

FROM PAGE 1A

MASS SHOOTING

need to unify. We need to come together. We need to still celebrate community.”

Morton said he has reached out to victims and their families. He is working to do what he can to support them, as well as all community members across Lexington who are grieving.

“Events like these, it takes a toll on all members of our community, not just family,” Morton said. “Those folks that directly were victims, they experienced a nightmare. But all of those folks in the park, all those folks who heard the gunshot wound, all those folks in this district are indirectly hurt in some form.”

Lexington Police Chief Lawrence Weathers said in a Sunday press conference that the shooting “does not define the East End.” Morton agrees.

“We cannot allow tragedy to take away our willingness to gather, our sense of community or the pride we have in where we live,” he said.

Morton said he has talked to East End neighbors and other Lexington neighborhoods about how the city can help them feel safe for future events.

One of the ideas he is pursuing is helping pay for local police officers to staff events. Neighborhoods

can request officers to serve at a local event, but oftentimes those neighborhoods have to pay the city for that presence. Morton said he wants to find a way for the city to bear at least a portion of those costs to ease the burden on neighborhoods.

Police officers were present at East End Day when shots were fired. Morton said the response from officers, ONE Lexington and other city agencies has been top-notch.

“To me, this is no one’s fault but the bad actor and the perpetrator,” Morton said. “And right now, it’s critical that we don’t point fingers, stay unified, and fight for justice and real solutions.”

A suspect has been charged in the shooting: Jametrius M. Griffin, 18, was arrested in connection with the shooting and faces charges of first-degree assault, second-degree assault and tampering with physical evidence.

The solutions Morton highlighted are targeted at young people, who city leaders have long said are the most susceptible to perpetrating or being victims of gun violence.

Morton was already looking into ways the city can “revitalize” youth programming before Saturday’s shooting, he said.



Council member Tyler Morton represents Lexington’s First District, which includes Charles Young Park and the East End neighborhood.

He has advocated for increased funding and expanded operating hours for Lexington’s community centers.

“The goal is to provide our young people with comprehensive programming that includes recreational enrichment opportunities, educational and skill development opportunities, employment opportunities, mentorship, and a focus on their overall well-being tailored to this generation,” he said.

And while recreational programming is key, the employment components of his strategy may be most important. Morton said he believes poverty is the root cause of violence, and the city needs to work to lift families out of poverty - particularly in lower-income neighborhoods like the East End.

Many of Lexington’s flagship economic development strategies have been geared toward funding regional business parks in other nearby counties and recruiting both employees and employers from other cities to move to central Kentucky.

While there are services such as the Lexington Workforce Resource Center that aim to connect local residents with local job opportunities, Morton said the focus on regional development could be leaving Lexingtonians behind.

“I believe that the (economic development) philosophy should be centered towards our people, our constituents of Lexington, and making sure that we’re bringing in and recruiting jobs that they can get into ... and not having to recruit folks from all around the United States to come into living in Lexington to then serve in those jobs,” he said.

“These youth should have access to seeing that right now, understanding what career they want to go into, understanding kind of what skills they need to get into these careers. So I think it’s all tied into one.”

Trump nominates Ballou for federal judge in Kentucky

BY AUSTIN R. RAMSEY
aramsey@herald-leader.com

President Donald Trump has nominated a conservative Southeastern Kentucky circuit court judge with longstanding ties to U.S. Sen. Rand Paul for a lifetime appointment to the federal bench.

Trump announced Tuesday afternoon in a Truth Social post that he was nominating Daniel “Dan” Ballou, chief judge of Kentucky’s 34th Judicial Circuit, to replace retired U.S. District Judge Gregory Van Tatenhove, who retired from the Eastern District of Kentucky bench in July to become the University of Kentucky’s new law school dean.

Ballou’s nomination came amid a batch of back-to-back federal judicial picks the president announced online Tuesday as the administration moves to fill red-state vacancies before the Senate’s calendar tightens ahead of the Nov. 3 midterm elections. His naming also ends months of speculation over the kind of Trump loyalist the White House would elevate to the bench and raises questions about the relative influence of Kentucky’s two Republican senators.

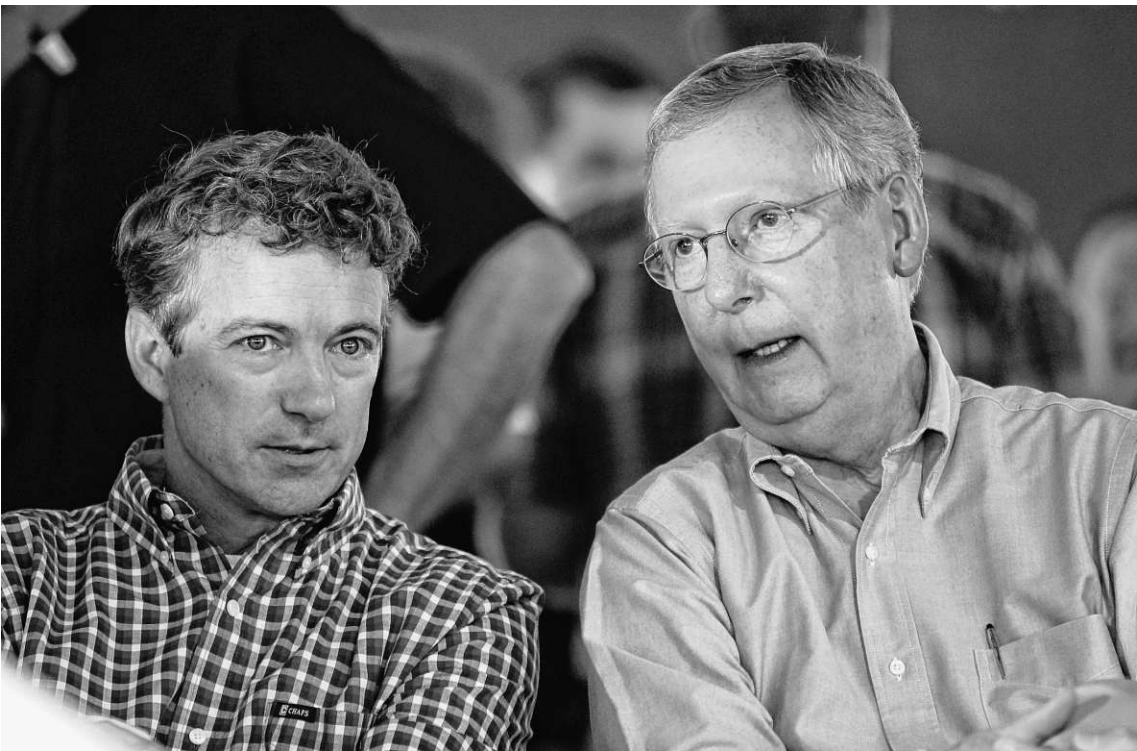
Traditionally, home-state senators play a major role in recommending candidates for federal judgeships. Senate Majority Leader Mitch McConnell, Kentucky’s senior senator, had been expected to have significant sway over the process. But McConnell’s health problems and a two-month absence from public view had fueled questions about whether the vacancy would remain open.

Trump tapped Ballou, who has long been politically aligned with Paul and whose career has intersected with the senator’s in ways that have drawn scrutiny.

In 2011, the Kentucky Judicial Conduct Commission reprimanded Ballou after finding that he violated the judicial conduct code by publicly endorsing Paul’s 2010 U.S. Senate Campaign and engaging in political activity while serving as a judge.

The case stemmed from an email Ballou forwarded to other Kentucky judges in January 2010 that included pro-Paul campaign materials about the candidate’s position on the Second Amendment.

Ballou said he did not intend



Then-U.S. Senate candidate Rand Paul and U.S. Sen. Mitch McConnell in 2010 at the 130th Fancy Farm Picnic in Graves County.

the email as an endorsement or to take a political position and defended his First Amendment rights. He also had been accused of making political contributions to former U.S. Sen. John McCain’s 2008 presidential bid, but the commission dismissed those allegations.

Ballou agreed to the commission’s reprimand and remained on the bench.

Paul congratulated Ballou on X, formerly known as Twitter, on Tuesday, calling him a “Great American.” Trump highlighted Ballou’s military service, calling him “A True Patriot” and saying he had no doubt Ballou would be “a powerful defender of the Rule of Law on the Federal Bench in the GREAT Commonwealth of Kentucky.”

Kentucky Attorney General Russell Coleman, also a Republican, said on X Ballou’s service on the bench in Kentucky’s Appalachian mountain region and as a Marine “have prepared him well to uphold the rule of law.”

“I look forward to his confirmation,” Coleman added.

Ballou’s ties to Paul date back years.

The judge’s campaign website prominently displays an endorsement attributed to Paul, who is claimed to have written that Ballou “has dedicated his life to defending the Constitution, our freedom and liberty,

and our way of life in Kentucky.”

“In applying the law and administering justice, Judge Ballou is guided by our founding documents,” the note adds.

The senator also endorsed Ballou’s 2018 bid for the Kentucky Supreme Court seat left vacant by Justice Daniel J. Venters’ retirement. Paul recorded television advertisements supporting Ballou, who won the primary over David Austin Tapp, now a judge on the U.S. Court of Federal Claims, but lost the general election to Debra Hembree Lambert.

Paul’s office did not immediately respond to a Herald-Leader request for comment.

McConnell’s office had not publicly commented on Ballou’s nomination as of Wednesday. A spokesperson did not immediately respond to a Herald-Leader request for comment.

Ballou, 60, declined to discuss the nomination when reached by phone Wednesday.

“I’m not really supposed to talk about it,” he said, adding that he expected to be able to discuss the nomination after the Senate finishes confirmation proceedings. He said he would “still be a judge” regardless of the outcome.

A MARINE VETERAN WITH YEARS ON THE BENCH IN KENTUCKY

Ballou was born in Knoxville,

Tennessee, and raised in Williamsburg, Kentucky. He graduated from Williamsburg High School in 1984 and left home three days later to begin training at the Marine Corps Recruit Depot in South Carolina.

He served seven years on active duty and was honorably discharged as a sergeant in 1991. He remained a reserve and deployed overseas on six occasions during Operations Desert Shield and Desert Storm between 1990 and 1991 and in Afghanistan in 2003 and Iraq in 2008, according to his online biography.

After leaving active duty, he entered college and earned a bachelor’s degree in political science from UK in 1995 and a law degree from the University of Mississippi in 1998.

He clerked for U.S. Court of Appeals for the Sixth Circuit Judge Eugene Siler Jr. before practicing law. Ballou was elected to the district court in 2002.

He raised eyebrows in 2003 when he agreed to give a pair of teenage speeders lighter sentences if they performed push-ups in his courtroom and each wrote a five-page essay about what they learned in traffic school.

“When I was their age, I was doing that every day,” Ballou later told WAVE News in Louisville.

Ballou served as a district judge until November 2006

when he was elected to fill an unexpired circuit court judge’s term. He took office in 2007 and was reelected without opposition in 2014 and 2022. His current term as 34th Judicial Circuit Court chief judge of the judicial district expires in 2030.

Kentucky circuit judges serve eight-year terms and run in nonpartisan elections.

Ballou, who lives in Williamsburg, is registered to vote as a Republican, according to Kentucky’s Voter Information Center.

Amid the height of the Covid-19 pandemic in 2020, a McCreary County prosecutor sidestepped Ballou to obtain a court order requiring a man who had been exposed to the virus by his mother to remain at home or submit to testing.

Ballou initially ordered the man to quarantine until an attorney could be appointed to represent him, but he later allowed that order to expire, questioning whether he had the authority to compel someone to undergo a Covid-19 test.

The McCreary County Sheriff’s Office later received reports that the man had been out in the community after a contentious hearing on the matter. The Kentucky Court of Appeals ultimately ordered the man to quarantine and submit to testing.

In 2024, Ballou intervened in his personal capacity on behalf of a police officer accused of conspiring to cover up the use of excessive force against a Whitley County man in 2020.

Ballou identified himself as a family friend of former Kentucky State Police Trooper Jeremy D. Elliotte, but did not disclose in a letter to the federal court that he was a sitting state judge. In the letter, Ballou described Elliotte as one of the most open, honest and fair-minded people he knew and praised his character and commitment to public service, according to court records.

Elliotte pleaded guilty to illegally entering a home without a warrant. Prosecutors agreed to drop assault charges and allegations that he had lied to KSP investigators.

A federal judge who would become Ballou’s colleague if the Senate confirms him sentenced Elliotte to six months in federal prison, describing his conduct as “a flagrant disrespect for the law.”