

NONPARTISAN VOTER GUIDE MISSISSIPPI ELECTIONS 2016

This Nonpartisan Voter Guide was created by students as a class assignment for POL370, Campaigns and Elections. The Mississippi University for Women does not endorse or otherwise support candidates or political parties competing for public office.

You probably know *too* much about Trump and Clinton, but are you ready to vote in the other elections you'll see on the ballot?

The following guide, created by students at “the W,” presents nonpartisan information on the candidates in two local races: District 3’s Mississippi Supreme Court Justice and District 1’s US Representative. Columbus is in both districts.



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MISSISSIPPI SUPREME COURT

DISTRICT 3, PLACE 1

Justice Ann Lamar is retiring from her seat on the Mississippi Supreme Court, and the following four candidates are competing to fill the vacancy.

Judicial elections are nonpartisan by law in Mississippi, which means that no candidate's name will appear with a party label on the ballot. While parties have made endorsements in other Supreme Court elections this year, none of the candidates for District 3 have been endorsed, though all have been invited to speak to local Republican Party chapters.

The Supreme Court of Mississippi is the highest court of appeal in the state, reviewing the decisions of all other Mississippi trial and appellate courts. It also has original jurisdiction over some matters, including constitutional questions, death penalty cases, and elections. Nine justices make up the Court and are elected to serve for eight years at a time.

District three covers, roughly, the northern third of the state and includes the following counties: Bolivar, Claiborne, Copiah, Hinds, Holmes, Humphreys, Issaquena, Jefferson, Kemper, Lauderdale, Leake, Madison, Neshoba, Newton, Noxubee, Rankin, Scott, Sharkey, Sunflower, Warren, Washington, and Yazoo. The district is currently represented on the Court by (retiring) Justice Ann Lamar for Place 1, Justice James Maxwell II for Place 2, and Justice Josiah Coleman for Place 3.

JOHN BRADY

John Brady, a defense lawyer from Columbus, earned his juris doctorate from Mississippi College School of Law in 1994. He and his wife, Jennifer, have two teenage girls, Rachael and Hannah.

According to Brady, he has been endorsed by former Mississippi Governor Haley Barbour, who cited Brady's experience and "commitment to fairness" as reasons for his support. Brady's experience dates back to his time at the Mississippi College Law School, where he led the School Review and was president of the Student Bar Association. He has served on the Mississippi Bar Executive Committee and as Bar Commissioner. He is a past president of the Mississippi Defense Lawyers Association and a member of the Defense Research Institute. As an attorney, Mr. Brady has defended businesses and government entities against lawsuits before the appellate courts, including Mississippi's Supreme Court and the fifth US Circuit Court.

In a press release, Brady said, "We must correctly interpret and apply the laws without attempting to fit laws into a specific case for a specific outcome." He added, "In 2016, we have seen and will see several changes on our Supreme Court. I want to continue the legacy of congeniality and professionalism that has been a hallmark of the Chief Justice's court." He concluded by saying "The Mississippi Supreme Court is the ultimate arbiter of litigated matters in Mississippi. I want to make sure that all parties get a fair and expeditious trial and review by correctly interpreting the Mississippi Constitution and the laws enacted by legislative authority, without infringing upon the legislature's role as lawmakers."

"About John Brady," *John Brady*, 10/24/2016.
<http://www.brady2016.com/about/>

Brady, John. "John Brady for MS Supreme Court." *Facebook*.
<https://www.facebook.com/JohnBradyForSupremeCourt/>

"Brady seeks MS Supreme Court Seat," John Brady Committee Release.
1/25/2016. <http://yallpolitics.com/index.php/yp/post/43104/>

"John Brady," *Ballotpedia*. 10/24/2016.
https://ballotpedia.org/John_Brady

BOBBY CHAMBERLIN

Judge Bobby Chamberlin is an experienced lawyer and former Mississippi Senator. Judge Chamberlin is a life-long resident of north Mississippi. Mr. Chamberlin and his wife, Kim, have one child, William.

Judge Chamberlin is no stranger to the field of law or the courtroom. Mr. Chamberlin earned a law degree from the University of Mississippi. Afterward, he worked for what is now known as the Austin Law Firm in Hernando before founding Chamberlin-Nowak, P.C. He served as Municipal Prosecutor for the City of Horn Lake, as a Special Master in Chancery Court, and—for eight years—as Municipal Court Judge for the City of Hernando. Elected to the Mississippi State Senate in 1999, he served as Vice-Chairman of the Universities and Colleges Committee as well as Chairman of the Elections Committee. Appointed to the Circuit Court by Governor Barbour in 2004, Judge Chamberlin now sits on the 17th Circuit Court District of Mississippi. Judge Chamberlin co-founded the 17th Circuit Court District Drug Court alongside current Supreme Court Justice, Ann Lamar.

When asked about obstacles to justice, Judge Chamberlin emphasized fairness and efficiency. He said everyone, including “people who don’t have the means” should have access to the courts. In our interview, he referred to the MS Supreme Court’s current effort to revise rules as a contribution to criminal justice reform, saying that he thinks the proposed changes will “streamline” justice for all. According to the proposal, the rules are meant “to provide for the just and speedy determination of criminal proceedings, to secure simplicity . . . and fairness . . . [and] to eliminate unjustifiable delay and expense . . .” Judge Chamberlin states “I am running for Mississippi Supreme Court because I believe that everyone, when they step into a courtroom, is entitled to a fair and impartial playing field and should be treated with the respect and dignity that they deserve.”

Bobby Chamberlin. Interview by Subrina Oswald. 11/02/2016.

“Rules for Comment,” State of Mississippi Judiciary, 11/02/2016.
<http://courts.ms.gov/rules/rulesforcomment/rulesforcomment.html>

“Judge Bobby Chamberlin for Mississippi Supreme Court,” Chamberlin for Supreme Court, <http://www.chamberlinforsupremecourt.com/>

STEVE CRAMPTON

Mr. Steve Crampton is a high-profile legal advocate for Christian and conservative values. Having previously lived in Texas and Tennessee, he now resides in Tupelo, Mississippi. He and his wife, Shelley, have seven children. In 2014, they established a private law firm in Tupelo, Crampton Legal Services, specializing in civil rights and other complex litigation.

Mr. Crampton holds leadership posts with Liberty Counsel, the American Family Association, and the Thomas More Society—all Christian legal groups. His expertise is the application of constitutional law in defense of religious expression and pro-life causes. He has worked to persuade courts that school vouchers may be used for Christian school tuition and led legal defenses of prayer in school. When groups challenged Mississippi’s “personhood” initiative, he persuaded the MS Court to let a vote take place. He has presented arguments to judges at each level of the state and federal court systems, including the US Supreme Court.

Mr. Crampton would bring to the bench an expansive interpretation of the right to religious expression, a minimalist interpretation of the establishment clause separating church and state, and a belief in the prerogatives of states to resist federal court rulings. For example, he has defended Alabama’s recently suspended Chief Justice Roy Moore, who instructed marriage clerks to disregard the US Supreme Court decision permitting gay marriage.

Brief for Liberty Council as Amicus Curiae. ACSTO v. Winn
https://www.liberty.edu/media/9980/attachments/Amicus_Brief_AZ_Christian_School_Tuition_080610.pdf

“Local attorney announces run for state Supreme Court,” May 4, 2016. Caleb Bedillion. DailyJournal.com. 10/24/2016. <http://djournal.com/news/local-attorney-announces-run-for-state-supreme-court/>

“Steve Crampton for Supreme Court Justice 2016.” Cramptonforcourt.com. 10/14/2016.

“Steve Crampton,” People for the American Way, 10/24/2016.
<http://www.pfaw.org/category/people/steve-crampton>

JAMES T. 'JIM' KITCHENS JR.

Judge James T. Kitchens, Jr.—not to be confused with sitting Justice James W. Kitchens—lives in Caledonia with his wife, Jo Ann. He is a Circuit Judge for Lowndes County with years of experience in the several layers of Mississippi's legal system.

Before winning election to the Circuit Court in 2002, Judge Kitchens worked as Lowndes County's Assistant District Attorney. In 2007, Judge Kitchens was Vice Chair of a committee formed by the legislature to provide recommendations on improving the Justice Court. In 2008, he joined a commission created by the Mississippi Supreme Court to evaluate model jury instructions and suggest improvements. As far back as 1992, Mr. Kitchens served on a committee of judges and attorneys helping the Mississippi Judicial College revise its Model Jury Instructions to render legal instructions more comprehensible to jurors. One of his earliest experiences with Mississippi's courts was as law clerk for the Chief Justice of the state's Supreme Court.

In our interview, Judge Kitchens emphasized the importance of a fair hearing. He says his is a record of providing “the same amount of care and concern” to every litigant. When asked about obstacles to justice, he cited poverty as a barrier in civil matters and, in criminal cases, the amount of cases that clog the courts and hinder “speedy justice.” Kitchens also spoke about his strategy for hiring his law clerks. His goal would be to recruit a diverse “cross-section” of top-notch law school students who can work well together. He noted that respect and collegiality would be important in his relationships with litigants, clerks, and the other Justices.

“Commissions, Task Forces & Committees,” State of Mississippi Judiciary.<https://courts.ms.gov/commissionsforcescommittees/commissionsforcescommittees.html>. 10/25/2016.

James T. “Jim” Kitchens, Jr. Interview by Toya McQueen. 10/24/2016. Parker, Susan. “Circuit Judge to seek seat,” Feb. 8, 2016. WTVA. http://www.wtva.com/news/Lowndes_County_Circuit_Judge_Jim_Kitchens_to_seek_a_seat_on_the_Mississippi_Supreme_Court_.html

West, 1992. “Introduction,” Mississippi Model Jury Instructions, 3rd edition. Mississippi Judicial College.

US HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES MISSISSIPPI, DISTRICT 1

This election determines who will represent Mississippi's first district in the lower house of the U.S. Congress. Trent Kelly has served in that role for the past year and a half, but three candidates are seeking to replace him.

The former Representative for District 1 was Alan Nunnelee, a Republican from Tupelo. He came into office with the “Republican wave” that swept Democratic incumbents like District 1's Travis Childers out of office in 2010. Nunnelee secured a spot on the powerful House Appropriations Committee, where he was known for his fiscal conservatism and expertise (he had served on the Mississippi Senate's Appropriations Committee for over a decade). In 2014, he was elected to serve a third term despite fighting brain cancer. When he died in office, a special election was held. Trent Kelly won that election and assumed office on June 2, 2015.

Based on its share of the US population, Mississippi sends four Representatives to sit in the 435-member US House. Representatives are elected for two-year terms but can be re-elected as often as voters choose. Currently, District 2 is the only district represented by a member of the Democratic Party. Republicans represent the state in District 1, 3, and 4 and also fill the state's two Senate seats. District 1 encompasses the northeastern fourth of the state, forming a rough triangle with Hernando, Corinth, and Columbus at the points (though it reaches around Starkville to include Louisville).

TRENT KELLY, REPUBLICAN

Congressman Trent Kelly is a Republican incumbent seeking re-election. Mr. Kelly lives in Saltillo with his wife, Sheila, and their three children, John Forrest, Morgan, and Jackson.

Kelly's experience includes 30 years in the Mississippi National Guard as an engineer, deploying as a Major to Iraq in 2005, and deploying as Lieutenant Colonel from 2009-2010. He received two Bronze Stars and numerous other awards for his dedication and service. Kelly, an attorney, also has experience maintaining a private law firm in Saltillo, as well as serving as the Tupelo Prosecutor, Forfeiture Attorney for North Mississippi Narcotics Unit, and District Attorney for the 1st Circuit Judicial District.

Since winning the special election in 2015, Representative Kelly has served on the Agriculture and Small Business committees. In our interview, Kelly stated his newest endeavor, if re-elected, would be serving on the Armed Services Committee in addition to the Agriculture Committee. Kelly's views on National Defense and Veterans, Agriculture, the Economy and Jobs, Energy, Government Reform Healthcare, the Second Amendment, Social Security and Medicare are published on his website. He also publishes a weekly newsletter to keep in touch as well as keep the public informed.

In our interview, Mr. Trent Kelly noted Sonny Montgomery as a political role model because of his "availability," "grassroots," and "friendly attitude." Kelly hopes his service as Congressman and dedication to touching base with the public through town hall, rotary, and other public events will earn him re-election. Kelly stated "we all have dreams; the special election was a larger opportunity to help, fulfilling my dream," explaining that his motivation in running for re-election is rooted in the continuing desire to help and represent the citizens of Mississippi.

"Rep. Trent Kelly," Center for Responsive Politics: Open Secrets, 10/24/2016. <https://www.opensecrets.org/politicians/summary.php?cid=N00037003>

Trent Kelly. <http://trentkelly.house.gov/biography/>

Trent Kelly. Interview by Subrina Oswald. 10/17/2016.

JACOB OWENS, DEMOCRAT

Mr. Jacob Owens, of the Democratic Party, is a resident of Oxford. He graduated from Mississippi State University in 2014 with a Bachelor's Degree in architecture and is presently working at an architecture firm in Tupelo as an intern architect. This is his first time running for political office.

According to the state's Democratic Party Chairman, Owens and other candidates receive little aid from the state party besides lists of potential donors and voters ("Challenger largely absent"). Instead of focusing on raising funds for campaigning, Owens has focused his efforts on voter registration, education about voter ID laws, and turnout.

During our interview, Mr. Owens argued that his experience prepares him to meet the challenges of governance by involving constituents and taking advantage of their expertise in different areas of policy. Citing his work at JBHM Architecture, he noted, "When a client wants something out of the ordinary, I have to get on the phone . . . [and] meet with as many people as possible . . . to understand what the client needs and how I can achieve that . . . on time and on budget." He went on to mention Republican Justin Amash as a model for "reaching out" to constituents.

In fact, Mr. Owens adopted many center-left positions, blending lines typical of both the Republican and Democratic parties. For example, Mr. Owens thinks minimum wage is too low but supports comprehensive welfare reform aimed at stopping abuse of the system and getting folks back to work. He said that regulations need a close review because of the effects they have on new or small businesses. He also wants to focus on the "crumbling roads and bridges that need national attention." The reason for Mr. Owens' attachment to the Democratic label appears to be the Party's general commitment to social change and policy reform that benefits people who have traditionally been left out. In this vein, Mr. Owens said he hopes to prioritize the future and address poverty.

Bedillion, Caleb. "Challenger in 1st District Congress race largely absent from campaign," Daily Journal. <http://djournal.com/news/challenger-1st-district-congressional-race-largely-absent-campaign/>

Jacob Owens. Interview by Toya McQueen. 10/03/2016.

CATHY L. TOOLE, REFORM

Ms. Cathy L. Toole, of the Reform Party, is a resident of Biloxi. Her interest in agricultural policy is evident from past candidacies for Mississippi Commissioner of Agriculture and Commerce, though she won neither race.

Little information about Ms. Toole's policy positions is publicly available, and we were unable to reach her for comment. Research into news coverage of events attended by her competitors in past races turned up no information on Ms. Toole. Voters may wish to view a 2011 candidate forum held by Mississippi State University Extension, to which Ms. Toole was invited as a candidate for Agricultural Commissioner. The url for the online video has been provided below.

Nationally, the Reform party favors fiscal conservatism and increased accountability for abuses of government power. It is hard to know the extent to which Ms. Toole agrees with the positions of her party's national organization. The only readily available public records indicate that she does have personal experience attempting to hold the federal government accountable for its commitments to individual citizens. Ms. Toole has repeatedly filed suit against the US Department of Veterans Affairs seeking compensation related to her husband's death. She claims that his death in 1997 was related to a 1958 basic training accident from his service in the US Army, when he was hit in the head by a rifle.

"Commissioner Candidate Forum," 2011. MSU Extension, 09/08/2016. <http://msite.ext.msstate.edu/Mediasite/Play/e4cf1c8fb85b4477b52ae2c8a626e74f>

"Mississippi Commissioner of Agriculture election, 2015," Ballotpedia, 09/08/2016. https://ballotpedia.org/Mississippi_Commissioner_of_Agriculture_election

"Platform." Reform Party National Committee, 09/20/2016. <http://www.reformparty.org/platform/>

Toole, Cathy L. v. Eric K. Shinseki, Secretary of Veterans Affairs. 2010. United States Court of Appeals for the Federal Circuit.

CHASE WILSON, LIBERTARIAN

Mr. Chase F. Wilson, originally from Olive Branch, is a physics graduate student at the University of Southern Mississippi. According to his campaign website he wants to "restore liberty to the American people" and "use common sense to solve present and future problems."

This is Wilson's first time running for public office; however, he serves as the President of a student organization at the University of Southern Mississippi, Young Americans for Liberty.

We were unable to reach Mr. Wilson for this guide, but he has taken many public positions on his Facebook page. Based on his posts there, Wilson wants to gradually phase out the Department of Education and use the money for "tax savings, better paid teachers, and adequately funded schools." He also wants to restore an expansive application of the second amendment and believes that people should own guns without permission from the government. He is against "stop and frisk [policing tactics], infringement of gun rights, increasing taxes, an unbalanced budget, safe spaces, warrantless searches and seizures, infringement of free speech, crony capitalism, over-incarceration, or systematic racism." Finally, he has stated that he wants to end the war on drugs. He adopts the position of the Libertarian party that the war on drugs is overpopulating our prisons and thinks that people have the right to grow, produce, and buy recreational drugs like marijuana.

"Chapters," Young Americans for Liberty, 10/24/2016. <http://www.yaliberty.org/chapters/university-of-southern-mississippi-hattiesburg>

"Libertarian party platform," Libertarian Party of Mississippi, 10/24/2016. <http://mslp.org/our-party/platform/>

Wilson, Chase. "Home," Chase Wilson for US House of Representatives, 10/24/2016. <https://electchase.com/2016/03/07/brief/>

Wilson, Chase. "Chase Wilson for US Congress," Facebook, 10/24/2016. <https://www.facebook.com/Chase-F-Wilson-for-US-Congress-1637509479802990/?fref=nf>

ABOUT THE RESEARCH

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This guide was produced by MUW students as part of an assignment in an upper-level political science course, “Campaigns and Elections.” Together, students worked to create interview scripts for both races and to research the offices being contested. Individually, students researched candidate biographies, qualifications and issue positions. They were also responsible for contacting candidates to request interviews, and three interviews conducted by two students were ultimately used to inform this guide. Students collected more information than could be printed here, so they had to decide what about the candidates would be most useful to include. After individual students submitted summaries of their research, the class collectively revised each candidate profile to ensure neutral language and balanced coverage. The students are proud to present the fruit of their labors, this guide, which we hope will help voters make an informed decision in two important local elections.