

OUR VIEW

Tennessean makes endorsements for upcoming Nashville election

Twelve elected offices are on the Nashville-Davidson County Democratic primary ballot on May 1.

These positions are fundamentally important to run government and uphold the public trust.

They are charged with deciding on legal cases, keeping inmates safe, defending those who cannot afford the cost of a lawyer, collecting taxes, and safeguarding citizens in law and in real estate.

These jobs may not be as well known as the mayor, but they matter to voters' pocketbooks and protecting their rights. In addition, given recent scandals at city hall and the courthouse (i.e., former Mayor Megan Barry and former Judge Casey Moreland), restoring citizens' trust in government must be a critical priority for these officeholders.

There is no opposition on the Republican or independent ballot, so the victors will either win the post outright or move on to the general election on Aug. 2 if no one receives 50 percent-plus-1 of the vote. Voters can request any ballot regardless of their party affiliation.

The Tennessean Editorial Board met with 27 of 28 candidates running for these posts April 10-12. We asked them to fill out a questionnaire beforehand and we interviewed them about their qualifications. Keep reading to find our endorsements in each race.

Tennessean Editorial Board's endorsements

We recommend voters wholeheartedly check the box for the four candidates who are running unopposed:

- ☑ Richard Rooker for clerk of courts,
- ☑ Brenda Wynn for Davidson County clerk,
- ☑ Charlie Cardwell for trustee, and
- ☑ Martesha Johnson for public defender.

They show a tremendous knowledge and devotion to their offices, either as veterans or newcomers, and will serve the public well.

We commend all the candidates who are competing in the contested races. Competition is healthy for a democracy and provides voters the chance to assess whether they want to see a different direction for a particular office.

In many of these races, there were multiple qualified and exceptional candidates, but our endorsement went to the person whose experience, background and responses to questions on vision, public trust and dedication to the community were superior, in our judgment.

Recommendations for judicial candidates

Key traits for a judge are integrity, efficiency and wisdom.

Chancery Court Part II

Our choice: Anne Martin

Martin, 50, is an attorney with Bone McAllester Norton and an adjunct law professor at Belmont University. With 26 years of practice, she is the most experienced candidate in the race when it comes to practicing in Chancery Court, which is a very specialized court in handling civil cases.

Criminal Court Division II

Our choice: Angie Blackshear Dalton
Dalton, 46, was appointed by Gov.



Escobar



Dalton



Martin



Wynn



Cardwell



Hall



Safley



K. Johnson



Matthews



M. Johnson



Rooker



Gentry

Bill Haslam to this post last November. She previously had 11 years of experience as a general sessions judge and worked as an assistant district attorney. She should have the opportunity to continue her service.

General Sessions Court

Background: Metro Council members appointed the two incumbents in the General Sessions Court seats up for election from among their ranks. Former Councilman Sam Coleman took the Division X spot to replace Casey Moreland, who is facing federal corruption and obstruction charges for alleged misdeeds while on the court. Coleman has worked hard to restore integrity on the bench. Former Councilman Nick Leonardo was appointed judge in January to replace Angie Blackshear Dalton, who had been elevated to the Criminal Court. While both men are capable attorneys and jurists, there are candidates in their races whose experience in the law, not necessarily politics, makes them superior choices.

Division III

Our choice: Ana Escobar

Escobar, 46, has an array of experiences as an assistant public defender, Metro clerk, in private practice and, most recently, as an assistant district attorney. She also has spent a lot of her career focused on the issue of domestic violence, which is an important part of the docket of this court.

Division X

Our choice: Joyce Grimes Safley

Safley, 63, worked her way in law school as a nurse and worked as a trial or litigation attorney for 29 years. She spent 15 years as an administrative judge traveling the state. She has been in private practice since 2017.

Recommendations in the clerk races

Criminal clerk of court

Our choice: Howard Gentry
Howard Gentry, 66, a former vice mayor and council member at-large, has

What do these offices do?

Here is a description about what these jobs do and who is running for them:

☑ **Clerk of court:** Keeps and manages records and provides services to the public for four offices. Richard Rooker is the incumbent and is unopposed. (Job salary: \$146,413)

☑ **Chancery Court Part II:** Circuit judgeship for civil cases. This is an open position, and candidates are attorneys Anne Martin, Joy M. Sims and Scott Tift. (Job salary: \$172,740)

☑ **Criminal court of clerk:** Keeps and manages records and provides services to the public for the Criminal Court. Incumbent Howard Gentry faces former Davidson County courts administrator Steven Murff. (Job salary: \$146,413)

☑ **Criminal Court Division II:** Circuit judgeship for criminal cases. Incumbent Angie Blackshear Dalton faces Joy Smith Kimbrough. (Job salary: \$172,740)

☑ **Davidson County clerk:** Keeps and manages records and provides services to the public for Metro, most importantly, automobile titles. Brenda Wynn is the incumbent and is unopposed. (Job salary: \$133,830)

☑ **General Sessions Court Divisions III and X:** Local judgeships that can issue search and arrest warrants, try misdemeanors and try small claims. (Job salary: \$172,740) **In Division III,** incumbent Nick Leonardo faces attorneys Ana Escobar, Sheryl Guinn and Newton S. Holiday III. (Note: Holiday was the only candidate not to come for an editorial board interview.) **In Division X,** incumbent Sam Coleman faces attorneys Frank Mondelli Sr., Tillman Payne and Joyce Grimes Safley, who was also a former administrative judge.

served honorably as the incumbent, with a focus on helping qualified people expunge criminal records. He was appointed in 2011 and has worked to make his office more effective and efficient. The editorial board named him a Notable Tennessean of 2016 for his work on stemming youth violence.

Juvenile clerk of court

Our choice: Lonnell Matthews Jr.

Matthews, 38, is a former district Metro Council member and former district executive director for the YMCA with extensive experience and involvement in youth programs. He also is on leave as the director for neighborhoods and community engagement for the mayor's office. His vision is to take the office beyond records keeper to a community-focused post that plays a part in helping deter youth from entering a life of crime.

Other recommendations

Register of deeds

Our choice: Karen Johnson

Johnson, 49, has 23 years of records, information systems and human resources management, which is an important experience in the job, and she is currently director of human resources at Mercy Health Services in Franklin. She also has been elected three times to political office as a school board mem-

☑ **Juvenile clerk of court:** Keeps and manages records and provides services to the public for Juvenile Court. This is an open seat, and candidates are manager and former bail bondsman Jeff Crum, state Rep. Sherry Jones, pastor Michael Joyner, and former Metro Council member and Mayor's Office neighborhoods director Lonnell Matthews Jr. (Job salary: \$133,830)

☑ **Public defender:** Leads Public Defender's Office, overseeing defense of people who cannot afford representation. Assistant Public Defender Martesha Johnson is unopposed to replace retiring public defender Dawn Deaner. (Job salary: \$145,505)

☑ **Register of deeds:** Keeps and manages records and provides services to the public on real estate deeds. This is an open seat, and candidates are real estate appraiser Richard Exton, Metro Council member Karen Y. Johnson and former Metro Council member Pam Murray. (Job salary: \$127,837.92)

☑ **Sheriff:** Officer of Metro government, overseeing the jail and authorized to deliver warrants and court papers (in Nashville, by charter, the Metro Nashville Police Department, not the sheriff's office, is responsible for law enforcement and keeping the peace). Incumbent Daron Hall faces former state law enforcement officer Kenny Hardy. (Job salary: \$161,854.30)

☑ **Trustee:** Collects real and personal property taxes and manages the tax freeze and tax relief programs. Incumbent Charlie Cardwell is unopposed. (Job salary: \$133,830)

ber and Metro Council member. In the latter role, she deals regularly with real estate, zoning and property matters that give her a keen understanding of the office she is now seeking.

Sheriff

Our choice: Daron Hall

Hall, 53, has served as sheriff for 16 years. He said so many inmates who are booked in jail are there either because of substance abuse or mental illness, and he desires to decriminalize mental illness and to use his facilities, in part, for treatment.

He has received criticism for cooperating with federal authorities who seek to detain inmates who are in the country illegally. As immigration enforcement continues to increase under the Trump administration, we ask that the sheriff do all in his power and within the law to advocate for policies that avoid harming the dignity of people accused of minor infractions and separating them from their families. He can further become a champion for the powerless and voiceless as he seeks to keep them safe in detention while under his supervision.

Opinion and Engagement Editor David Plazas wrote this editorial on behalf of and in collaboration with fellow Tennessean Editorial Board members Michael A. Anastasi and Maria De Varenne. Call him at 615-259-8063, email him at dplazas@tennessean.com or tweet to him at @davidplazas.

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

City can't afford transit plan

The following quote is from April 17: "Successful (property tax reduction) appeals last year exceeded expectations, and Metro Nashville government is now grappling with a property tax shortfall of between \$20 and \$25 million. It comes when the city is financially strained, with its school district losing millions in state funding, a government-wide hiring freeze and an underfunded safety-net hospital."

Suppose that Metro is only minimally successful in raising the already granted discounts to those large commercial factors?

If you divide that \$20 million shortage by the approximate 180,000 single-family or multifamily homes in Davidson County we find that it will cost the average household about \$111 annually to make up the difference.

In light of this, would any reasonable person vote an additional \$9 billion in long-term debt or tax obligations? Why would any reasonable governing body not explain that there are many more efficient, less expensive methods of pro-

Featured letter

Law should allow regional transit plan

I read in the article "Nashville at a crossroads" that in 2017, the GOP leaders in our state legislature introduced and passed the IMPROVE Act. It basically prevents the surrounding counties from working together with Metro on major initiatives such as mass transit.

As a result, the current Metro plan largely ignores the problems on I-65, I-40 and I-24, the three leading conduits in and out of Nashville.

Who in their right minds thought that stopping multi-county planning would somehow improve our multi-county traffic crisis? And what financial gain did they receive by throwing this literal "roadblock" into the equation?

Randall Putala, Brentwood 37027

viding exactly the same miles of new public transportation without imposing this overwhelming burden on an already troubled tax shortage situation?

To those who say the opposition has not suggested an alternative, that is simply not true.

The fact is that many alternatives including the exact same routing using rubber tired high-tech electric buses

only has been proven to be more efficient and cost only 25 percent of the total estimated amount.

The problem is that our council and our ex-mayor decided that you did not need that information, just as they must have decided that the voters do not need to know about the current budget shortfall, one that is affecting our school systems and the public hospital and health

care right now.

Mike Dioguardi, Nashville 37215

Bill Frist right on transit

As a liberal I was surprised when I preferred former Republican Sen. Bill Frist's "Perspective" in April 15's Tennessean to that of Democrat Bill Freeman.

Frist made five excellent points, and I thought the last two were especially insightful. They showed how government policy can dramatically affect the culture of its citizens.

Coincidentally in the same issue of the paper, another story about a survey by the financial website WalletHub points out how Tennessee is the 10th most "stressed" out in the country.

Another cultural connection here is the United Nations' repeated surveys showing the socialist Scandinavian countries rating consistently higher on the happiest scale than America. A lot higher.

Thank you, Mr. Frist. You did not show the blind spot of many wealthy Republicans.

Howard Meek, Nashville 37217