This version of the Voter’s Guide has been updated to reflect only general election candidates.

leading up to this year’s county elections, The Dispatch sent questionnaires to all candidates in contested races. Candidates were asked to provide basic information such as age, political experience and contact information. They were also asked to answer between 1-3 questions, limiting their responses to 150 words.

The answers provided to us are printed in this guide. We only edited the answers for length; we didn’t make any grammatical corrections.

Questionnaires were sent to all candidates, and our staff followed up with multiple phone calls and emails in an effort to get responses from every candidate.
**Sheriff**

1. **What do you see as the primary crime problem in the county and how would you address it?**

Since I'm no longer a part of the Sheriff's office, I'm unsure of the LCSO's role in working with the Columbus Police Department. However, if I'm elected as Sheriff, I would request a meeting with the chief and hopefully we could come up with a plan to create a partnership between the departments and work together to reduce crime for the citizens in our city of Columbus and Lowndes County.

2. **How effective have the Sheriff's office's efforts to retain and recruit officers and jailers been, and what more can be done?**

Since I'm no longer a part of the Sheriff's office, I'm unsure of the LCSO's role in working with the Columbus Police Department. However, if I'm elected as Sheriff, I would request a meeting with the chief and hopefully we could come up with a plan to create a partnership between the departments and work together to reduce crime for the citizens in our city of Columbus and Lowndes County.

3. **What role does LCSO have in addressing it?**

Since I'm no longer a part of the Sheriff's office, I'm unsure of the LCSO's role in working with the Columbus Police Department. However, if I'm elected as Sheriff, I would request a meeting with the chief and hopefully we could come up with a plan to create a partnership between the departments and work together to reduce crime for the citizens in our city of Columbus and Lowndes County.

**Democrat**

Willie D. Jones (I)

Education: High school diploma

Political party: Democrat

Political experience: None

Residence: Lowndes County

Family: Single; no children

Email: lowndesso5@gmail.com

Phone: (662) 251-7983

**Democrat**

Andre D. Roberts

Education: High school diploma

Political party: Democrat

Political experience: Running for second term as sheriff

Residence: Lowndes County

Family: Married; one child, one grandchild

Email: ehawkins@lowndesso5.org

Phone: (662) 795-8963

**Republican**

Edwin Haggie (I)

Education: New Hope High School, Jefferson Bible

Community College

Political party: Republican

Political experience: Running for second term as sheriff

Residence: Mississippi University for Education

Age: 50

Sons & daughters

Children: Four children

Email: andrew.roberts1@gmail.com

Phone: (662) 889-2152

**Republican**

André D. Roberts

Age: 47

Education: High school graduate


Residence: Columbus

Family: Four children

Email: andre.roberts1@gmail.com

Phone: (662) 889-2152

**Republican**

Greg Andrews (Democrat) – Unopposed incumbent

Term: 4 years, Annual salary: $69,575

**Republican**

Teresa Barksdale (Republican) – Unopposed incumbent

Term: 4 years, Annual salary: Fee based ($99,500 cap)

**Republican**

Greg Andrews (Democrat) – Unopposed incumbent

Term: 4 years, Annual salary: $99,500 cap

**Republican**

Teresa Barksdale (Republican) – Unopposed incumbent

Term: 4 years, Annual salary: Fee based ($99,500 cap)
1. How will the new office space benefit the coroner's office, and what steps should be taken to best use the new facility?

2. What experience/qualifications make you the right candidate for this position?

3. What are the other challenges facing the coroner's office over the next four years?

The new coroner's office facility would greatly benefit the department because it would allow families to have secured spaces for proper viewing and family of their loved ones. The facility would also provide office space to those who work within the coroner's office and allow for a great amount of square footage for the proper storage of deceased persons.

I have worked around the funeral business for 10 years, and for 3 of those years I have been a licensed funeral director and embalmer for the state of MS. My skills and trained knowledge on how to properly communicate with grieving families, showing both love and compassion during one of the hardest times of their life, is what I love to do. This is a ministry and Working with grieving families and deceased persons is my calling.

The coroner's office should look towards implementing provisions regarding giving families the necessary communication regarding any question pertaining to their loved ones, such as the time it takes to receive cases back from the crime lab and questions regarding questionable or criminal deaths.

Tommy Lee Kidd

Education: Bachelors Degree

Political party: Republican

Political experience: 20 years as Lowndes County Coroner

Term: 4 years, Annual salary: $52,000

Republican

Greg Merchant (I)

Age: 47

Education: IS Caldwell High School; East Mississippi Jr. College; Dallas Institute of Funeral Service Technology; Bachelors in Theological Studies

Political party: Republican

Political experience: 19 plus years as Lowndes County Sheriff

Residence: Columbus

Family: Married, four children, five grandchildren with another expected in October

Email: gmerchand45@email.com

Phone (662) 327-5197 (office) (662) 388-0724 (cell)

The new facility will provide us with enough office space for each of my 3 deputies and administrative assistant to each have their own office to complete their death investigation reports in a more controlled and secured area rather than working from their vehicle or home. The new office space will also allow us to maintain and secure investigation reports for many years. When a tragic death occurs, I am always asked if the family can view their deceased family member and we have never had a controlled environment to let that happen because of cross contamination and possibility loss of evidence, we will now be able to offer a state of the art viewing room. This office will allow for a conference meeting area for follow up conferences with families. This facility will allow for growth in the future.

I have had a long rewarding Funeral Service career of 40 years, where I graduated from Dallas Institute of Funeral Service with honours, along the way I have worked a number of years as a Sheriff's Deputy fulltime and as an auxiliary officer and most importantly saw much of the last 20 years as Coroner. My staff and I bring more than 60+ year experience of Death Investigation to the office. My three deputies bring a wide variety of experience, one has a 30 year E911 experience, one a RN waiting to sit for her Nurse Practitioner board and one a 30 year law enforcement career. I am the State Commander of the Mortuary Response Team that response to mass casualties such as tornadoes, Airplane crashes and have lead operations in Chocow, Monroe, Winston and most recently in Stark County and the Jackson Response to the KC 130 Marine Airplane Crash.

The ever raising drug problem, old drugs new drugs and the supplements sold at the corner gas station. The associability of internet drugs creates delays in death certifications being issued, delays in Toxicology reports and the concern the labs are testing for the correct substance. The lack of Directors at the state the Medical Examiners Office to complete and issue autopsy reports in a timely manner. The need for additional Deputies and staff to get the deceased released back to their grieving families in a more acceptable time.

William Starks (Republican) - Unopposed incumbent

Republican

Matt Furnari

Age: 47

Education: Bachelors Degree in Business Management from Mississippi State University

Political party: Republican

Political experience: 6 years (Currently serving 2nd term as Alderman for Town of Calhoun)

Residence: Calhoun

Family: Married, two children

Email: furnarlohmc@gmail.com

Phone: (662) 574-2551

I do not take the proverbial foot off the gas. Success breeds success and this is the time to attract more industry/businesses to our area. As stable as a business may be or perceived to do it could close its doors tomorrow. We witnessed it in our own community with General TV/Denny's. Boyce foods in neighboring West Point, and others. With added revenue comes opportunity to improve infrastructure, public safety and recreation, which in turn will help attract more business. If we invest our money back into the community and economically measurable improvements in these areas we will see a better community. It truly is a circle effect, attract business – spend money which improves the community – more business will come. The goal is to establish this successful/economic circle.

It is crucial that Columbus is a thriving city. No matter how successful Lowndes County becomes, it will fail if our city anchor Columbus does not keep up. An oversimplified answer to this is communication and cooperation. Lowndes County and Columbus are two separate governed entities, but we have to work together whenever the law and common sense allows. Public safety would my main recommendation. Making sure there is the right candidate for Columbus City police department have a productive working relationship.

Sometimes I have always said when talking about growth is, I do not want growth just to see we are growing. I like to say we want it to be good growth. With our economic booms come the responsibility to use money in the best possible way to promote the most. Another issue we will face is a having qualified employees to fill all the new jobs. We must be a a good partner with Lowndes County Schools to make sure there is a continued focus on providing students with the high skills jobs available.

District 1 Supervisor

William Starks (Republican) - Unopposed incumbent

Do not submit answers to the questionnaires by the deadline.
District 3 Supervisor

Chris Hemphill (Republican) - Unopposed incumbent

Term: 4 years, Annual salary: $35,000

Justice Court Judge District 1

Chris Hemphill (Republican) - Unopposed incumbent

Term: 4 years, Annual salary: $35,000

Justice Court Judge District 2

Ron Cooke (Republican) - Unopposed incumbent

Term: 4 years, Annual salary: $35,000

Constable District 1

Chris Griffin (Republican) - Unopposed incumbent

Term: 4 years, Annual salary: $4,500 + $55/per paper served

Constable District 2

Joe Ables Jr. (Republican) - Unopposed incumbent

Term: 4 years, Annual salary: $4,500 + $55/per paper served

Constable District 3

Willie Sonson Sanders (Democrat) - Unopposed incumbent

Term: 4 years, Annual salary: $4,500 + $55/per paper served

Republican

Andy Williamson

Education: Graduated from New Hope 1990
Political party: Republican
Political experience: None
Residence: Columbus
Family: Married, four children, four grandchildren
Email: williamsonae@gmail.com
Phone: (662) 242-2102

Use that track record and success to continually pursue more mega scale locations and more industry. We can’t afford to let our foot off the gas on economic development for Lowndes County.

I would try to have a friendly working relationship with the city. I have a good friend on that board.

I think the illegal drugs are getting out of hand, I would want to give the Lowndes county sheriff’s department all the tools and resources that they need to combat this issue.

Independent

Christopher Moore

Age: 66
Education: High School, airman leadership, NCJ leadership school both military, 4 month college
Political party: Independent
Political experience: None
Residence: Columbus
Family: Married, two children, two grandchildren
Email: badddogg@yahoo.com
Phone: (662) 393-6444

We have to keep growing. Start bringing in companies that can use the products from Aluminum Mill. Start looking for investors to bring shopping, eating, and entertainment to the community.

I believe the voting board does a good job working with the city. I would continue to grow the relationship to better the growth of our community.

With the lack of volunteers response during the day in all areas I would like to work with all chief and the Fire Coordinator to move forward with a full day timeline fire drill for better response times during the day. I also want to work with EM&ITER to research what will take to hire and retain 911 employees, the backbone to all of the EM&I in the Lowndes County area dispensing for 5 different agencies plus calling Mississippi Highway Patrol and utility companies on certain calls. The current board has done a great job in raising wages but I would like to see a good idea can do to improve the existing MMAI already made. Challenges facing District 3 I do not believe to be lack of community events.

District 5 Supervisor

Democrat

Leroy Brooks (I)

Age: 69
Education: B.A. Political, Masters of Social Studies, Concentration Public Administration and Policy and Psychology
Political party: Democrat
Political experience: Supervisor nearly 40 years, student of Political Science, College Instructor in Political Science
Residence: Columbus
Family: Married, two children, two grandchildren
Email: lerobrooks@bellsouth.net
Phone: (662) 328-0032 (home) (662) 251-8125 (cell) (662) 323-8711 (office)

The county can boost capital/build on its economic success by maintaining a strong partnership with educational and training facilities to insure the county has a viable workforce.

The County has actively supported the city of Columbus on several projects through direct financial support in-kind services. A strong partnership will only develop when each elected official recognizes that working together is a give and take proposition and we’re working for the good of the community and not personal agendas.

The county will face a number of challenges with its continuous growth. The construction and maintenance of county roads, the need for viable fire protection that is not being provided in various parts of the county, increased law enforcement and the overall need to enhance the quality of life for all citizens. I feel confident through a viable plan of action and a reasonable approach to spending, we can meet the challenges.

Independent

Tiffany Turner

Age: 37
Education: Columbus High School, East Mississippi Community College; Mississippi University of Women
Political party: Independent
Political experience: Historic Preservation Commission, Former Utility Commissioner, Community Adselor
Residence: Columbus
Family: Married
Email: t.cantrin1987@gmail.com
Phone: (662) 609-4876

We have to start preparing a workforce for the incoming economy. Upgrading the workforce is essential for the betterment of our community.

We have to start with accessibility to our workforce readiness programs at East Mississippi Community College, the Greater Learning Center and other trade schools and targeting 16-25 year-olds and any other age that may need it. This is the age group most likely to be 20% of crime in our area. Crime is the result of poverty, poverty is a result of hopelessness. Hopelessness can be from a lot of things but mostly from not being able to provide for oneself and our more interactive campaign for accessibility to these opportunities would make our county better not just economically but it will decrease our crime at the same time.

Lowndes County Board of Supervisors does not have a salt agreement with the City of Columbus. It looks like our elected officials of Columbus and the Board of Supervisors seem to be more divided now more than ever. The City of Columbus is one of the largest tax bases in Lowndes County. Citizens pay both city and county taxes but county benefits lead the way. We have to start with building a long term, mental relationship with Columbus and all of the municipalities, townships and communities of Lowndes. It's near impossible if we choose to become a township. We need to get in a serious working relationship were we talk through strategic planning over the next 3-5 years. We need to be planning our efforts together in infrastructure, parks and recreation and crime. We can have a greater impact if we use our resources together because we service the same people.

Mental Health: 1 in 5 people are affected by mental health challenges in this country. Our county has a history and one of the only community health centers that is able to grow in knowledge and resources as a Community Health Center. I have access to training sessions and materials that can be available to community stakeholders. With the proper training we can improve awareness and dispel stigma to get these individuals the proper assistance needed.

Drug: We have a serious problem with the illegal drugs in this area. The availability and appearance of these drugs can be deceptive and deadly. Our law enforcement is doing great work to rid the streets of these drugs and more recently our state legislature has passed a law permitting use of test strips to identify fentanyl which could be fatal in a single dose.

I = incumbent
District Attorney

1. How do you view the balance between punishment and diversion in the criminal justice system, and what do you believe is the district attorney's role in striking that balance?

I think the difference between punishment and diversion depends on the nature of the crime, the consequences of the victim, the criminal history of the person, and the best options for rehabilitation. In my eight years as DA, I’ve prioritized prison for violent crime because violence destroys families and communities. My office has a 66% conviction rate for murder and over 85% for all white collar and drug offenses. I personally handled the prosecution of the early Warren County serial killer’s, Tommie Whitaker. He was convicted of two murders in 1947 at 14 and 18 when he was convicted of two murders in 1947 at 14 and 18. When it comes to non-violent offenders, I believe diversion is a viable option. For people suffering from substance abuse, it is often in their best interest to get them with rehabilitation services or job placement instead of incarceration. For people suffering from advanced drug or alcohol abuse issues, I work with the Drug Court to determine if they have services that could help them.

2. What efforts can the district attorney’s office make or support over the next four years to further reduce recidivism?

The first problem with recidivism in Mississippi is our prison system does not have the resources to provide appropriate programs and support. Too often what I hear from inmates is that they had to do everything in their power just to survive. Until MOUC, it is properly funded; the best way to reduce recidivism is to focus on young people. Over the next four years, I plan to work with the Youth Court to identify juveniles on the wrong track and partner with them to get them on the right path. We have crime prevention grants to help provide services and mentorship. I also plan to work with the schools in my district to identify troubled and youth defined and assist as much as we can to prevent and reduce the potential. This will take the involvement of community partners like churches, non-profits, and other community organizations.

3. How important of a role should victims’ advocacy play in the district attorney’s office, and in what ways would you promote that over the next four years?

The role of victims’ advocacy in the district attorney’s office is of paramount importance. Victims of crime often experience severe physical, psychological, and emotional trauma, and it is crucial for the justice system to prioritize their rights, needs, and support throughout the legal process. Here’s how I’ve promoted victims over the previous four years. My office was the first in the State to offer grievance counseling for survivors of gun violence to help those impacted by gun violence cope with the pain and trauma of trauma.

Republican

Jase Dalrymple

Education: Mississippi State University (2014); University of Mississippi (2016)
State Representative House District 41, Term: 4 years, Annual salary: $23,500

1. How can the state best use the influx of revenue from federal sources during the pandemic?

A balance between punishment and deferred prosecution needs to be maintained and the line needs to be painted clearly. I believe 100% in deferred prosecution for those who are guilty of non-violent non-violent crimes. We have a lot of people who are struggling with drug or alcohol abuse issues, I work with the Drug Court to determine if they have services that could help them.

2. What are the priorities for your district in the next four years?

It’s not the district attorney’s role to ensure that individuals don’t re-offend. All I can do is give a qualifying individual an opportunity (competing a court program so they will not be a convicted felon), which puts them in the best possible position moving forward.

3. What is your position on expanding Medicaid?

I believe that expanding Medicaid will help the health of individuals and society, but I also believe it will increase the amount of money that we need to spend on healthcare. This is a complex issue with no easy answers.

State Representative District 41

Kabir Karriem (I)

Education: S.D. Lee High School C/O ’91; Hinds Community College; Mississippi State University, Bachelor of Science

1. How can the state best use the influx of revenue from federal sources during the pandemic?

To best utilize the federal revenue influx during the pandemic, Mississippi should prioritize the following areas: education, infrastructure, and health care. These areas are critical to the state’s economic recovery and will provide long-term benefits. We can improve access to quality care in underserved areas through rural health services, and invest in public health infrastructure. The federal funds will enhance preparedness for future health crises, support community health centers for rural Alaska, and provide economic recovery for transportation, and broadband internet.

2. What are the priorities for your district in the next four years?

There are a plethora of priorities for House District 41 in the next term. Economic Development: Lowndes County has a vibrant and diverse business environment that can attract new industries and create jobs. The governor has signed a bill that allows the Department of Economic and Workforce Development to pass the largest economic development package in state history. The package includes a $2.5 billion allocation for capital improvements and an additional $500 million for small businesses. By expanding broadband access and providing more pay and resources for our teachers and students, we can ensure that our children have access to quality education. We support the development of small businesses, by continuing to invest in education and training programs that can help people gain new skills and take advantage of available job opportunities. Our infrastructure must improve, and maintain, and improve the infrastructure in the district, such as roads, bridges, and public transportation, to provide quality services to all residents.

3. What is your position on expanding Medicaid?

I support the expansion of Medicaid, which will provide necessary access to healthcare. Expanding Medicaid will help families and individuals afford the cost of necessary care. The expansion will help reduce the financial burden on families and individuals who are located in underserved areas. It will also improve the overall health of the state by providing comprehensive healthcare. Medicaid expansion will have a positive impact on the economy, as it will create jobs in the healthcare sector, particularly in rural areas. Medicaid recipients and uninsured individuals who create economic opportunities for health care providers and help to ensure that our children receive the necessary care they need. Medicaid expansion will have a positive impact on the economy and provide a comprehensive, cost-effective solution to the state’s healthcare needs.

Democrat

Andy Boyd (Republican) - Unopposed incumbent

State Representative District 37

Cheikh Taylor (Democrat) - Unopposed incumbent

Dana McLean (Republican) - Unopposed incumbent

State Representative District 38

State Representative District 39

Term: 4 years, Annual salary: $23,500

Term: 4 years, Annual salary: $23,500

Term: 4 years, Annual salary: $23,500