

March Meeting Summary: *Learnings From the Trenches*

3-31-2025 at the 201 Café and Wine Bar

Six of our local Democrats ran in the November 2024 election for School Boards, County Commission, and TN State House. They agreed to share what they learned from running in their respective races. The questions were prepared by members of the club.



David Miller – David defeated a 3-term incumbent Republican to get elected to the Anderson County School Board for District 8. David is a retired educator with over 35 years of experience in a variety of settings – including prisons. He trained high schoolers to work with elementary school students, taught severely emotionally disturbed high school students, became Chair of the Special Education Department, and initiated a program to serve English as a Second Language (ESL) learners. He was President of three union locals and served on the Governing Board of the Georgia Association of Educators, as well as being active on the national level of the National Education Association. David is currently a volunteer teacher for beginner adult ESL students in Oak Ridge.

Theresa Venable – Theresa ran for the Anderson County School Board District 5. She ran with 30 years of experience as a teacher in elementary and middle schools and involvement in two nationally known libraries. After retiring in 2006, Theresa volunteered with the Children’s Defense Fund at Alex Haley Farm in Clinton. She next became librarian at the Langston Hughes Library, and then was the Programs Coordinator for the Children’s Defense Fund for the next 17 years. She now serves on the Blue Ribbon Book Selection Committee of the Dolly Parton Imagination Library.

Ashley Craven – Ashley was elected to one of the two open positions on the Oak Ridge Board of Education. She comes from a long line of educators, although currently in her professional life she is a Project Manager and Integrations Specialist in the veterinary industry. She’s a mom and stepmom to three kids – two youths in Knoxville public schools and a preschooler. Ashley also serves on the Oak Ridge Traffic Safety Advisory Board and volunteers with the Anderson County Community Mediation Services.

Tiffany Malone -- Tiffany ran an extremely competitive race for Oak Ridge Board of Education – coming in a close third. She has two children currently in Oak Ridge Schools: one at Linden Elementary and one at Robertsville Middle School, and one who graduated from Tennessee State University in 2024. In Tiffany’s professional life she is an Electrical Engineer with degrees in both electrical and industrial engineering. She also is active in leadership roles with the Boys and Girls Club Oak Ridge, the Oak Ridge Alumnae Chapter of Delta Sigma Theta Sorority Inc., and the Knoxville Chapter of Jack and Jill of America Inc. Tiffany is also currently serving on the board of the Anderson County Democratic Women’s Club.

Ebony Capshaw – Ebony was elected Anderson County Commissioner for District 6. She previously served as 5th Senatorial District executive committeewoman and ran in 2018 for Anderson County trustee. She has over 23 years of work experience problem solving and implementing process improvements in pharmacy, quality auditing, customer service, and higher education. Ebony serves as a member of Roane State Community College pharmacy technician program advisory board, East Tennessee Medical Reserve Corps, AME Zion Women's Home & Overseas Missionary Society and Christian Education Department. She also has served on the boards of numerous local and statewide organizations.

Anne Backus -- Anne ran for the TN State House for District 33. She was elected as the TNDP Executive Committee woman for District 5 in January of 2020. She ran for the TN State House district 33 in 2024 and is running again in 2026. She has a degree in Industrial Engineering and worked a Project Manager for 33 years. Anne serves her community as a Court Appointed Special Advocate (CASA) for the Anderson County Juvenile court, and volunteers as a math tutor. She is the founder/co-chair of PFLAG’s Oak Ridge Chapter and a member of the Anderson County NAACP.

Karen George – Karen was the evening’s emcee. One of Karen’s numerous accomplishments is being the first black woman to own a real estate brokerage firm in our area (Walton George Realty Group). Karen is a member of the TAR Residential Forms Committee, the TAR State Convention Committee, she is a licensed real estate instructor, a member of the National Coalition of 100 Black Women of Greater Knoxville, a board member of NAMMBA of Knoxville, a board member of Pilot Club of Oak Ridge, and a member of the Advisory Board for the Anderson County Family Justice Center. Karen said that she and her family chose Oak Ridge in 2009 for the education system, and stayed for the people.

Each panel member was asked:

“Please identify your proudest accomplishment?”

- David said his students were his.
- Theresa also said her impact on her students.

- Ashley was most proud of her success in the recent election.
- Tiffany that she was able to use her connective “superpowers” to help folks.
- Ebony uses her skills and her networking ability to solve problems and help others.
- Anne is most proud of founding PFLAG and Youth Pride.

“Today, what advice would give your 2023 self before you ran for office?”

- Anne said “not to worry.”
- Ashley found that “people want to believe in you.”
- David said to “get an early start.”
- Theresa also said to “relax.”
- Tiffany said to “start early and not be afraid to ask for help.”
- Ebony said “not to be afraid to ask for money.”

“What support would you need to run again for office?”

- Ebony said “enough money.”
- Tiffany said need “plenty of volunteers.”
- Theresa said “people power.”
- David said to “ask for help.”
- Ashley would need “child care.”
- Anne said “money and volunteers.”

“What surprised you most about running for office?”

- Anne - “I didn’t get it.”
- Ashley – “The amount of stats needed to efficiently run a campaign.”
- David – How many people were surprised, and happy, when he knocked on their doors.
- Theresa – “How receptive people were.”
- Tiffany – Realized she didn’t need to be afraid to knock on doors.
- Ebony – “That I could have good conversations with folks who are not Democrats.”

“What can you say to encourage others to run for office?”

- Ebony – “Rely on close friends.”
- Tiffany – “Talk to others who have run before.”
- Theresa – “Use all the volunteers.”
- Ashley – “Become subject matter knowledgeable.”
- Anne – “Everyone is capable.”

Each panel member also mentioned that running for office was surprisingly fun – hard work but fun and gratifying. The women candidates discussed the importance of being safe and canvassing with one or two others.

David used his time to announce his run for TN Senate District 5 in the November 2026 election, and to help us get to know him better.

David has been a lifelong Democrat since his uncle paid him a dime to pass out handbills to support Adlai Stevenson in the Presidential election of 1956, explaining they were Democrats "because it is the Democrats that help people help themselves."

Tennessee has the 48th most regressive tax system in the United States, it is dead last in homestead exemption for property owners. Corporations are taxed low and given loopholes and abatements all in the name of "economic development." We all know how trickle-down economics works, the rich just get richer! Yet we have money for vouchers, but not universal pre-K, or expansion of Medicaid. Corporations must pay their fair share! These issues are why David is running.

And he is going to stand up for Democratic values and results. Do you have Social Security, Medicare, Veteran's Benefits, a 40-hour work week, unemployment benefits, civil rights, and so much more? Thank Democrats! And when whoever he runs against says they are a conservative he will ask them to explain what it is they are trying to conserve.

David used the old-fashioned approach of knocking on doors, discussing the relevant issues such as vouchers and book banning, making phone calls, texting, and post cards in his run for his current position representing District 8 on the Anderson County School Board. He plans to use similar tactics to win this election.