

Election Debate - Candidates Outline Visions at Forum

CAMPTON, Ky.—At a local candidate forum hosted on Saturday by the Wolfe County Republican Party, candidates running for local government offices at the November 3 General Election took the stage to thank the hosts and attendees for the opportunity to present their qualifications and their visions for the community's future.

Jason Oliver, candidate for School Board District 5, opened his address by highlighting his lifelong connection to the area as a proud 2007 graduate of Wolfe County High School. He went on to earn a Bachelor's degree in Criminology from Morehead State University in 2012. In addition to his strong academic background, Oliver called attention to his over a decade of local professional stability, noting that he has been employed with Mountain Telephone for the past 12 years. "I truly care about our schools and am fully willing to give back to this community," Oliver said during his opening statement.

A central fixture of his broader educational vision, he said, includes advocating for the area's student vocational paths, explicitly noting that he wants to see Wolfe County establish its own dedicated vocational school.

During the event, candidates were asked a pivotal question regarding what single, measurable change they would look to implement during their first year on the board to directly benefit Wolfe County students. Oliver focused his response squarely on addressing the district's economic resources. He stated that his primary objective would be targeting school finances and funding by securing a dedicated, full-time grant writer. According to Oliver, bringing an aggressive grant-seeking strategy to the district is precisely where the extra money can be generated to adequately fund student programs and build up local educational resources. In closing, Oliver laid out a firm promise of accessibility and transparency to the community.

"If elected, I promise to always be available to listen to your concerns," Oliver said. "In fact, I encourage you to reach out. I promise to be transparent and to be someone you can trust to make the right decision. Most importantly, I promise to always be an advocate for both students and staff. I will always strive to improve the quality of education received by the students. To the staff, I want to ensure that Wolfe County School System is a place you are proud to be employed by."

Reflecting on the nature of the event's forum, he added, "Standing up here and answering questions blindly is not when I'm at my best. I'm the type of person that would rather give you a thoroughly thought about, researched answer rather than the first thing that comes to mind. I promise that I will devote my time and attention to addressing questions and concerns you may have in the future."

"In closing," Oliver concluded, "the students of Wolfe County deserve every opportunity to succeed in life. I ask that on Election Day you help me, and allow me to help them lay their groundwork for the rest of their lives."

Following Oliver's presentations for District 5, Julie Hendrix, candidate for Wolfe County School Board District 4, shared her deep professional background in education and community service. Hendrix noted that she served as a local GED teacher for approximately 20 years before the COVID-19 pandemic hit. Following that period, she transitioned to working in public library services, serving at the local public library for a brief time before taking on her current role at the Rowan County Public Library. When posed with the same panel question regarding the single change she would prioritize during her first year on the board to benefit local students, Hendrix focused heavily on collaboration and organizational alignment. Hendrix responded that her priority would be to deeply analyze the school district's current



Jason Oliver



Julie Hendrix



Ryan Kidd and Greg "Bubba" Banks



Michael Brand

mission statement. She emphasized the importance of evaluating whether the existing framework needs to be updated. To do this effectively, Hendrix stated, she would actively gather direct feedback from teachers to determine if the district's mission is a statement that truly motivates them and makes them feel invested in their work.

In her closing remarks, Hendrix delivered an emotional appeal rooted in her personal history and a desire to give back to the community that supported her early life. "I am from Wolfe County and grew up in the housing projects," Hendrix said. "I had a lot of community members help me. I feel I need to pay back for all the good the community has done for me. Thank you all."

Greg "Bubba" Banks, candidate for Sheriff, and his challenger for the office, Ryan Kidd, addressed community trust and office priorities in their remarks, taking the stage to answer critical questions regarding community transparency, public trust, and their immediate plans if elected.

The candidates were asked how they would build trust between the Sheriff's Office and the citizens of Wolfe County, and what they would do differently to ensure that residents feel the office is responsive and accessible to them.

Ryan Kidd, who previously served as a deputy jailer, opened his remarks by thanking the Republican Party for hosting the event and thanking everyone in attendance. Responding to the prompt, Kidd emphasized a need for increased "field visibility." He stated that deputies should be visible, approachable, and actively involved in the community. He noted that Wolfe County citizens deserve to know that when they call for help, their concerns will be taken seriously and they will receive a prompt response.

Greg "Bubba" Banks opened his statement by thanking everyone for being there and thanking the Republican Party for hosting. He humbly asked for the voters' continued support, stating that he would keep moving forward in trying to make Wolfe County a better place. In response to the question, Banks focused on maintaining current outreach. He noted that he strives to attend and volunteer at school functions and community events. He highlighted ongoing department participation in recovery rallies, the annual Truth and Consequences program with local schools, mock crash demonstrations, and participating in elder abuse awareness weeks to help seniors with annual their walks. He also highlighted the Sheriff's Department's work with local youth through the "Shop with a Cop" program, clarifying that the sheriff's office does not hand-pick the children, but rather allows each individual school

to select the participants to keep the process fair. Banks emphasized his lifelong commitment to working with young people for future generations to come.

The panel next asked the candidates what their first three changes would be if elected to the Sheriff's Office, and how they would prove to Wolfe County citizens that those changes are actively working.

Ryan Kidd outlined what he termed three clear pillars for his administrative changes:

1. Implementing 24/7 patrol coverage so citizens know deputies will always respond when needed.
2. Introducing body-worn cameras to keep all deputies fully accountable, noting that the camera footage would serve as the definitive measure of transparency.
3. Ensuring equal justice under the law, promising that all citizens will be treated equally regardless of political affiliation.

Greg "Bubba" Banks stated his top three priorities would focus on "continuity and core constitutional mandates":

1. Continuing to protect the citizens.
2. Aggressively fighting the drug epidemic.
3. Strenuously working with our youth.

Banks concluded by promising to strictly follow the constitutional duties of the office, explaining that the Kentucky Constitution dictates three primary duties for a Sheriff to follow: tak-

ing care of the court system, serving legal papers, and collecting local taxes.

Towrap up the segment, both candidates issued their final arguments directly to the voters of Wolfe County. Greg "Bubba" Banks focused on experience and the demanding realities of the position. "Just like to ask for your support to be re-elected for your Sheriff," Banks said. "I'll continue working hard as I have. We will be working on grants. It's a tough job; it's not an easy job. You've got to follow the Constitution. You have end -of-the-month issues—prime issues. It's not easy, but I would like to ask you for your vote and support, and I will continue to work hard for Wolfe County."

Ryan Kidd closed by framing the office as a "direct obligation" to the voting public. "Authority of this office comes from the people," Kidd emphasized. "The responsibility of this office is to the people, and the badge belongs to the people of Wolfe County. If I am given the honor of serving, my duty will be to respect the law and protect your rights."

Michael Brand, candidate for County Judge Executive, opened his address by thanking the Republican Party for hosting the event and extended explicit thanks to MTC and Spree TV for broadcasting the debate to local viewers.

"I am wanting to improve the future for our residents," Brand stated. "There are things that need to be ad-

dressed in the next few years. If there is anything you have questions about, I'll try to address those, and we'll take those questions at the end. Thank you."

Brand outlined a direct list of administrative initiatives he would like to achieve in office:

- Writing grants to aggressively pursue external county funding.
- Fixing and maintaining the roads that school buses travel on to protect student safety.
- Ensuring the county is structurally prepared for winter weather situations.
- Securing resources so that firefighters can stay stationed directly at the firehouses in both Campton and Hazel Green.
- Boosting essential local emergency operations, noting that the county needs enhanced emergency services in EMS, Search, and Rescue. He detailed that a \$5 million dollar grant had been acquired, and noted that "it could have been EMS" before reiterating, "you have to fight for grants."
- Improving financial transparency for taxpayers, stating, "It makes a difference of you knowing where your money is spent."

When the panel asked Brand what three specific things he intended to accomplish during his first year in office and what measurable results citizens should expect to see by the end of that year, Brand promised immediate, direct outreach to the state government. "Well, changing that, I'm gonna say the first 10 days," Brand responded. "I would like for my Fiscal Court and myself to go to Frankfort and introduce themselves to the Governor and say, 'Hey, we're from Wolfe County, and we need help with water infrastructure.'"

Brand concluded his presentation with a strong final push for community advancement and local potential.

"I am trying to be the advocate for Wolfe County and I would like to have your vote," Brand concluded. "My focus will be moving Wolfe County forward. We have all kinds of potential for growth."

Following the conclusion of the candidate speeches, Marvin Hobbs delivered the event's closing prayer.

Candidates Dillon Donathon (School Board Dist. 5), Eddie Rose (School Board Dist. 4), and Raymond Banks (County Judge Executive) did not participate in the forum.

—Angelica Fraley

101 cases of measles confirmed in outbreak

7 reported in Laurel County last week

By Melissa Patrick
Kentucky Health News

Laurel County confirmed seven measles cases last week, bringing Kentucky's total in this current outbreak to 101 confirmed cases.

As of Oct. 12, the state measles dashboard shows that measles cases have been confirmed in Barren (5); Caldwell (3); Carroll (5); Christian (45); Laurel (7); Lewis (2); Owen (2); Todd (1); Trigg(25); Trimble (1); and Washington (5) counties. (Four cases were reported earlier this year in Jessamine County, but are not considered part of this current outbreak.)

Of the 101 cases, all but two of them were in unvaccinated people, according to the state measles dashboard. The dashboard reports that one of the individuals had received one dose of the measles, mumps and rubella (MMR) vaccine, and one had received the recommended two-dose series of the vaccine.

Counties that increased last week were Caldwell and Christian, both up one case compared with the prior week; Trigg, up two cases; and Laurel, seeing its first cases in this outbreak.

Tyler Caldwell, co-director of Laurel County Health Department (LCHD), told Spectrum News that all seven cases involve one household.

LCHD reminds Kentuckians on its Facebook Page that the MMR vaccine is the best protection against measles.

As for who is protected, LCHD said, in terms of vaccination status, you should be protected from measles if you were born prior to 1957, you had two MMR vaccination doses, or you have documented measles

immunity (IgG+).

The Kentucky Department for Public Health has also confirmed nine hospitalizations in this outbreak, up from seven a week ago.

Measles is a highly contagious respiratory virus that can cause serious health complications, especially in young children. It is spread through the air, where it can remain suspended for up to two hours. One infected person can infect nine out of 10 unprotected people around them.

Early symptoms of measles begin seven to 14 days after exposure and include high fever, cough, runny nose, and red/watery eyes. The characteristic measles rash can appear three to five days after symptoms begin, usually on the face before spreading down to the rest of the body.

A two-dose MMR vaccine is 97% effective against measles, and people of any age can get it. The measles vaccination series is typically given to children at 12 to 15 months and then at 4 to 6 years old.

"The immunization is completely safe and ridiculously well-effective," Health Secretary Dr. Steven Stack told Spectrum News. "So I think the key message here is that we really strongly encourage folks to get immunized. Because if you get immunized, you don't have to worry about this disease."

Anyone who is concerned about being exposed to measles is asked to call their provider or local health department to seek guidance on how to proceed. Anyone who has measles should talk to their healthcare provider from home and stay away from other people until their symptoms are resolved.

Tourism Commission in special meeting

The Wolfe County Tourism Commission held a special meeting Tuesday, October 20, at City Hall in Campton to review ongoing projects and discuss plans for 2027.

Chairwoman Leah McWhorter called the meeting to order.

Following the attendance verification to establish a quorum, the floor was opened to welcome guests and hear comments. Minutes from the previous meeting were approved on a motion by Leah McWhorter, seconded by Steve Koutoulas. Following a review of sponsorships and grants for both past and current months the attention turned to the Executive Director's report which led to a discussion of the county's ongoing initiatives, including a systematic review of several vital projects shaping the future of Wolfe County tourism. These include Digital and Outdoor Growth:

Updates were shared regarding the rollout of the brand-new Tourism website, along with progress reports on the Campton Trails Project infrastructure and grants. Members evaluated necessary upgrades for the local fairgrounds, reviewed the status of planned elec-

tric service upgrades, and mapped out the trajectory for active planning grant applications.

Financial Stewardship: To wrap up old business, the board reviewed credit card and banking updates, and heard an overview of the Fiscal Year 25/26 audit.

With no new business on the table, the Assistant Director took the floor to provide a comprehensive look at day-to-day office operations and upcoming community activities.

Following a financial report from Treasurer Susan Lacy, the commission turned its attention toward the immediate future. Excitement built as the group discussed upcoming regional activities, notably the Music on the Green and Fall Fest events, along with collaborations with the USDA and nearby Beattyville.

The evening concluded with an open-floor tourism strategy discussion, during which the board members brainstormed ideas for long-term projects to keep Wolfe County "naturally gorgeous."

With a clear roadmap established for the final stretch of year 2026, the meeting was adjourned.

—Angela Fraley

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