



Saline County Republican Candidates Addressed HSV Residents – 2022

Description

On March 31, at the third part of the Hot Springs Village Republican Primary Candidate Forum, Saline County Republicans addressed HSV residents. Saline County Justice of the Peace, Keith Keck, was the Forum Moderator.

Keck explained that the County Judge position is similar to being the “mayor” of the county.

The candidates at this portion of the meeting include:

Matt Brumley, Candidate for Saline County Judge

Rick Long, Candidate for Saline County Judge

Rodney Wright, Incumbent Candidate for Saline County Sherrif

Thomas Burchfield, Candidate for Saline County Treasurer

Ragan Kyzer, Candidate for Saline County Treasurer

Holly Sanders, Candidate for Saline County Treasurer

Jennifer Carter, Candidate for Saline County Tax Collector

David (Davie) Gibson, Candidate for Saline County Tax Collector

Matt Brumley, Candidate for Saline County Judge

“I am going to talk about the things that I am passionate about – and that is Saline County.”

Brumley moved to Saline County 30 years ago from Texas. “It was the people in Saline County that made a difference. Where I lived in Texas, everybody cared about themselves.”

“There was a time in my life where I wasn’t really sure what I was going to do.” He said there was a

horrible accident and he was not qualified to render help. This led Brumley to enroll in CPR classes at Saline Memorial Hospital. Taking this class piqued Brumley's interest in becoming an EMT.

"I absolutely fell in love with the thought of being able to give all I've got to somebody that needs my help. I made a career out of it."

Brumley said he could not become an EMT at the hospital where he took the EMT classes because he was too young to be covered by their insurance policy. "So I went to Pine Bluff, Arkansas. What a great place to learn to be a paramedic. Within 24 hours I felt like I could do anything. The only thing they were concerned about was 'would I be able to touch the gas and brake pedal'. And I was."



Matt Brumley, Candidate for Saline County Judge

In 1999 a Directorship position opened over emergency services at Saline Memorial Hospital. Brumley spent 16 years in this position where he said he was able to learn about the needs of the community.

"If you live in Garland County, you are important to me, too. I love my neighbors and if their house is on fire, it's probably going to affect mine. If they are doing good, it's probably going to have a great impact on me, also. Those relationships are important."

Brumley said in his Directorship position, that he had a responsibility to become acquainted with many officials, law enforcement officers, and other first responders.

"I had a calling in my life, while I was doing all of this [Director of Emergency Services at Saline Memorial Hospital]. " Brumley's calling was to start, "Amplify Fest". This is a musical festival that takes place in Saline County. "Over the past 11 years, we went from just a handful of people showing up, to 63,000 attendees in 2018." Over two days time, "they came to hear the good news of Jesus and the Gospel. We celebrated."

“Here is what I pledge to do. We need help. Today. And we’ll need help tomorrow. I want to finish empty every day, with everything I’ve got, I’m going to pour into the people in Saline County. I am the people of Saline County. I want to get to know you.”

Brumley said he would be available after he spoke to talk to attendees. “If you have any questions on, ‘who is Matt Brumley and why would I vote for someone for County Judge who has never served a day, I will be happy to answer those questions.’”

What is a major challenge of the office you seek and how would you address it?

“Our greatest resource is people. Those people deserve sound infrastructure.” In Brumley’s Director job. He began a project where no Arkansans would be greater than 30 minutes away from a vascular neurologist. That took infrastructure. “Sounds impossible. Today, there are 55 hospitals in this program. But without broadband internet, we’re unable to do the telemedicine things that we are capable of. We’re unable to give the education that we need. Infrastructure has changed. Regarding roads, I can tell you where 30% of the potholes are today.”

“My pledge is this: to make our infrastructure as strong as it can possibly be, for the good of the people, while being fiscally responsible with the hope of growing, but also growing responsibly.”

What separates you from your primary opponent?

“I am going to be candid. I didn’t do a lot of research on my opponent. I have so many things I need to pay attention to. I will say, off the cuff. I am not a flash in the pan. I am going to die in Saline County, hopefully, no time soon. If I do not win this election, I am going to serve my tail off. For the last thirty years, mostly 17 of those, since my twin boys were born, I’ve served my tail off. I want them first, to be able to look at me and say, ‘that’s good’. I think that my work today, and your work today are going to have a lasting effect on generations.”

Rick Long, Candidate for Saline County Judge

Rick Long is a lifelong resident of Saline County and has been married for 43 years, with three grown children. He has been a registered nurse for 30 years and was the Director of Nursing at Birch Tree Communities for 12 years. Birch Tree is a community mental health center. Long said that in the directorship position, he managed all of the nurses in 14 branches.

Long worked at Saline Memorial as Manager of the 6th Floor where he was over 85 employees and was responsible for the budget and staying within the budget.

“My passion has always been people. I am not a politician.”

Around Thanksgiving, people began asking Long to run for the position of Saline County Judge. “The requests kept coming and I started praying about it for two and a half months.”

“God laid it on my heart to do this. I don’t know if God wants me to be County Judge or if he wants me to stand up in front of people like you and profess my faith. Either way, I am a winner.”



Rick Long, Candidate for Saline County Judge

Long said he takes the responsibility of the County Judge very seriously. He has been fiscally responsible with the resources of others for the past 20 odd years.

“I’ve been in this race for two months. I have not once solicited a campaign donation. I think that is important. I think it is really important. That tells you how serious I am about running for this position. I know I am being outspent tremendously. But I don’t think I am going to be outworked. It is easy to spend other people’s money. It is not quite so easy to spend your own.”

“I’ve always been fiscally responsible.”

Long said he does not have a mortgage, or car payment and does not owe money to anyone.

“If I get voted in as County Judge, I am not going to owe anybody except the people of Saline County and that is why I am running. I am tired of electing people into office to ignore me and ignore you... I am running for the people of Saline County. Period.”

What is a major challenge of the office you seek and how would you address it?

County roads and trash are the major challenges. Long said he would be out in the County to check on things instead of just sitting in his office in Benton. He also said, if elected, he wants to create an open-door policy and will not ignore complaints or ideas from his constituents.

What separates you from your primary opponent?

Long said that experience separates him from his opponent. He is familiar with all of the different areas in Saline County and also knows a lot of the people that live there.

“As far as experience goes, I am not here to knock anybody.”

“Twenty years of being an administrator for a state-wide organization, for a place like Saline Memorial where I was responsible for psychiatric patients, Alzheimer patients, those have been my passions. I have been responsible for budgets and working within those budgets. No offense to Matt, but I think there is a difference between going out and soliciting money for different things and living with what you’ve got and making the best that you can do with what you’ve got. I think that is what separates us.”

Rodney Wright, Incumbent Candidate for Saline County Sherrif

Wright said he has served as Saline County Sherrif for seven and a half years. He was born and raised in the county

He said in 2014 he walked into a ‘neglected’ office. “In the past seven and a half years, I’ve done a really good job of rebranding that department. We had to rebrand it.” Wright said they had to rebuild the trust with everyone they serve including the agencies and community. Wright said they have done an excellent job of rebuilding trust.

“I work with some amazing people.”

Wright said Saline County is huge and “as many people as you think you know, there are ten times as many that you don’t know...”

Wright explained that after traveling the 755 square miles of Saline County for seven and a half years, this is a big job. “It is a huge responsibility and cannot be taken lightly.”

Wright served the City of Benton for almost 20 years, working alongside the Sheriff’s office. He thought he knew what it would take to be Sheriff. “Wrong. I had no clue. I knew the things that needed to be fixed. We worked on them and got them fixed.”

Wright said improvements made in the past seven and a half years include adding more patrol deputies and school resource officers, and pay raises for the deputies. These improvements were made because Saline County has a good Quorum Court. He also worked with the County Judge to achieve these improvements.



Rodney Wright, Incumbent Candidate for Saline County Sheriff

“I am very proud to be your Sheriff and I look forward to hopefully still being your Sheriff after May 24. It’s been an amazing experience – the best experience of my life! I will continue doing a great job and hopefully, have your support.”

What is a major challenge of the office you seek and how would you address it?

“Recruitment and retention are my biggest challenges...I have 46 positions in my jail and 18 openings.” They advertise daily in different venues and cannot get people to apply. Wright said all of the area law enforcement agencies are “fishing out of the same pond,” for employees.

What separates you from your primary opponent?

Wright said he only knew a little about his opponent. “I have 28 years of law enforcement experience and have been your Sheriff for seven and a half years. We’ve come a long way in the last seven and a half years.”

“Experience would be the separation between myself and my opponent.”

Thomas Burchfield, Candidate for Saline County Treasurer

Burchfield has served as the Manager of Financial Education at the State Treasurer’s Office for the past three years. Prior to that, he was the Deputy Director of Arkansas 529 Caller Savings Plan and the Able Plan, which is a savings plan for those with disabilities.

As the Manager of Financial Education, he travels the state, teaching folks how to budget, save and invest money. “I love serving you at the Treasurer’s Office.”

“I want to bring my experience to the County Courthouse.” He would like to teach financial initiatives across Saline County. “I don’t want to just do the job day-to-day and go home.” He wants to get out of the Courthouse and serve the constituents.

“My life has been about serving. I have served you in the County Coroner’s Office and the Clerk’s Office...I look young, but I am not. I have a lot of experience.”

“I love to serve and you need an experienced Christian conservative in the County Treasurer’s Office. It is not one of those really exciting offices, but it is very important.”



Thomas Burchfield, Candidate for Saline County Treasurer

“I’ve been in politics all my life. Prior to working at the Treasurer’s Office, I was a mortician for ten years.”

“I helped my friend, Richard Milligan up at the capitol and am happy to have his endorsement. He has made millions for the state. Under his leadership and under my help and other staff members, with Arkansas 529, we raised that to over \$1 Billion in assets. In the Able Plan, which is very small, we’ve raised that total to over \$3 Million in assets.”

“I am fiscally conservative. I announced I would never take a pay raise if I am elected as your County Treasurer. I feel like they make quite a bit of money and I feel like you are taxed enough. That makes me a little bit different than my opponents.”

“I know how to take care of a budget.” Burchfield is the breadwinner of his family.

“Another thing about my race is my faith.” Burchfield married a Catholic but was raised Pentecostal and converted. “My faith guides me in everything I do...I appreciate your vote on May 24.”

What is a major challenge of the office you seek and how would you address it?

“The major challenge for me is to get out and to serve you more. I am not just going to sit and do the day-to-day operations and make my staff do the work. I’ve been a leader in several organizations and I know from top to down, it is all a team effort. We need good leadership in that. Getting out in the county and serving you more is going to be my main objective.”

What separates you from your primary opponents?

Burchfield said that what separates him is that he is a fiscal conservative. “I am not here to benefit myself. That is why I made the pledge to never take a pay increase and at the same time, it is the experience too. I’ve served you in the County Coroner’s Office and the Circuit Clerk’s Office and I’ve been all across the state for the past 20 years, electing good Christian conservative Republicans.”

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Ragan Kyzer, Candidate for Saline County Treasurer

“I always enjoy coming to the Coronado Center to listen to the Hot Springs Village Republican Women.”

Kyzer has lived in Saline County for her entire 46 years. She is a single mom with a daughter entering the nursing program at UCA in Conway. Her son recently built a house in Benton.

Not long after high school, she was hired into the Circuit Clerk’s Office where she was promoted to Chief Deputy. She still holds the same position where she manages the Clerk’s office and most of her focus is on six budgets that are all funded from different areas.

“I work closely with Legislative Audit in our yearly review process and also with the County Financial Department and Comptroller.”



Ragan Kyzer, Candidate for Saline County Treasurer

“I am proud to say I have led a team that has accomplished great things in the Clerk’s Office. We’ve implemented E-filing in our Court’s Division. We are 100% automated in the Land Records. We are all certified Passport Agents.”

“Working in County Government for 25 years has given me a specific understanding of the importance of working cohesively with all the county offices...”

Kyzer said she has a respected relationship with all the other county offices, most importantly, the Treasurer’s Office and staff. Current Saline County Treasurer, Larry Davis, trusts Kyzer’s work ethic and is endorsing her.

“When I am elected I have many goals and improvements that I am looking forward to. The first one is to keep the current staff.” Kyzer explained that county employees worry about losing their jobs when a new public official is elected.

Her second goal is to set up ACH direct deposits for entities that receive benefits every month from the county. This includes schools, libraries, fire departments, etc. The departments are agreeable to this change.

Thirdly, she wants to upload monthly Treasurer’s Reports to the website.

Kyzer is the Vice-president of the Saline County Republican Women. She encourages American values to our children at a Constitution Camp. This camp will be held in July.

She encourages small businesses and meets with local conservative business owners, who speak to

the Women's Group. "Small business is the backbone to our economy and a productive society."

"I am proud to be pro-life. I am a Christian, a member of the NRA, and I support the Second Amendment." She knows these issues will not come up in the Treasurer's Office.

"I want to be your next Treasurer. Please vote for me in the May primary."

What is a major challenge of the office you seek and how would you address it?

"Automation is the focus of the office at this point. In 2020, Saline County created a new Financial Department and County Comptroller, which work hand-in-hand with the Treasurer's Office." The new office is streamlining the accounting processes. This is beneficial to the other offices, but there are still improvements to be made.

Kyzer and the Comptroller work together and have discovered there is further automation needed in order to reduce redundancy, improve efficiency, and cut down on human error. These improvements will benefit each county office.

What separates you from your primary opponents?

"What separates me from my opponents is my 20 years of county experience."

"My entire career has been with the county government and that has provided me first-hand knowledge and understanding of county operations." Her opponents do not have this first-hand knowledge.

"The Treasurer's Office is one you want to know when you get there and not learn it after you walk in." She also has a trusted relationship with other government officials.

Kyzer is attentive to detail and a professional.

Holly Sanders, Candidate for Saline County Treasurer

"I am your current Saline County Tax Collector." Sanders has lived in Saline County her whole life, presently living in Benton with her two children. She graduated from Bryant High School in 1992.

In 1993, Sanders began her career in the banking industry, working her way up to branch manager. In 2001 she became a stay-at-home mom.

In 2009 re-entered the banking industry. In 2011 Sanders began her public service career in the Tax Collector's Office.

At this point, while still working full-time, she set an example for her children and enrolled in college at the University of Arkansas. Sanders graduated with a bachelor's degree in Human Resource Management and Education. "Being a single mom, I was determined to show my children the value of honesty, hard work, and dedication." Her son is working on a degree in pastoral ministry and her daughter is a high school senior and plans to attend the University of Central Arkansas and pursue a degree in physical therapy.



Holly Sanders Candidate for Saline County Treasurer

Sanders says she has learned every aspect of the duties of the Collector's Office. In 2015 she became Chief Deputy, subsequently being appointed as Tax Collector. Her primary goal in this position has been to implement more efficient ways to assist the Saline County taxpayers.

She initiated monthly visits to Hot Springs Village to assist the citizens with a more convenient way to access and pay their property taxes.

She is also developing more convenient payment options.

If elected, her goal is to streamline the office even more and improve communications with other county offices and county residents.

What is a major challenge of the office you seek and how would you address it?

“One major challenge that I would first address is an innovative job [undecipherable word] system. All the software systems at the Treasurer's Office are what our Financial Department uses and they work together. There is also an option they do not have at this time, but it is available and that is the same software system that the Collector's Office uses. While the Treasurer's Office takes in and disperses any and all funds that the county receives, I do believe the property taxes are the largest revenue that Saline County takes in. For example, last year Saline County took in over \$97 million dollars in property taxes (2021). All of those funds are, of course, dispersed out to school districts, cities, fire districts, improvement districts, etc.” As of right now, every month when we balance our receipts, we disperse our funds to the Treasurer. We also give reports – paper reports that someone has to manually go through. I believe if we were able to be on the same software system, that would be electronically done. It would save not only time, but it would be such a benefit for the Treasurer's Office and the Collector's Office...”

What separates you from your primary opponents?

“There are, I believe six counties in Arkansas that have just one office for the Treasurer/Collector. The reason for this is because these two offices work hand-in-hand...”

“As the current Tax Collector, I have a unique insight of the knowledge, experience, and understanding into the operation of the collections of monies and disbursement of funds....”

Sanders said that her extensive on-the-job experience as Tax Collector separates her from her opponents. She has inside knowledge.

Jennifer Carter, Candidate for Saline County Tax Collector

Carter lives in Benton with her husband and seven-year-old son. She said she has been dedicated to the Tax Collector Office for the past ten years.

The Tax Collector’s Office handles many things. Some of these are: exemptions for disabled American veterans, working with mortgage companies on escrow payments, in addition to handling probate and bankruptcy claims. The office collects for 77 improvement districts and 12 volunteer fire departments. The six bank accounts they use have to balance perfectly. Last year, the office brought in \$97 Million.



Jennifer Carter, Candidate for Saline County Tax Collector

The money the office collects is extremely important to the operation of the cities, libraries, schools, roads, etc. Most of the money collected goes to the school districts.

She understands the operations, laws they must follow, and the deadlines of the office.

“I have experience in running a small business and in customer service. I want to take that experience and make the Collector’s Office the best that it can be. As your Collector, I will be committed to providing friendly and quality service. I will keep the citizens informed...I will be dedicated to looking at ways for us to improve services and how we can make it easier on all the citizens that do business with our office. I will stay up-to-date with today’s technology and I’ll work at adding mobile payment options.”

“I am ready for this job, to be your next Collector and I would greatly appreciate everyone’s support.”

What is a major challenge of the office you seek and how would you address it?

“One of our major challenges in our office today is the shortage of staff. Because we are short on our staff right now, there are several individuals who really do need additional training. If I was elected, I would focus on making sure that our staff was a great team so that we can better serve you.”

What separates you from your primary opponent?

“What separates me and Davie is that I do have real experience in the office. I understand our hardship and I know what we need to do to make it better.”

David (Davie) Gibson, Candidate for Saline County Tax Collector

Gibson said his grandmother lives close to the Coronado Center.

He served as Justice of the Peace for around four years. “I have loved every minute of it” He is on the Executive Board for the county party and also on the Executive Board for the Greater Saline County Young Republicans.

The first thing he wants to do as Tax Collector is to make sure you know where your tax dollars are going. That’s really important to me that you understand where that money is going.”

“The thing I am most proud of in my Quorum Court time, we passed a pro-life bill to make Saline County pro-life. It means a lot to me to be in a position where I could stand up for the unborn and really show who I am as a person. That is specifically why I brought that up. I want you to know who I am. I am founded in God. God has put me in this position for a reason.”



David Gibson, Candidate for Saline County Tax Collector

“I’ve enjoyed every minute of being on the Quorum Court and enjoyed every minute of the campaign, meeting everybody and being involved.”

“When I am elected, I won’t take this for granted. This is something I have worked for my whole entire life. Being an elected official is not easy. You’ve got people from your own party who will go against you, simply because you are willing to stand up for what’s right.”

He said people told him Saline County would not be pro-life and they proved them wrong.

“As your Tax Collector, I want to be able to put your guys first and take care of the people who put me in that position.”

What is a major challenge of the office you seek and how would you address it?

“Making sure we tell you where your tax dollars are going. If we give X amount to school A, I want that school to be able to tell me exactly much they spend on the band, academics, and football. It is important. You don’t want 80% going to one thing and then 20% is dispersed for the rest of the school. That’s unfair.”

He wants to treat the taxpayers and also the workers in the office like family. He wants an office environment that people want to work in. This will help with employee retention.

What separates you from your primary opponent?

“What separates me is my involvement in not just being an elected official but for six years I have been a part of the Republican Party. It’s simple. I’ve been committed for five years. This is something I love

doing and God always puts a burden on me to serve people. He gave me a servant's heart and I intend to make sure that I take advantage of that. I've heard, 'we need a new generation of Christians and conservatives rising up.' That's me. I'm here."

It's more important to me that I make sure you know I am working for you than anything else...If you want to know one thing about Davie Gibson, I will always put the people of this County, who put me in that position, first. If you need me, my door is open. I'll give you my phone number."

"I would ask that you vote for me. More importantly, I ask that you pray before you vote. Small decision. Big decision. Just pray."

J. P. Keith Keck thanked Governmental Affairs Committee Members Sam Sacco, Steve Rittenmeyer, and David Childs who put together the Forum.

Cheryl Dowden, Hot Springs Village Gazette, April 3, 2022

Photography by Joe Dowden

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