

LOCAL / REGIONAL

Hamilton County DA Candidates Pinkston & Brooks Face Off in NAACP Forum, Wamp ‘Declines’

By Camm Ashford

Two candidates running for Hamilton County district attorney had an opportunity last Tuesday night to lay out their platform to voters.

Republican candidate and current Hamilton County District Attorney Neal Pinkston and Democrat John Allen Brooks faced off from 7-8:30 p.m. during “Conversation & Votes,” a Zoom event hosted by the Chattanooga Hamilton County Branch of the NAACP.

The event was also streamed live on the NAACP’s Facebook page.

According to the Rev. Ann Jones Pierre, local NAACP branch president, Republican candidate Coty Wamp “declined the invitation.”

In a published statement, Wamp—who serves as general counsel for the Hamilton County Sheriff’s Office—said, “Unfortunately, I had another speaking engagement with the Tennessee Valley Republican Women that has been planned since December.”

Explaining the ground rules of “Conversation & Votes,” Rev. Pierre noted, “This is a conversation, not a debate. Our purpose is to give information.”

Questions for the candidates came from the NAACP as well as concerned citizens, Rev. Pierre said.

When the candidates were asked by moderator Dr. Edna Varner why voters should choose them, Pinkston—who has served as district attorney since 2014—said, “I’m a prosecutor, not a politician,” citing his advantage in the race because of his experience within the department.

Pinkston also pointed out that the NAACP honored him in 2019 with the Thurgood Marshall Award in the area of Law Enforcement for Civil Rights and Community Activism.

Pinkston was the first white recipient of the award, the highest honor bestowed upon an individual by the local NAACP.

Brooks, former County Commissioner and chairman of the Hamilton County Democratic Party, said, “Protecting the rights of the most vulnerable motivates me. It is extremely important to treat everybody professionally.”

Pinkston has recently come under fire for having his wife and her brother working in his office, and late last month placed the two family members on leave following a state ruling against his office for nepotism.

“It’s a question for the voters,” Pinkston said of the nepotism charge. “And understand, too, that a family member could be the most qualified for



Democrat DA Candidate John Allen Brooks



Republican DA Candidate & Current Hamilton County DA Neal Pinkston

a position. Or may not have been a family member when hired.”

Brooks had similar thoughts on the subject.

“Nepotism isn’t against the law in the county, so it’s up to the voters,” he said.

Both candidates also had similar views on the role of the juvenile court

system, mental health, drug addiction and privatation of the prison system (both were against).

The primary election will take place May 3, with Pinkston and Wamp being the only Republicans on the ballot.

Democrat Brooks is unopposed in the primary.

Blackburn, Rosen Introduce Bipartisan Legislation to Bolster Department of Veterans Affairs’ Cybersecurity, Protect Veterans’ Personal Information

WASHINGTON, D.C. — U.S. Senators Marsha Blackburn (R-Tenn.) and Jacky Rosen (D-Nev.) announced the introduction of their bipartisan Strengthening VA Cybersecurity Act, which would require the Secretary of Veterans Affairs (VA) to obtain an independent cybersecurity assessment of VA information systems and submit to Congress a plan to address the cybersecurity weaknesses found in the assessment. This bill has been endorsed by AMVETS and the Paralyzed Veterans of America and comes in light of growing concerns about possible Russian

cyberattacks as retaliation for American sanctions. Companion legislation will be introduced in the House of Representatives by Representative Frank Mrvan (D-Ind.), Chairman of the House Veterans’ Affairs Committee’s Technology Modernization Subcommittee.

“Despite having the second-highest IT budget, the VA ranks 5th lowest out of other departments on cybersecurity funding,” said Senator Blackburn. “The lack of key cybersecurity management elements at the VA makes our veterans’ personal information vulnerable. As VA continues modernization efforts, it is

critical that these systems are adequately secure.”

“In light of the ongoing threat of possible Russian cyberattacks, we must take proactive steps to enhance the cybersecurity of our country — including by protecting our veterans,” said Senator Rosen. “The Department of Veterans Affairs is the largest integrated health care network in the United States, yet it spends less as a percentage of its overall budget on cybersecurity relative to other government agencies. This bipartisan bill would help us understand the VA’s cyber vulnerabilities and ensure we pro-

tect our veterans’ personal information from malicious cyberattacks.”

“Personal data breaches are seemingly more and more common at the VA and among the veteran community,” said Joe Chenelly, Executive Director of AMVETS. “Foreign adversaries and common criminals often target our veterans. Senator Rosen and Blackburn’s legislation is a step toward better security for our Nation’s veterans and we strongly support it.”

Black Teen Gets Accepted into Nearly 50 Colleges, Offered More Than \$1M in Scholarships



NATIONWIDE — Makenzie Thompson, a high school student from South Fulton, Georgia, has been accepted to nearly 50 colleges. She said she was amazed when she realized she has also been awarded a total of more than \$1.3 million in scholarships.

“Once I hit a million I was like that’s kind of crazy. Like people don’t make a million in their lifetime,” Makenzie excitedly told WSB-TV.

Makenzie, who is an honors student at Westlake High School in Atlanta, is also the Senior Class President and co-captain of the dance team. She volunteers at a local veterinarian clinic while doing work-based learning there as well.

Makenzie recently received acceptance letters from schools such as the University of Georgia, Delaware State University, Ohio State University, Xavier University, Purdue University, and many more that the list showing her

college acceptances in their school wall could not fit them all. Each university offered her scholarships ranging from thousands of dollars to full-rides.

Makenzie’s school and her parents said she is really hardworking and they were proud of her achievement.

“Everything that she does is for excellence and academics,” said Makenzie’s principal Jarvis Adams.

“She knew what she wanted. And she knew what it was going to take to get there,” said her father Stephen Thompson.

Meanwhile, Makenzie has chosen to go to Tuskegee University, which offered her full tuition and books, to study animal science and pursue her dream of becoming a veterinarian.

Makenzie expressed her joy about her accomplishment.

“Oh I am extremely proud of myself. It’s been a long time coming. A lot of long nights,” she said.

Fisk Jubilee Singers at Carnegie Hall

Nashville, Tenn. (TN Tribune)—Saturday night (March 19th)marked an incredibly special occasion for the multi-award-winning Fisk Jubilee Singers®. The Fisk Jubilee Singers® have inspired audiences, broken barriers and built buildings for 150 years.

Dr. Paul T. Kwami was invited by MidAmerica Productions, Inc. to serve as a guest conductor during the opening concert of its 39th season. Under Dr. Kwami’s direction, the Fisk Jubilee Singers® led several outstanding choral ensembles through a tour de force collection of the traditional Negro spirituals and a Ghanaian song. The concert took place on the Ronald O. Perelman Stage/Isaac Stern Auditorium in Carnegie Hall.



The extraordinary arrangements included everything from John Work to Harry T. Burleigh and Paul T. Kwami.

NETWORK: from front

the future, this move came at the right time and it’s brought us to the right place,” said Ferguson, who previously served as chief operating officer at Lipsey Logistics and president at Riverside Transport in Chattanooga.

Founded in 2016 by trucking industry veterans Ferguson and Ben Gordon, Network Transport has

grown into a cutting-edge transportation and logistics provider, producing more than \$121 million in revenue in 2021.

Network Transport, which became part of the Soar Transportation Group in July of 2020, is headquartered in Chattanooga with satellite offices in Dallas and Salt Lake City.

More than 150 people attended the company’s grand opening on Tuesday.

WAMP: from front

of them is NOT the way they’ve treated law enforcement. And I just can’t stand behind it right now.”

The war of words between Wamp and the NAACP first began to heat up when Rev. Pierre alleged that Wamp had refused to find a date that all three candidates for DA could appear before the NAACP for a virtual “Conversation & Votes” forum.

Wamp disputed this, saying she was already booked for the Republican Women’s Club event when Rev. Pierre extended to her the last-minute NAACP

invitation.

“The D.A.’s office is committed to justice and the NAACP is committed to justice, therefore, there should be no reason that the NAACP is not supported,” Rev. Pierre said.

“One of the main reasons I’m running for office is to help the black community in this city,” Wamp said. “I’ve committed to the black community more than I have any other community in this county, period.”

The primary election will take place May 3, with winners from the party primaries meeting in the general election in August.