

Polk County Candidate Forum

Thank you for your interest in the Polk County Candidate Forum. Due to time constraints, not all questions were able to be asked to the candidates. Below are the candidates' answers to questions not asked at the Polk County Candidate Forum on May 3, 2018.

Lt. Governor Candidate

Sarah Riggs Amico

What is your assessment of health care in rural Georgia and your plans to improve health care of citizens in rural Georgia?

Rural healthcare in Georgia is in crisis. Rural hospitals in Georgia are going bankrupt and closing - six have closed since 2013 and others could close soon, leaving thousands of Georgians more than fifty miles away from a doctor. We have 60 counties without a pediatrician, and half of our counties don't have a OB/GYN. I believe that every child should have regular access to a pediatrician near their home or school, and that every Mom and Dad should have affordable insurance options to pay for their own family's healthcare. Expanding Medicaid would help shore up the system, bringing billions of federal dollars to the state, and millions to rural healthcare providers.

What are your top three goals if elected?

Expand Medicaid and affordable healthcare in general. By not expanding Medicaid the state of Georgia is refusing federal funds that would help the poor and working class in our state as well as improve our healthcare system.

Fully fund public education including paying teachers what they're worth. Since 2003, Georgia politicians have consistently underfunded education. Every Georgia child should have a quality education regardless of their zip code. That means innovation in our classrooms, rewarding good teachers, and partnering with businesses to increase vocational training in high schools and community colleges.

Help shape Georgia's labor force for the future economy. I know what it takes to grow economically. During my tenure at the company Jack Cooper has grown from 120 employees to over 3000. While our company grew I was able to protect our union workforce and even expand worker benefits, including paying 100% of the healthcare premiums for our workforce and their spouses and family.

What do you believe is the largest issue Georgians face today?

Like many Georgians, I believe that our current hyper-partisan politics are hurting our state. The values that bind us together -- family, faith, love of country, and respect for one another -- have eroded as our leaders spend most of their time fighting each other rather than getting things done. As a Democrat, I'll work with both parties- and with people from any and every background- to run an efficient government that delivers real results for Georgia families. Put people over party and bringing accountability to the statehouse.

Secretary of State Candidate

Buzz Brockway

The integrity of our elections is critical as we face more and more challenges to elections. Is there something more that Georgia could—and should – be doing to increase voter confidence?

Our voting machines are getting old and have reached the end of their life cycle. As I've traveled the state there are some counties that have purchased used voting machines on eBay to scavenge them for parts to keep other machines running. This is not sustainable. Most of the country votes using hand marked paper ballots. I think Georgia should do the same and move to this type of system in time for the 2020 Presidential election. The second thing we must do is begin performing post election audits - quality assurance so to speak, for elections. We can use statistical sampling to check paper ballots to insure that the reported election results are accurate. If we do those two things in a open and transparent manner, we can restore trust in elections.

Absentee ballots pose a very real opportunity for fraud. How can we do a better job of voter ID for absentee ballots?

There are a couple of options we should consider for improving the security of absentee ballots. Some have proposed having an absentee ballot application notarized, but that could involve time and a cost a voter may not be able to afford. Others have proposed requiring the use of photo ID when applying for an absentee ballot. This has promise, but we need to make sure we don't open ourselves up to a legal challenge that imperils our entire photo ID policy. Colorado and Oregon are two states where all votes are cast by mail, similar to our absentee voting system. I want to learn how they secure their ballots and apply those techniques to our absentee voting system.

How can Georgia better verify that charitable organizations are operating for charitable purposes and not taking advantage of the benefits?

There are many outstanding organizations that have developed best practices for charitable organizations. There are also many well respected organizations keeping an eye on charitable organizations, making sure they use the money as they are supposed to. I want to partner with these private organizations to prevent duplication of effort and leverage their expertise with the investigative arm of the Secretary of State's office to protect and inform Georgians. As a conservative, I believe private charity is most effective, and as Secretary of State I would work to insure Georgia's charities are serving the public effectively.

Do you believe that the Secretary of State's office plays a role in the business friendly environment in Georgia, and if so, how can the office help to improve that environment?

The Secretary of State plays a key role in developing a business friendly environment in Georgia. It is crucially important someone starting a business be able to have their corporate paperwork processed timely by the Secretary of State's corporations division. It is also crucial to our economy that people be able to obtain the professional license of their choice speedily. My college degree is in Management Science, where we learned how to make systems more efficient. I did this work for many years in a manufacturing company. I would apply this expertise to the Secretary of State's office so that Georgia is not only considered the best state in America to do business, but also the easiest.

State School Superintendent Candidates

John Barge

Do you feel educators are paid sufficiently?

While Georgia pays better than most Southern states, I do believe there is room for improvement. Georgia's teachers have had only one pay raise of 2% over the last several years. Additionally, due to skyrocketing healthcare costs, teachers are bringing home less pay than previously. It is difficult to recruit and retain quality teachers when they can make significantly more money using their knowledge in other fields.

What should the State Superintendent do to provide an equitable, quality public education for all children pre-k through grade 12?

Through effective policy development and influence of legislation, the State Superintendent should provide an environment in which districts can be successful, teachers can teach unimpeded by worries of high stakes testing and evaluation, and students can safely learn and be prepared for success in life.

Do you think we are putting too much emphasis on new technologies such as iPads?

Not necessarily. Students today are technology natives. It engages them. However, I do think we often make the mistake of believing that technology is a silver bullet and the answer to all of our educational problems. We should not buy technology simply because someone has promised it will raise student achievement. The key to any initiative, including technology, is in the implementation. Have we trained teachers in the proper use of the technology and are we equipped for the maintenance, repair and replacement of that technology?

Do you support an appeals process for TKES?

Absolutely. As a superintendent, I have a hard time justifying assigning a teacher of a non-tested content, like art, music, PE, CTAE or foreign language, a growth score that is based on the average growth in reading and math for the school. I believe there is a way for teachers to look at student work over time and determine whether or not student growth occurred.

Richard Woods

Do you feel educators are paid sufficiently?

While funding has been added in past sessions with the intent for it to go towards teacher raises, our state must make a stronger and more sustained commitment to raising the pay of our educators. If we do not provide dedicated raises for our educators, they will continue to flee our classrooms. They have stayed committed to our kids during our economy's darkest hour. Now it is our turn to show our commitment to them.

Teachers have not seen a significant pay raise in years and had to suffer a reduction in pay through furlough days. Healthcare cost have risen, and the quality has dropped over the past decade as well. Teacher pay is basically capped by year 21.

Thus, I would prefer to see an increase in teacher pay and benefit support and will work to make this a reality.

What should the State Superintendent do to provide an equitable, quality public education for all children pre-k through grade 12?

The most effective step that I have taken is to provide services that benefit all students and school systems. Over the past three years, we have taken steps to reduce mandated testing, provide universal instructional resources, streamlined reporting processes, and increase opportunities like STEM/STEAM, AP, IB, dual enrollment, career tech, ag, fine arts, and world language.

We have also worked to involve business, higher ed, other state agencies, and community partners both locally and statewide. Education is not only a Department of Education issue, it is a Georgia issue. If we do not invest in today, we will subsidize in the future.

Do you think we are putting too much emphasis on new technologies such as iPads?

Technology cannot and should not replace a classroom teacher. It is only a tool. Technology does not build relationships and can be a hinderance to the instruction and learning if misused.

In my 22 years of K-12 experience at the school level, I have not seen new technologies as an issue. The concern has always been in teacher training and support on how to properly use

technology to enhance learning. I have seen technology magically appear in classrooms with no input from teachers or clarity on how it should be used.

Technology can be a great asset in teaching and learning. I do believe it helped to make my classes more relevant and meaningful. It has given students great opportunities to expand learning. The key is having an effective plan and knowing how to use it.

Do you support an appeals process for TKES?

In all honesty, I would like to see both the TKES and LKES process overhauled. For clarification, the LKES process is how education leaders are evaluated; TKES is the teacher evaluation process.

Since taking office, the testing weights were reduced and the mandatory six observations for all teachers has been reduced. Under my opponent, testing weights were more oppressive, and all teachers had to have six mandatory observations. More changes are planned.

I do believe educators should be held accountable, but the system must be fair and the process should not punish or set quotas on success. The process should be one that centers on improving the performance of both our administrators and teachers. It should not be a check-the-box compliant system of accountability but provide real meaning for professional growth.

County Commissioner Candidate – District 1

Jose Iglesias

What are your thoughts of one EMS service versus two for the county?

I've developed inter-governmental relationships with elected officials, at the local, state and federal level, and it's time for someone to run who will believe that greater things are coming. We cannot be complacent anymore, we need to accept that our county is ready for greater things!

When it comes to EMS, why can we have the best of both worlds, and Work Together? I believe inter-governmental agreements are necessary and important, maybe create a joint agreement to provide EMS services that would partner with the Polk County Fire Department (PCFD).

What I would like to see is a plan which would include a partnership agreement between both EMS services and the Polk County Fire Department(PCFD). The plan would include the two EMS services each investing in 2-3 ambulances to be stationed at pre-selected stations in our County in order to have better coverage and response time to benefit the citizens of Polk County.

If we want to evaluate all available options for the citizens of Polk County, we have to ask the two existing EMS services: What is your definition of value? What amount of future EMS service revenues will be considered to be reinvested back into our communities?

I would like for our citizens to get a breakdown and to offer examples of how some of EMS revenues/profits will be retained locally and reinvested in Polk County?

Finally, I would like for either EMS service to provide an itemized list of their current user fees being charged and also offer on having an independent study done on the Economic Impact of having just one EMS service versus having two, and determine which would benefit the Citizens of Polk County.

How do you feel about relocating fire stations?

First, a current inventory assessment of our stations needs to be done. We need to determine which ones need attention as far as repairs or updates, and determine if we currently have funding available through SPLOST to get this done, if not we can start considering pursuing the SAFER grant to help with this.

Second, we need to determine which ones need to be consolidated, by evaluating what the distance in miles should be for coverage by each one in order to service our citizens properly. In other words how far they need to be from each other, my approach would be visiting some of the stations by determining what needs to be renovated and what needs to be relocated.

Third, we need to work together with our Fire Department and the volunteers and get their input on how they feel on relocating fire stations? Which ones they feel need to be consolidated to serve more efficiently?

Should we continue to buy fire equipment using SPLOST or what other revenue source would you prefer?

If the only current available funding to buy fire equipment now is by using SPLOST, then we should continue making sure that our Fire Department has the proper equipment that meets compliance with guidelines pertaining to Firefighter Prevention and Safety. Our citizens and existing industries need reassurance that we have the necessary resources and tools available for the Fire Department to fulfill their responsibilities.

My personal plan with this, is that we should not be dependent on using SPLOST as the only revenue source to buy fire equipment, there are specific Grants to assist help Fire Departments with staffing and equipment. One Grant in particular is the SAFER GRANT.

It is important for us to consider pursuing “Other sources of revenue, such as Grants” that are out there at the Federal level, and we need to make sure that our people are aware and informed here at the local level.

You can click the following link:

<https://www.everycrsreport.com/reports/IN10836.html>

Or read here what the previous link partly contains:

“Under current law ([15 U.S.C. 2229\(r\)](#) and [15 U.S.C. 2229a\(k\)](#)), sunset provisions for the [Assistance to Firefighters Grant](#)(AFG) and the [Staffing for Adequate Fire and Emergency Response](#) (SAFER) programs will go into effect on January 2, 2018, unless the 115th Congress enacts AFG and SAFER reauthorization legislation. On August 2, 2017, the Senate passed the AFG and SAFER Program Reauthorization Act of 2017 ([S. 829](#)) by unanimous consent. [S. 829](#) would repeal the sunset provisions for AFG and SAFER, as well as reauthorize appropriations for both programs through FY2023. The House has not passed AFG and SAFER reauthorization legislation. On September 28, 2017, [H.R. 3881](#), the AFG and SAFER Program Reauthorization Act of 2017, was introduced and referred to the House Committee on Science, Space, and Technology. [H.R. 3881](#) is identical to the Senate-passed [S. 829](#).”

AFG and SAFER Basics

“The AFG and SAFER grant programs are structural firefighter assistance grant programs housed in the Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) in the Department of Homeland Security (DHS). Both competitive grant programs provide direct funding primarily to local fire departments. AFG includes funding for firefighting equipment, protective gear, emergency vehicles, and training. Additionally, AFG grants support Emergency Medical Services (EMS) training, equipment, and vehicles in fire departments and EMS organizations not affiliated with hospitals. AFG also supports fire prevention projects and firefighter health and safety research and development through the [Firefighter Prevention and Safety](#) (FP&S) grant program. SAFER grants fund firefighter hiring by career and combination fire departments and recruitment and retention by volunteer and combination fire departments.

The [majority of AFG funding](#) goes to rural fire departments, while the [majority of SAFER funding](#) goes to fire departments in urban areas. Dating back to the programs' establishment, Congress has [appropriated](#) a total of \$7.625 billion to AFG (since FY2001), and \$3.5 billion to SAFER (since FY2005). The [FY2017 appropriation](#) was \$345 million to AFG and \$345 million to SAFER.”

Do you feel that Polk County is spending adequately to keep our roads up?

I feel that Polk County is not spending enough to keep our roads up. For example, if our County had 600 miles of roads, and the capability of paving is only 15 miles per year, it would take us 40 years to pave all the roads. It always comes down to the money factor and not having enough for paving roads.

Even, if we had the money, we don't have the manpower to go out and pave it, so we would have to contract it, and if we contract it, we won't get as many miles if we were to do it ourselves. So it's a circle.

Again, we need to go aggressively after grants, and I'm happy to know that this year we received State funding for Cherokee Rd, which our State Representative Trey Kelley put in a lot of effort in making sure Polk County got some money in Grants for paving roads.

Do you feel that the Polk County Animal Control is doing an adequate job? And do you feel that they are adequately staffed and funded?

I feel that the Polk County Animal Control is doing an adequate job with the current staff, every year Department heads have an opportunity to come before the Board of Commissioners to explain their justification for additional manpower, and is up to the Board to approve it, but the bottom line is always making sure that you have adequate funding for that in the County budget.

Do you feel that the past and current policy of Polk County as to funding Recreation by allotting money to the three cities is adequate or should Polk County also be more involved with providing facilities and programs of their own?

Our County has been very consistent with its current policy to funding Recreation through the cities. In 2015, the County allocated a total of \$200,500. In 2016, a total of \$205,000. In 2017, a total of \$205,000.00. In 2018, \$205,500.00. IN FY 2016-2014 SPLOST: TOTAL \$575,000.

For itemized details, you can Contact our County Manager or Finance Director in order to get a breakdown of what each of the Cities: Aragon, Rockmart, Cedartown are receiving.

The cities are taking the lead and should continue putting the effort in making more recreation. If there is a way to do a joint recreation effort, then I would love to hear your ideas before May 22, which is election day. Don't forget to vote.

Do you believe the Silver Comet Trail is an asset or a liability? Is it adequately funded and maintained?

I believe is both an asset and a liability. Is an asset, in the fact that it draws visitors and builds up our economy. It's a liability, because we have to maintain it, of course the cities share the burden too.

What will you do to continue to support a vibrant economy for Polk County?

My priority would be to continue in Working Together with lawmakers, elected officials, our education system, Agriculture and existing industries. It is important that we take care of our existing industries who provide jobs currently in Polk County.

Make decisions today, and take the necessary steps to be ready for future economic development opportunities like the expansion of our airport's runway, allowing for the filming industry to come to our county by making sure we have the proper ordinance language in place at the City and County level, creating ideas that benefit our people and our county, being smart about signing contracts or going into an agreement.

We need to make sure that Polk County is positioned properly for the future development economic opportunities.

How will you work to increase jobs for Polk County residents?

Again, taking care of our existing industries and small businesses in order to continue seeing the groundbreaking and continued expansions of businesses like Kimoto and Cedarstream just to name a few.

In building a vibrant local and national economy, would you emphasize reforming tax policies, addressing income inequality or something else?

When it comes to creating a vibrant local economy, we need to make sure that entities that have the opportunity to do business and have presence here in our County that they reinvest some of their profits and or revenues back into our communities by providing jobs to our local citizens.

In order for us to be ready for that, education needs to be addressed and always highlighted, even promoting high school graduation and continuing education for adults is very important in today's economy.

As far as tax policies, income inequality or something else, we need to partner with State and Federal representatives to come up with ideas and solutions that would benefit taxpayers and local municipalities.

The solutions for these would have to be addressed at the State and Federal levels like it was done last year with the Tax Reform signed by our President.

Board of Education Candidates – District 1

Robert Furr Jr.

Do you feel educators are paid sufficiently?

No I do not believe teachers are paid sufficiently for the job they do

Educators have the future of our community, state and nation in their hands; yet disrespectful football players are paid millions of dollars. A first year teacher in Polk County barely makes enough to stay off food stamps. We pay teachers the state base teacher pay and give teachers their part of what social security that would have been taken from their pay. PSD gives the part that PSD would pay to the teachers. We also have the highest paid superintendent in the area, even though one of the past superintendents came close to destroying PSD. With 2 of the highest turn over years in PSD history. PSD even gave this particular superintendent two substantial pay raises in four years. PSD did this while the teachers were on furlough and had not received a pay raise in five years. Teachers should be given substantially more than they are paid, receive better benefits, and be allowed to earn seniority and bidding rights on available positions.

Polk School District must start acting more like a business. **(The Business of Education)**

PSD Must Stop Flying By The Seat of It's Pants!

Thank you

Robert Furr

Candidate Polk School Board District 1

Do you feel Polk County receives its fair share of federal and state DOE funds?

Polk School District received \$4,807,785 in SFDF funding (this is state fiscal stabilization funding). Grants based on FTE P: Title 1 grant \$1,401,531, Special Education Grant \$1,401,531 and yet PSD is considering discontinuing community based instruction. \$115,898 for homeless students, \$45,961 for preschool and \$45,961 for special preschool. I believe that PSD could receive much more state and federal funds if we did a better job of conducting the FTE count. We need someone in the federal funding position who is well trained to write grants. Grants are over and above what trickles down from GDOE and Federal DOE.

Thank you

Robert Furr

Candidate Polk School Board District 1

What are your top three goals if elected?

If I am elected I will attempt to accomplish three important aspects of the business of education at PSD.

1. I will do everything in my power to make sure every dollar that is spent is accounted for. Fiscal policy will be legal, ethical, moral honest, and fair. No more five million dollar short falls that do not get investigated and have not been accounted for.

2. I plan to work with PSD Human Resources and the superintendent to create a merit based employment and promotion process that is legal, ethical, moral, fair, and honest. No more of the common practice of picking who you want and do a few token interviews to cover up the dishonest process.

3. Teachers have too much redundant paperwork. I want to see more planning, more teaching students, and less fluff paperwork. The administration can do paperwork and discipline. Let the teachers do what they do best and that is to teach the students.

Above all I will act Legal, Ethical, Moral, Honest, and Fair

Thank you

Robert Furr

Candidate Polk School Board District 1

Do you support an appeal process for TKES?

I will support any actions that abolish the disaster called teacher keys effectiveness system. TKES is nothing more than government double talk. It is strictly the opinion of the evaluator. Teachers should be allowed to teach to the students. Every student does not learn the same. Every student does not respond the same. Every student does not have the same background. TKES is nothing more than scripted teaching following an outline of task based teaching. Good teachers put their heart into teaching each lesson. Teachers are not robots without feelings and ideas. I support any action that will put an end to TKES.

In closing if elected we will do a better job and it will be legal, ethical, moral, honest, and fair.

Thank you

Robert Furr

Candidate Polk School Board District 1

Britt Madden Jr.

Do you feel educators are paid sufficiently?

It is my belief that educators in Polk County work every day with our most important asset, our kids. The students represent our future and the importance of what the teachers do cannot be underestimated. Based on research from the Georgia Department of Education on 2016 data, the state average salary is \$54,000 and Polk County's average salary is \$56,000. Floyd and other neighboring school systems have average salaries for their teachers at \$57,000. There is no amount of compensation that can match the impact teachers make on a daily basis in children lives. I feel that the compensation is fair but always needs to be competitive with other local, neighboring districts.

Do you feel that Polk County receives our fair share of Federal DOE funding?

No. The State of Georgia Department of Education passes through monies from the federal government used in our local school system. Funding at the state level is based on a formula called QBE (Quality Basic Education) which was enacted in 1985 and is old and antiquated. When written, Georgia looked much different than it does today. The formula limits smaller, rural systems across the state like Polk County. While the formula is not fair, it is what we have until it changes and I will work with the rest of the board to utilize the funding the most efficient way possible to achieve student success.

What are your top three goals if elected?

My goal as a school board member is to serve the residents living within District One. I will do that through approachability, accountability, and transparency. My goal as a school board member is to respect the board as a whole. I understand that in order to tackle issues like school safety, scholastic achievement, and district morale, the board needs to move together as a unified governing body. We do not always have to agree, but disagreements should not end up costing the students. My goal when elected is to do my very best to lay the ground work so that every student in this county – now and in the years to come – will have access to a rewarding and inspiring education. This includes recruiting and retaining the best and brightest educators, improving our facilities, increasing student success, taking a hard look at school safety, and communicating district achievements to the public.

Do you support an appeals process for TKES?

The State of Georgia Department of Education unveiled the TKES system in 2016 as the evaluation process of local educators statewide. While the system is still very new, other than existing local district grievance processes, there is little a teacher can do to dispute a seemingly unfair TKES evaluation. As this state teacher evaluation system matures, I believe and would support peer review or administrator review panels.

Board of Education Candidate – District 4

Vicki Mayes

Do you feel educators are paid sufficiently?

As an educator who worked in a plant before going to college, I have the best paying job of my career. But, knowing what educators have to do during their work hours and after hours at home, I do not feel the pay is what it should be. The only way for an educator to earn more money is to earn another degree. The cost of going back to school prevents many for doing so. Education is the only career where the pay does not equal the counterparts in other fields. Without adequate pay it will continue to harder to attract and keep highly qualified teachers.

Do you feel that Polk County receives our fair share of Federal DOE funding?

I do not feel low socioeconomic areas of Georgia receive the federal funding they need. Part of the funding formula is based on property taxes, and in an economically depressed area it is almost impossible to have the funding of areas such as Metro Atlanta.

What are your top three goals if elected?

The first priority is to build the trust back in Polk School District. The past actions of the previous leadership has impacted this area greatly. All of the stakeholders need to feel the Board and the County office is fully supportive, and will work diligently to ensure the everyone has a seat at the table. Secondly, I want to seek and find ways to enable all of the students, no matter their post school plans are prepared face jobs, military, college, or anyother route they decide to take. And last but not least, I want to make sure we are using our resources wisely to ensure we are fiscally responsible with taxpayer dollars.

Do you support an appeals process for TKES?

I do support an appeals process for TKES! Teachers are help responsible for the education of their students, and that is how it should be. But, when there are circumstances beyond the

control of the classroom teacher there needs to be a way to document this. Such as, problems with sickness, divorce, death, and hunger all impact a child's performance. If the scores fall because of this the teacher has not way of documenting this. Also, there are times when personality conflicts come into play and this can impact a teacher. So yes I do support this.