

June Meeting Summary: Candidate Forum

6-29-2026 at The 201 Café and Wine Bar

The moderator Karen George introduced the candidates and set the stage for the night's format. She would call on a candidate and give them one of the topics the organizers had predetermined. The candidates would then have two minutes to address anything about the topic they wished. The candidates had access to the topics ahead of time so they could gather their thoughts.



Sharon Bourgeois Capshaw
(Anderson County Commission District 7) – Election Commission – Sharon noted there are complexities in managing the elections, for instance there is a precinct inside of a convenience store which doesn't meet ADA requirements. However, the voters in that precinct would like that location to remain.

Derek Guy (Anderson County Commission District 6) – Relationship between the Mayor

and Commission – The majority of the Commission is GOP and will rubber stamp what ever the Mayor wants. In that, they have a good relationship; however, it is not a relationship that benefits the residents of Anderson County. We need transparency and good government; not rubber stamps.

Steve Verran (Anderson County Commission District 6) – Opioid funds – There are millions of dollars available for 501C3s to apply for. He noted that the other members of the Commission won't let him get involved in the Commission committee overseeing the funds – so he is not aware of the issues.

Marty May (Anderson County Commission District 5) – Public libraries – The Library Board is trying to ban books that don't align with their personal ideologies. He is in favor of having books available and shelved appropriately. The current board is overstepping their duties.

Ebony Capshaw (Anderson County Commission District 6) – Workforce development – She is a member of the East TN Economic Council and noted we are in the middle of

“Manhattan Project #2” with the current economic growth in the area. Last summer she spent 45 days working with a nuclear workforce workshop tasked with creating a roadmap to a skilled workforce. She also stated that she continues to involve the trades as a way of ensuring better paying jobs in the county.

Sharon – Law enforcement & public safety – The county sheriff and the local police department collaborate to provide enforcement and safety in the county. Russell Barker, the current Sheriff, has worked for better pay for the Deputies. This is important so they have a better life and will continue to work for the A.C. Sheriff’s Department after they have been trained. Too often trained deputies will go to Oak Ridge or Y12 for the better pay after they have training and experience with the county.

Derek – Emergency management – The first responders also need a raise, and for the same reasons as the Sheriff’s deputies. However, there is no one currently who will step up and advocate for the first responders on the County Commission. They need better support.

Marty – Relationship between Oak Ridge and Anderson County – Transparency and cooperation is vital and has been lacking. While important long term, Marty’s priority right now are the issues directly affecting those in the more rural District 5, such as a viable and reliable EMS system.

Ebony -- Relationship between Oak Ridge and Anderson County – The success of both is connected, and the Commission needs to do a better job managing their part of the relationship. Workshops with the city on joint issues would be a good starting point – issues such as economic development in the region, animal control and sheltering, and policing. Oak Ridge is the largest tax base in the county and it is important to work together.

Steve -- Relationship between Oak Ridge and Anderson County – The county turns to Oak Ridge when they need money, for instance the hefty hotel tax goes directly to the county even though many of the hotels are in Oak Ridge. Conversely, Oak Ridge doesn’t rely on much from the county. Oak Ridge provides much of the tax revenue but doesn’t get much bang for their buck.

Sharon -- Relationship between Oak Ridge and Anderson County – To improve the relationship we need better communication. We could collaborate on projects rather than duplicating efforts, such as the new animal shelters in both the county and Oak Ridge.

Derek – Animal shelter – Derek noted he has not visited the Anderson County shelter in person yet. He is skeptical of the recent flurry of activity. The shelter has been a sore spot for years in the county; however, it was not until the election year that any action was taken to move the project forward.

Marty – Animal shelter – The current shelter is in pretty sad condition. Anderson County and Oak Ridge could have gotten together to build a large, state-of-the-art facility for much less than the two facilities will cost overall. The proposed county shelter will not be as large as has been advertised by the Mayor's office. The upkeep will be approximately \$2 million a year – with no clear plan how to pay for that upkeep. This is an important problem.

Sharon – Homeless population – Education, job training, job placement, mental health treatment, drug treatment, community support and feeling valued are all critical issues that need to be addressed to help with the homeless population in the county.

Ebony – Homeless population – She noted that when she worked with Knox County they served many homeless youth. Youth are particularly at risk of getting kicked out of their family home before they can support themselves and to escape abuse. There are some resources, such as TORCH (weekdays only) and Karm, but it is difficult for the homeless population to learn about the resources and get connected with them. She saw a good example of a positive intervention with a Willow Brook family who was assisted by a Willow Brook staff member to connect with the transitional housing intake process.

Marty – Homeless population – He has worked with Karm in Knoxville and learned that a portion of homeless people are not able, or willing, to work for many reasons including untreated mental health issues that affect their ability to be indoors, manage their emotions, and manage their reality. There are a lot of empty buildings in the county that could possibly be repurposed into shelters. We could also explore providing housing vouchers or subsidized temporary housing with county resources.

Derek – Homeless population – This is not just an Anderson County problem – it's an everywhere problem. Derek worked with the Agape House, a 30-day transitional housing resource. It had a good model for transitional housing with support and clear expectations of the residents. Becoming unhoused is a growing problem as the county grows, rental property is more in demand, and owners buy up properties with the goal to maximize the rents. The end result is that low-income people are forced out with nowhere to go.

After a short break Karen reconvened the event with the candidates for State, Federal, and the TNDP Exec Committee.



Anna Golladay (US Congress District 3) – Vouchers & public education – The local governments must put pressure on the state to limit the voucher scam passed by the TN government. The state needs to make sure the federal funding for education is used, and used appropriately, for all TN children.

Bryan Martin (US Congress District 3) – Federal & State officials' effectiveness – Everyone is so frustrated at the current state of the government – led by the tone in Washington. It's been a slow erosion of competence and integrity. So slow that people wonder how we got in the state we're currently in with the threats to our civil rights. We must turn the tide and address the issues of civil rights, housing, healthcare, democracy, voting rights, immigration. And reestablish the process of negotiation to Washington – everyone won't get everything they want (and might not be happy) but their needs must be balanced with others. The people are not actually being represented and that has to change.

Kelly McCampbell (TN House District 33) – Healthcare – The state pays \$1.4 billion to the federal government for services that could go to building and maintaining hospitals here in Tennessee. We need to change laws to fix the underlying causes of chronic health problems. In overall health TN ranks 44th in the nation and lags on nearly every health indicator.

David Miller (TN Senate District 5) – Voting rights – The GOP doesn't care about voting rights; in fact, the supermajority protects those who want to attack voting rights. It is critical that we break the supermajority in order for any reforms or protections to happen. The District 5 seat is the only open seat of the 16 that are in play this year. It's critical it goes to a Democrat. Tennessee does not have a supermajority if we could get the Democrats and independents to actually vote. We have had a non-voting state in the past – and it's critical to get voters out to vote if we want to turn the tide.

Andrew Bennett (State Executive Committee) – Immigration & ICE – His wife is from Hungary, and although she is not subjected to the same issues as those from Central America he has a reference for what people are going through. She became a naturalized citizen and so is afforded some protections that other immigrants do not have. People are

not being treated fairly – what is happening to them at the hands of ICE is horrific. Having militarized people dragging people off the streets in America must stop.

David Garcia (State Executive Committee) – Affordability & the cost of living – Oak Ridge is unique because wages are higher than the surrounding areas due to TVA and DOE jobs. And higher than the median wages in many places. Unionization is important in keeping wages high AND in keeping the money in the community. We have the resources to address poverty and affordability issues if we have the will to do so. Homelessness is a black eye for the community and one we could address with good government.

Anna – Tax policies – In Oak Ridge and Anderson County there is a 12% poverty rate. We need to remember that the abundance from ORNL is only one part of the equation. There is a massive tax bill the State pays that does little to fix problems in Washington. Social Security is only solvent until 2034 in its current situation; however, if all were asked to pay in appropriately and the cap were raised to appropriate levels the fund would return to solvency.

Kelly – Public libraries – No one should control what a child reads except the child's parent. Pulling books after a single complaint is an over-reach. While having age-appropriate books shelved correctly is a start - recognizing that some are inappropriate for certain ages – all books can have value to someone at some point in their journey. The book *Roots* is a good example. The book was pulled due to the TN Age Appropriate Materials Act but later reinstated after public outcry. Library boards should not be able to show their personal biases or hatreds in controlling what other people can read.

Anne Backus (TN House District 33 and State Executive Committee) – Role of State Executive Committee -- In the EC position the role is to represent the Democrats in that district. The EC is responsible for determining if candidates are actually Democrats – something that sounds easy but takes care and careful research. They also ensure county parties are organized and have the resources they need to succeed.

Andrew – Democratic candidate qualifications – There are circumstances that would disqualify someone from being a Democratic candidate. Their voting record is one disqualification if it shows a pattern away from Democratic candidates. Also being an outlier on core Democratic issues or shared values and ideology.

David Garcia – Transparency & accountability – Local meetings with information shared about the state party and information taken back to the state are important. We need one message that resonates with all so everyone is on the same page. However, having a single message requires the state to listen to the locals. The state party should focus on breaking the 30 year supermajority in Tennessee. The party has been focusing on winning one-off

seats and that's not working. There has to be a better approach. We need to focus on the needs of the people.

Andrew – Candidate training & voter participation – A lot of people sat out the last election thinking their vote didn't matter – but it does. And there are a lot of people in the state who are not registered to vote. We would have a better shot with more voter involvement. We also need candidate training. There used to be fairly comprehensive training and it's not clear if the training is still offered or just not publicized. Volunteer recruitment is critical – we need to have volunteers. People hate to make phone calls, but the people you call don't know who you are so you don't need to be afraid of ill will or making a mistake. Door knocking seems intimidating, but it is actually a good positive experience.

Anne – Candidate preparation – The party prepares people to run with candidate training and support. They can bring issues to the Exec Committee for assistance. And the vetting helps the committee know the candidates by examining their voting record (3 of 5 statewide votes as a Democrat and being involved in the party).

Karen entertained questions from the audience directed toward specific candidates.

Anna – Her thoughts about programs vs. system changes, specifically related to homelessness? The government exists to affirm the dignity of its people. If we fail to acknowledge dignity we have lost the thread of what government should be. The current government has little, to no, care for individuals – with how they fund local governments and allocate money to programs that affirm dignity of individuals as proof.

Kelly – The SAVE America Act? The President just blew up the bi-partisan housing bill over the SAVE America Act, which primarily affects women's voting rights. The act requires proof of citizenship when registering; however, goes further and requires that the name on the birth certificate matches the name on the current ID. This creates problems for married women who changed their names and all others who changed names or cannot access their original birth certificate or cannot afford to purchase a passport. The SAVE Act can negatively impact anyone's voting rights. We can fight the act in the courts but also need to do everything we can to fight this at the state level.

Bryan – Why did he wait to get into the race? He needed to wait until after the redistricting to see the district he would represent. But also needed to have the soul-searching discussion with his wife and family as running really impacts the entire family. The state redistricting was the catalyst for him to consider running in the first place. Gerrymandering in general is just wrong – and the current redistricting is simply a mess.

David Garcia – How would you increase Democratic voters? The Democrats have lost the trust of the rank&file voter. We need to educate the voters about the value of the party. We

also need to encourage more involvement. There is lots of work on the horizon and all across the country. The party needs to lead the charge to make sure the work is done by union labor and local labor whenever possible.

Derek – Added to David's comment that getting high schools involved in trades training programs is very important. Those in the trades should have the same recognition as those going to college. In Oak Ridge, there is a high school program where the IBEW apprentices can begin their programs in high school – the apprentices can skip to the 2nd year cohort if they completed the 1st year in high school.

Andrew -- How would you increase Democratic voters? The GOP is good at getting us to bite into culture war issues, such as LGBTQ issues, and forget to attend to the meat and potatoes issues, such as civil rights. The party can help to keep the broad-based issues and the Democratic response at the forefront of people's minds.

Karen asked each candidate to briefly tell the audience about themselves.

Anna – She was a community organizer and sees the need for work on the economy and affordability, the minimum wage and workers rights, and healthcare. Chuck Fleischmann has taken a vacation on issues directly affecting the people of Tennessee.

Andrew – He wants to make sure the party is on the same page and moving forward trying to win elections. Medicaid expansion and other issues affecting the state are also on his radar.

David Miller – There are clear differences between himself and his opponent, Jimmy Matlock. He's running for strong schools, tax-free groceries, and putting the people of Tennessee first in government policy decisions. He would like the opportunity to debate Jimmy Matlock!

Anne – She lives, works, and volunteers to protect disenfranchised populations. She knows the legislation and the legislators, she is reliable and shows up, and she lives her values.

David Garcia – He has spent his whole adult life representing working people. He plans to continue that in his work with the TNDP Exec Committee.

Bryan – He wants to change the over-riding feeling that we, as the people of Tennessee, are better and deserve better than we have right now. He has the time, energy, and will to change that.

Kelly – As an engineer she solves problems for a living, and there are a lot of problems that need solving for the people in District 3. She works hard to always be the most prepared

voice in the room and will out-work anyone. She is committed to working the issues that keep people up at night – such as how to pay the rent and groceries and prescriptions.

Marty – The District 5 voice is not being heard and represented on the County Commission. He wants to make sure the people of his district are properly heard, informed, and represented. If he doesn't know an answer to a constituent question he will find out and get back with them.

Sharon – She believes what makes Oak Ridge and Anderson County great is its diversity. We have great schools and she wants to ensure they remain great, and we can support the 800+ seniors who graduate with work programs and jobs.

Ebony – It has been a privilege for her to serve the community that raised her – her neighbors. The work is far from over and she intends to continue working and making decisions that impact all the people in the county. She has worn many hats, neighbor, healthcare advocate, educator, but none as rewarding as commissioner.

Derek – Our freedoms are being stripped away a little by little. He wants to join the county commission to be a bulwark against the creeping erosion of our rights.

Steve – He would like to see more Democrats with him on the county commission. The party should come together to run more Democrats.