

Local, state and national leaders deliver checks to Whitley County



Photo by MARK WHITE

FUNDING FOR WHITLEY COUNTY: Local, state and national leaders converged in Williamsburg to announce funding for Whitley County. Notable dignitaries included 82nd Rep. Nick Wilson, Judge-Executive Pat White Jr., U.S. Rep. Hal Rogers (R-KY), Williamsburg Mayor Roddy Harrison and Kentucky Senate President Robert Stivers.

■ By Mark White

Congressman Hal Rogers, Kentucky Senate President Robert Stivers and 82nd Rep. Nick Wilson went to the Williamsburg Tourism & Convention Center Tuesday afternoon, and they came bearing large ceremonial checks to help pay for local projects.

Suffice it to say, they drew a crowd of approximately 100 people with additional chairs having to be set out for people in the audience.

“These funds represent more than an announcement. They represent an investment in our community, in our future and new opportunities available to people, who live and work here,” noted Corbin Economic Development Director Bruce Carpenter. “We are grateful for the partnerships and dedication that make this possible. We look forward to seeing the positive impact these funds will have for years.”

Among the check presentations was \$3 million Rogers recently acquired in funding from the Army Corps of Engineers through a Section 531 Pride Grant to help pay for part of the \$15 million Williamsburg water project. The project includes replacing some of the oldest waterlines in town, installing a new river crossing for waterlines, building a second water tank and expanding the capacity of the Williamsburg Water Treatment Plant so it can accommodate growth and increased demand.

“I hope this funding goes a long way toward fixing your water issues downtown,” Rogers noted.

Stivers and Wilson also presented the city with a \$1.5 million check to help pay for the water tank, which the Kentucky General Assembly allocated this spring.

“What we are going to be able to do is service the entire region much better and more efficiently than we are,” said Williamsburg Mayor Roddy Harrison. “We produce great water, but like other places we are old and we have problems. With the announcement today, we are going to be able to take care of the citizens of Williamsburg first, the University of the Cumberlands, and, also, all of the county districts.”

“Because of this money, we are gonna be able to do this project much quicker instead of having to phase it over several years,” Harrison noted.

He added Rogers previously secured \$4 million for the water project, which means about 60 percent of the project will be paid for using grant money. The city will be borrowing approximately \$5 million from the Kentucky Infrastructure Authority to pay for the remainder of the project. Harrison said he hopes to make an announcement soon regarding the location of the new water tank.

Rogers noted the waterline project will be taking place along with demolition work on the burned building downtown.

“You better get used to the mud on your shoes, but we will be there to help you wash them off,” Rogers added.

Whitley County Judge-Executive Pat White Jr. said many people may not realize the county water districts do not produce water and instead purchase it from water treatment facilities, like the one in Williamsburg.

Harrison said he and White have a great working relationship, which is not the case with cities and counties everywhere.

Harrison said what is even better than that is the relationship he and White have with Rogers, Stivers and Wilson, and being able to turn to them when there is an issue.

“They are always on the phone. They are always ready to listen, and Corbin Mayor Suzie Razmus too,” Harrison added.

Airport funding

Wilson and Stivers also presented a \$6.4 million check Tuesday for the runway addition project at the Williamsburg-Whitley County Airport.

“This is one we have been having serious discussions with Congressman Rogers office. Hopefully, this will be the seed money for a real transformation project,” Stivers said.

he said legislators hope to leverage this seed money so the airport can become a “real business and economic development hub.”

“This is what I think can be a game changer project for the whole region,” Stivers added.

Jail renovation funding

In addition, Stivers and Wilson presented the fiscal court with a \$1.5 million check to help pay for the local jail renovation and expansion project.

“I love these big checks because it means we are getting things done for our community and our constituents,” White added. “I am grateful for our state and federal delegation.”

White noted the county is doing renovation work and adding 100 beds onto the Whitley County Detention Center. The \$11.5 million project is 80 percent funded through grant money.

“Rep. Wilson and Senator Stivers have been a huge part. They went to Frankfort and battled in the budget session to be able to help us do that. It is largely Senator Stivers vision that we expand our jail,” White said.

White said a jail needs to have about 300 beds to run efficiently. Once the expansion is complete, the detention center will have nearly this many beds.

The jail expansion is a partnership, which will allow Whitley County to house McCreary County inmates. Many of those inmates are now being housed in Knox County or sometimes some place further away.

In addition to keeping McCreary County inmates closer to home, Whitley County will receive funding from McCreary County to house its inmates, which will help cover jail expenses.

White said the project is currently 12 days ahead of schedule, and only \$4,000 out of the \$250,000 contingency fund has been used.

“Our walls are almost up, and we will be setting the roof in the next couple of weeks,” White added.

The Kentucky General Assembly previously allocated \$8.5 million for the project, and Stivers said the new funding will help finish this project.

Other funding

Wilson and Stivers also presented a \$950,000 check to support development of an innovation hub.

“These investments will make a meaningful difference for Whitley County and help position our communities for continued growth,” said Wilson. “From improving our jail and water infrastructure to expanding the Williamsburg-Whitley County Airport and developing an innovation hub, these projects address important local needs while creating new opportunities for our families, businesses and communities. I’m proud to have helped secure these investments and look forward to seeing their impact across Whitley County.”

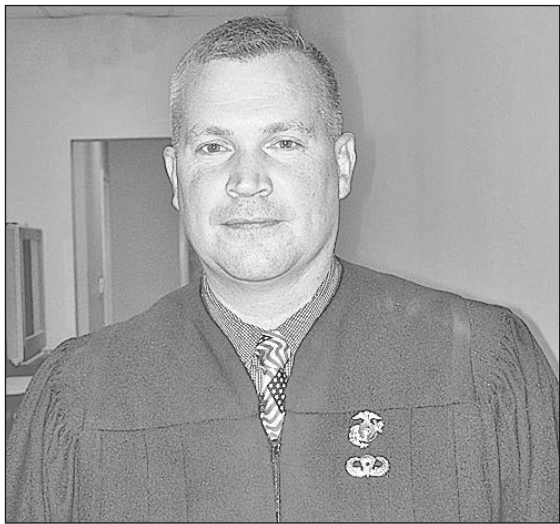
“We fight for the area to bring things back here,” Wilson added about the efforts by himself, Rogers and Stivers.

Stivers noted there is no better example of the cooperation between Rogers, himself and Wilson than the \$140 million I-75 improvement project taking place in southern Laurel County and Whitley County.

He added this project doesn’t happen without Rogers’ help.

Whitley Co. judge nominated by President for federal judgeship

■ By Mark White



Dan Ballou

President Donald Trump has nominated Whitley Circuit Judge Dan Ballou for a federal judgeship.

Trump made the announcement in a post on Trump on Truth Social on Aug. 18

“I am pleased to nominate Daniel Ballou to serve as Judge on the United States District Court for the Eastern District of Kentucky,” Trump wrote.

“A True Patriot! I have no doubt that Daniel Ballou will be a powerful defender of the Rule of Law on the Federal Bench in the GREAT Commonwealth of Kentucky. Congratulations Dan!”

Ballou is a longtime circuit judge for Kentucky’s 34th Judicial Circuit, which includes Whitley and McCreary counties.

Ballou graduated Williamsburg High School in 1984. He served in the United States Marine Corps from 1984-1991 where he rose to the rank of sergeant. He served in the United States Marine Corps reserve rising to the rank of major. He retired in 2015.

Ballou received his bachelor’s degree in political science from the University of Kentucky in 1995.

He received his law degree from the University of Mississippi School of Law (Ole Miss) in 1998.

He clerked for Judge Eugene E. Siler Jr. of the U.S. Court of Appeals for the Sixth Circuit from 1999-2000.

Ballou had a private law practice in Williamsburg from 2000-2002.

He was elected as a District Judge for the 34th Judicial District in 2002 and served as district judge from January 2003 – November 2007 when he won a special election as Circuit Judge for the 34th Judicial Circuit. It is a position he continues to hold.

There is no guarantee a nominee will get appointed.

The nominee undergoes a thorough background check. After the president officially sends the nomination to the Senate, the nominee appears before the Senate Judiciary Committee where they are questioned about past rulings and legal views. The committee then decides whether to send the nomination to the full Senate. If the nomination reaches the full Senate, then a final vote is held. The nominee needs 51 votes to be confirmed.

If confirmed, the president would then make the appointment.

What happens next?

Assuming 34th Judicial Circuit Judge Dan Ballou gets confirmed by the U.S. Senate to become the next U.S. District Judge for the Eastern District of Kentucky, which is not guaranteed, what would the process be to replace him as circuit judge in Whitley and McCreary counties?

Gov. Andy Beshear would appoint an interim judge.

First, Kentucky Supreme Court Chief Justice Debra Lambert would notify Beshear about the vacancy.

The Administrative Office of the Courts would then send notices to local attorneys notifying them of the vacancy, and a replacement would be appointed.

Attorneys can recommend someone or nominate themselves for the vacancy. Interested attorneys would complete an application and return it to the judicial nominating commission executive secretary.

Once applications are received from local lawyers, a judicial nominating commission would review applications and submit the names of up to three people to Beshear, who would name an interim replacement from that list. If the governor does not appoint a judge within 60 days of receiving the list of nominees, the appointment is made by the chief justice from the list of nominees.

The judicial nominating commission would be composed of seven members. Lambert would chair it.

Whitley Circuit Court Clerk Gary Barton said there would be one attorney appointed to represent Whitley County and one attorney to represent McCreary County.

The board would also be composed of four citizen members. There would be one Republican and one Democrat appointed from both Whitley and McCreary counties, Barton said.

The citizen members of the commission could not hold any other political office, or any office in a political party or organization.

The replacement would serve until the November 2027 General Election when the position would be on the ballot to fill out the remainder of Ballou’s unexpired term in office, said Whitley County Clerk Carolyn Willis.

Ballou’s current term in office expires on Dec. 31, 2030.

There have been judicial vacancies filled through this process three times in the last 23 years in Whitley and McCreary counties, according to News Journal archives.

Following the death of Circuit Judge Paul Braden in 2011, then Whitley County Attorney Paul Winchester, and Corbin attorneys Thor H. Bahrman and Maxie Higgason were nominated by the judicial nominating commission with Winchester getting the appointment.

After the election of Ballou as circuit judge in late 2007, the judicial nominating commission nominated Jane Butcher, Jason Price and Fred White in early 2008 to replace Ballou as district judge. White got the appointment.

Corbin’s 2026 property tax rate to decrease .8 cents

■ By Mark White

2026 property tax rates are dropping slightly in the city of Corbin.

During a special called meeting Monday, the Corbin City Commission held the first reading of an ordinance setting the tax rates.

The real estate tax rate decreased from 27.8 cents per \$100 of assessed value in 2025 to 27.0 cents for 2026. Out of this 27.0 cents per \$100 of assessed value, 19.98 cents

is earmarked for general expenses, 5.40 cents is earmarked for the police and fire pension fund, and 1.62 cents is earmarked for the library fund.

The tangible property tax rate decreased from 32.83 cents per \$100 of assessed value in 2025 to 31.32 cents per \$100 of assessed value in 2026. Tangible property includes things like a business’ inventory.

The motor vehicle tax rate was set at 24.23 cents per \$100 of assessed value, which is the same

rate as last year.

Commissioner John Baker noted the rates were set at the lowest possible rate the commission was allowed to set them.

The taxes will be payable starting Oct. 15.

Through Nov. 30, taxpayers can pay their tax bills and receive a 2 percent discount. From Dec. 1 – Dec. 31, the bills are payable at the face value.

Starting Jan. 1, there will be a 10 percent penalty added. The penalty increases again starting Feb. 1.