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Senate candidate Bill Hagerty addresses Republicans at Lincoln Day Dinner



U.S. Senate candidate Bill Hagerty and State House District 13 candidate Elaine Davis stand for a picture for The Focus at the annual Lincoln Day dinner last Monday evening.

By Ken Lay

United States Senate candidate Bill Hagerty is on the campaign trail as the 2020 election cycle enters its home stretch.

The former ambassador to Japan was in Knoxville early last week and was the keynote speaker at the Knox County Republican Party's Lincoln Day Dinner on Monday, Oct. 12 at the Rothchild Catering and Conference Center.

Hagerty addressed the importance of the upcoming election two days before early voting began in Tennessee.

"We need to take away the Democrats' biggest argument and that's that the president didn't win the popular vote," Hagerty said. "So, I encourage you to get out and vote."

"If the Democrats win, they will stack the (Supreme) Court with judges. They wanted to go from nine to 14 judges and they

will nominate activist judges who will legislate from the bench with no accountability to us. They've even talked about eliminating the Electoral College, meaning that states like New York and California will determine who becomes president. They've started a movement to make the District of Columbia a State and they'll probably make Puerto Rico a state. You know what that means, more Democrat senators."

Hagerty addressed issues such as standing with the military and the police.

"When I'm elected I will stand behind our military and I'll stand behind law enforcement," Hagerty said. "If you don't stand behind your law enforcement officers, you'll have chaos, burning and looting."

He also promised to help President Donald Trump revitalize the

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COVID-19 mandates may get more restrictive

By Mike Steely
Senior Writer
steelym@knoxfocus.com

The Knox County Board of Health met following a two week break and one member said he was shocked at the increase in coronavirus cases. The board also discussed the two resolutions before the Knox County Commission involving public board meetings, public forums and the creation of a separate body to deal with emergency health events.

Dr. James Shamiyeh told fellow board members that the growing number of hospital admissions in the region is concerning. He said the current increase is the sign of a coming surge of COVID-19 cases. Health Department Director Dr. Martha Buchanan reported the number of new cases is up and hospital capacity is in the "cautious" level in an upward trend.

"I was surprised how the situation changed since we met two weeks ago. We could walk into a big surprise, a data and case county shift. We're entering a new phase," Shamiyeh said.

If the increase continued Shamiyeh said, "We may not be able to supply all the regular services. If you need medical care we come to the hospital. We're watching the growth closely."

The board's almost three hour meeting saw three citizens speak in public forum during the virtual gathering, two very critical of the board's policies.

The Board of Health members discussed changing the metrics used in determining their actions, raising the percentage of cases prior to setting regulations. It may now look at a 5% positive or less rate before easing restrictions or 10% before increasing restrictions. They discussed possible new safety restrictions should the expected surge continue.

Requiring the wearing of masks inside public and private has no expiration date and continues to be mandated. The board voted to continue for two weeks, until their next meeting, the 11 p.m. curfew of bars and restaurants with alcohol service. Also continued for two weeks is the 25% customer capacity at bars.

Dr. Buchanan reported 12 complaints about curfew violations and said that one business continues to violate the regulations. She also said that

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Two Jacobs officials on paid leave in theft investigation

By Mike Steely
Senior Writer
steelym@knoxfocus.com

Knox County Mayor Glenn Jacobs confirmed last week that two top employees have been placed on paid leave during an investigation into their activities.

Chief of Staff Bryan Hair and Parks and Recreation Senior Director Paul White are the subjects of an inquiry being conducted by auditors Pugh CPA in an investigation that could stretch over a few weeks. Charges apparently involve something to do with expenditures involving golf carts and shoes according to a reliable source.

One Jacobs associate confirmed the charge of theft is involved. It is likely the investigation will see the termination of White but the future of Hair is

uncertain. Finance Director Chris Caldwell reportedly is contacting the state comptroller to help in the investigation.

Jacobs announced both men being placed on paid "administrative leave" last Tuesday after he said he was informed of potential wrongdoing. Hair, a long time associate of White when they were both executives with the Tennessee State Bank, replied, "I appreciate the mayor launching this investigation and I will fully cooperate. I'm looking forward to getting back to work."

Caldwell and Dwight Van de Vate, director of Community Development, are filing in for the two suspended employees. Hair was active in the Jacobs campaign and served as the transition director before being appointed chief of staff.

Employees within the county mayor's office have been instructed not to talk about the possible charges until the investigation is completed. Jacobs is promising a full release of details and possible charges.

On Thursday Hair released the following statement:

"Towards the end of May, my wife broke her foot and I reached out to Parks & Rec to see if they had a cart I could borrow that was not being used. I was aware they had recently purchased carts for both Recreation and to use at the Festival of Lights to allow constituents that were unable to walk the paths, the ability to ride. I was told that they were not being used at the time since recreation was shut down due to Covid so I borrowed the cart and used it through the

summer until her foot healed and then returned it to Parks & Rec. This was not only a mistake on my part, but a lapse in judgment. It was not wise for me to borrow something that belongs to the citizens of Knox County, and for that, I'm deeply sorry."

Rumors about the misuse of county credit cards and the former Hospitality Fund were dismissed by off-the-record comments although a charge of potential theft is definitely involved. Initial public information on the suspensions was released by the Jacobs Communication Department's Abbey Harris and Mike Donlin.

"All County officials found to have acted inappropriately should be held accountable. There's nothing more important

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Troy Jones challenges Sam McKenzie for Staples House seat

By Mike Steely
Senior Writer
steelym@knoxfocus.com

You might think that former Commissioner Sam McKenzie, husband of Knoxville Vice Mayor Gwen McKenzie, has a walk in the park for election to replace Rick Staples as the District 15 Tennessee Representative.

But McKenzie is not unopposed in the November 3rd General Election.

Independent candidate Troy Jones, a Knoxville attorney, stands in his way. You may think that the heavily Democratic area would automatically go for McKenzie but

Jones is echoing many of the Democratic Party positions. His platform includes his support for automatic voter registration, raising teacher pay, repealing vouchers, enacting a Green New Deal climate change policy, expanding Medicare, fighting against anti-LGBTQIA policies, care for veterans, and redirecting fossil fuel funds to renewable energy and conservation.

The Focus talked with Jones and asked several questions. Here are his replies.

Tell me a bit about you and your family. Are you a Knox County native?

I am a Knoxville native. I

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Independent Troy Jones is opposing Democrat Sam McKenzie for District 15's state House seat. Jones, a Knoxville attorney, has a progressive platform that may appeal to some of the heavily Democratic district voters.

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