

DA Candidates Get 'Direct' in Watauga Forum

Written by Steve Frank
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Candidates got right to the point in a forum last night at the Watauga County courthouse, the very setting in which the trio of District Attorney Candidates would like to function. Burnsville attorney Seth Banks, Watauga Commission Chairman Nathan Miller, and Chief ADA Britt Springer—the three Republicans seeking the nomination—took on a number of court issues, with the form and function of the DA's Office at the front in a number of interactions during the forum, issues such as deferments of prosecution; Seth Banks said, "Under the current administration, there are regularly cases deferred that are domestic violence cases." Banks said, "I think that's a recipe for disaster," and "These types of cases are not ones that we should be giving deferrals grants—we either win them or lose them on the merits, and then, if we win them, we can impose real consequences like supervised probation or prison." On deferment, Nathan Miller said, "But there were two—one for armed robbery down here at the West End Pantry and another for an armed or attempted armed robbery at Lowes Foods. Now, the case was good enough that the DA's office brought it before the Grand Jury and got an indictment." And he said, "Then they deferred it. Now what that means is that person did some community service, did a little supervised probation. Then the case was dismissed. They put those clerks in fear for their lives. That's not right." And chief ADA Britt Springer responded, "These breaks that Mr. Miller's talking about—guess what—we're calling the calendar, we're ready to proceed, (then) all the defense attorneys will say 'hold the case open, I need to talk to my client.' So this happens regularly that we can't try a case because the defense attorneys are outside talking to their clients that they haven't talked to yet. So, in my administration, what's going to happen is we're just going to start calling the trials, and then at that point hopefully the defense attorneys will fall in line and be ready before court." The candidates forum was sponsored by the Watauga Domestic Abuse Response Team / Sexual Abuse Response Team and local Bar Association. The May primary will most likely determine the next DA as there are no Democrats on the ballot in the fall, and that primary is a week from today, but voters have been casting their ballots in early voting since last Thursday, and will be able to until Saturday at 1. The job opened when former DA Jerry Wilson announced that he would retire at the end of the year, then quickly retired a month ago due to health reasons.