000 from new development this year. The compensating rate would produce approximately \$315,000.

Under the 4% option, the district could collect approximately \$312,000 from existing property, plus revenue from new development. Its total revenue increase could therefore exceed 4%.

Public notice and hearings

A city or county can generally adopt the compensating rate without conducting a House Bill 44 public hearing.

A proposed rate above the compensating rate, including the 4% rate, requires a hearing. The district must disclose the previous rate and revenue, the proposed and compensating rates, expected revenue from new and personal property, and how the additional money will be used.

State law requires the notice to be published twice in consecutive weeks in the newspaper with the largest circulation in the county. The hearing must be held seven to 10 days after the second notice is published.

A rate producing more than 4% additional revenue from existing real property is subject to recall. Qualified voters generally have 45 days to

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Legislative Update

BY **Representative Amy Neighbors**

MENTAL HEALTH COMMITMENT LAWS: MORE OPTIONS, SAFER COMMUNITIES, BETTER CARE

For nearly 50 years, Kentucky’s mental health commitment laws largely left courts with two difficult choices when someone experiencing serious mental illness was found to be a danger to themselves or others: involuntary hospitalization or release. That has now changed.

House Bill 485, enacted as part of Senate Bill 122, modernizes Kentucky’s mental health statutes and gives courts another option: outpatient treatment. The law allows courts, under specific circumstances, to order an individual to participate in treatment while remaining in the community. Those requirements can include taking prescribed medication, participating in treatment programs or following up with medical providers.

This is an important shift because treatment does not always have to mean hospitalization. For some individuals, the most appropriate path may be receiving care while remaining connected to their families, communities and support systems.

The changes made by HB 485 did not happen overnight. They were the result of years of work among people who see the challenges of serious mental illness from different perspectives — including judges, prosecutors, defense attorneys, mental health professionals, advocates, families and state health officials.

That collaboration was important because mental health policy requires a careful balance. We have a responsibility to protect public safety, but we also have a responsibility to make sure people experiencing serious mental illness have access to appropriate care and that their constitutional rights are protected.

HB 485 also updates definitions related to mental illness, clarifies procedures for involuntary hospitalization, establishes certification review processes, and strengthens coordination between courts and health care providers.

The law makes additional changes to Kentucky’s forensic commitment statutes, which apply to individuals found incompetent to stand trial for certain violent offenses. Those changes include extending the deadline for evidentiary hearings from 20 to 45 days, clarifying legal procedures and adjusting review requirements. In most cases, review hearings will occur at least every two years unless circumstances change, while courts retain jurisdiction.

At its core, the goal is straightforward: connect people with the level of treatment they need while using the least restrictive setting appropriate to their circumstances.

Too often, people living with serious mental illness

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