

# Across the River

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PAUL WILCOXEN | For The Sun

Scott Doody reacts after being appointed to the 118th District seat in the Illinois House of Representatives.



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Scott Doody addresses supporters after being appointed to the 118th District seat in the Illinois House of Representatives during a meeting on Thursday.



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Jackson County Republican Chairman Kyle Morgan, far left, Republican attorney John Fogerty, left, Alexander County Republican Chair Evelyn Caldwell and Pulaski County Republican Chairman Rex Wilburn sign paperwork Thursday making Scott Doody's appointment to the 118th District seat in the Illinois House of Representatives official.

## Doody appointed to fill Illinois House vacancy

BY PAUL WILCOXEN | FOR THE SUN  
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MARION, Ill. — Scott Doody was unanimously appointed Thursday to fill the vacant 118th District seat in the Illinois House of Representatives, allowing him to begin representing the district immediately.

Doody said he intends to get to work right away and prepare before lawmakers return to Springfield this fall.

"I'm going to work as hard as I can," Doody said. "Failure is not an option."

The 118th Representative District Republican Committee made the appointment during a meeting at Veterans Airport of Southern Illinois. Doody was the only person to submit an application for the position.

The vacancy was created after former State Rep. Paul Jacobs resigned from the House following his appointment to the 59th District Senate seat. Jacobs won the Republican nomination for the Senate seat during the March primary after then-Sen. Dale Fowler announced he would not seek re-election.

When Fowler retired before completing his term, the 59th District Republican Committee appointed Jacobs to the Senate, creating the House vacancy filled by Doody.

The newly appointed representative said this allows him to begin serving constituents months before the next General

Assembly is seated. He said he can spend the summer learning the job while working with residents and local officials on issues affecting the district.

"This gives me a six-month head start to get my feet on the ground and get used to what's going on," Doody said.

Doody said he plans to spend the coming months meeting with city and county leaders, listening to concerns across the district and helping residents navigate state government.

"I've got all summer and all fall to get my feet cranking on the problems we've got down here," Doody said. "I know the people of 118. I know their struggles, I know their joys, I know the geography they live in."

Doody said he also plans to rely on the experience of Southern Illinois lawmakers as he begins serving in Springfield.

"I've got a good team," Doody said. "I've got good people with me."

Doody won the Republican nomination for the 118th District seat in a three-way primary election in March. He will face Democrat Chip Markel in the November general election for a full two-year term.

The 118th House District includes all or portions of Alexander, Jackson, Pulaski, Union and Williamson counties.

Have a story idea for Paul? Reach him at pwilcoxen@thesouthern.com.

## Carbondale encampment residents prepare for possible displacement

BY BRANDYN WILCOXEN, ZOE LEWIS | FOR THE SUN  
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CARBONDALE, Ill. — Residents of the East College Street encampment are left with an uncertain future as construction at the Piles Fork Greenway looms on the city calendar.

A project in the works since receiving grant funding in 2022, the Piles Fork Greenway trail will be demolished starting in August to make way for further improvements.

As a result, the few dozen who live adjacent to the multi-use path will need to relocate, though it is unclear where they will end up.

Zach Kiebler said many at the encampment are looking for options if they are removed from the city-owned property, but shelters or other resources are not always viable options for most who end up at East College Street.

"There's absolutely people that those resources help, but it's not a catch-all," Kiebler said. "There's a lot of us, like myself, that fall in the cracks. There's many things that can affect eligibility for places like that."

Among those reasons are pet ownership, not having an I.D., marital status, substance abuse or mental illness.

These are not things that affect everyone at the encampment, but any one of them, or other factors, can get in the way of receiving resources or taking that next step toward a more permanent housing situation.

"There's so many people out here with stories of trauma and abuse and neglect that would make the average person squeal worse than any horror movie they've ever seen," Erikah Buker said.

Buker, who lives at the encampment, added that they believe local shelters are unable to address the severity of need in Carbondale, often due to funding shortages.

"These are all fantastic resources for the community and a massive help, but not fully adequately staffed to take the onslaught of people out here," Buker said.

The encampment



BRANDYN WILCOXEN | For The Sun

Residents at the unofficial encampment on East College Street are at risk due to an upcoming construction project adjacent to their encampment.



BRANDYN WILCOXEN | For The Sun

The Piles Fork Greenway in Carbondale is the subject of an improvement project, which will begin demolition in August.



BRANDYN WILCOXEN | For The Sun

No trespassing signs have been posted in the area, although it is not yet clear when or how it will be enforced.

came about last fall after people staying at another location across the street were forcibly removed by the property owner. That location was tucked away in the woods, allowing more privacy and security, whereas the College Street encampment is more open and public.

An issue with that vulnerability is not just the possibility of bad actors harming residents, but also judgment from the wider public, particularly regarding sanitation.

"We can clean this place, and an hour later somebody can come through and ruin four hours' worth of work in five minutes," Buker said. "We have garbage consistently dropped off on our doorsteps in the guise of charity."

The city once provided a dumpster in response to residents' complaints about needing a place to throw things away, but after a few weeks, it was removed.

Buker said clearing

the encampment out will not address the problem, simply shuffling people elsewhere in town as it did before.

"It's almost becoming a yearly tradition in the fall to unsettle and re-station," Buker said. "If there's no clear path to a shelter, I'll have to set up a camp somewhere else."

The city of Carbondale received a \$2 million grant intended for either the construction of a new homeless shelter or the renovation of an existing building, but no concrete plan has been put in place yet.

While that project is expected to materialize, the timeline of a little over a month is much tighter than the time it will take to complete the project.

"My next step is figuring out everyone else's next step," Kiebler said. "I've got a place to go if all else fails, but it looks different for everyone. There are resources out there that are helping some of us, but it's way too complicated and too many mitigating factors to catch everyone."

Kiebler said several people are helping those in need at the encampment by providing supplies or connecting them with services, which he and others are grateful for.

"What we need more is for the people who are not so friendly to just be more understanding," Kiebler said. "Don't actively make things harder when you're trying to get us to reach a certain goal."

To read the city's statement on the construction and impacts to the encampment, visit [tinyurl.com/4vjd3byb](https://tinyurl.com/4vjd3byb).



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