

# Conservative Alliance Reporting & Vetting

Pickens County Commissioner Primary Race - May 24th



## ★ West- Post/District 1 (Replacing Jerry Barnes)

- ★ Rick Tucker New comer 30 year Pickens resident
    - <https://www.facebook.com/profile.php?id=100079851496552>
    - <https://www.facebook.com/100071791420411/videos/230201739302292>  
Interview with Jasper Ga, News
  - ★ Josh Tippens Former Board of Elections Chair - resigned to run for commissioner. Grew up in Pickens Co.
    - <https://www.facebook.com/josh.tippens>
    - <https://www.facebook.com/TippensForPickens/>
    - <https://www.facebook.com/100071791420411/videos/1112085126302196>  
interview from Jasper Ga, News
  - ★ David Shouse moved to the area at age of 12 Ran for Pickens county Chair against Kris Stancil in 2020.
    - <https://www.facebook.com/profile.php?id=100001570738817>
    - <https://www.facebook.com/100071791420411/videos/577673950443007>  
interview with JasperNews
  - ★ Robert Watson New Comer & 7 year resident of Pickens. Wants to help with growth and prevent becoming a Cherokee Co. Could not locate FB pages or interview only Debate is available for review.
  - ★ Brian Cleghorn- 23 year resident. Currently serves on Pickens County Recreation Board Know as a "vocal and colorful personality" (Pickens Progress, May 6, 2022)
    - <https://www.facebook.com/100071791420411/videos/1280768655665370>  
interview with Jasper, GA news
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## East - Post/District 2 replacing Becky Denny who resigned last year

- ★ David Garner - Local television personality but new comer to local politics. 20 years here. Involved in multiple civic organizations.
  - <https://www.facebook.com/DaveGarner2022>
  - <https://www.facebook.com/100071791420411/videos/494579512386643>  
interview with Jasper Ga News
- ★ Josh Tatum- Works for Landscape business newcomer to politics. Grew up in Pickens Co.
  - <https://www.facebook.com/profile.php?id=100079230529641>
  - <https://www.facebook.com/100071791420411/videos/1269106973497510>  
interview with Jasper GA News

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### Purpose:

To inform fellow citizens on the good character, virtues, and national and state constitutional conservative policy platforms and performance records of candidates running for local, regional, state and national offices

Below are links to policy that would govern commissioner decisions some may be outdated but will link you to updated sites.

[https://ballotpedia.org/Pickens\\_County,\\_Georgia](https://ballotpedia.org/Pickens_County,_Georgia)

[https://ballotpedia.org/Georgia\\_state\\_budget\\_and\\_finances](https://ballotpedia.org/Georgia_state_budget_and_finances)

[https://ballotpedia.org/Energy\\_policy\\_in\\_Georgia,\\_2008-2017](https://ballotpedia.org/Energy_policy_in_Georgia,_2008-2017)

[https://ballotpedia.org/Environmental\\_policy\\_in\\_Georgia](https://ballotpedia.org/Environmental_policy_in_Georgia)

**Commissioner Debate held April 20, 2022 Link is below**


 **Pickens County Commissioner Debate 2022**

### Other Documents of Interest

- **Comprehensive County Plans page with historic use and maps**
- <https://pickenscountyga.gov/comprehensive-plans/>
- <https://pickenscountyga.gov/wp-content/uploads/2018/05/2018PlanningDevelopmentComprehensivePlanDraft.jpg>

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- **Pickens County 2021-2022 Budget**
  - <https://pickenscountygga.gov/wp-content/uploads/2021/12/2022-Approved-General-Budget.pdf>

## Vetting

on the issues identified through debate and other public interviews based on public Q&A and available voting and service record. Issues Ranked by importance with sub issues highlighted for clarity on candidates standing on each. We will Rank each by assignment of flags showing strength of standing on the issue 1-5 flags 

**~Pickens County Priorities and Issues- We have 3 county commissioners if there is a split the chair will decide.**

### 1. Growth Management East and West

#### Infrastructure

Water Long term plan 15-20 year plan

Roads

515 - 15 miles through Pickens county 13 is in the city of Jasper.

#### Operations Cost Management

14 County departments /employees retention/ Job satisfaction

### 2. Economic Development

Revenue without Population increase- Principle to maintain rural nature of Pickens county

Tourism vs. Non-tourism

Eco /farm/traditional

Parks and Recreation

Secondary needs resulting increased Education needs Other infrastructure

EMS/Hospital/law enforcement

Commercial development-Zoning already exists

Further ordinances /aesthetics/setbacks/ building code

### 3. Parks and Recreation

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West End /East End

Dual Use /Water source/Revenue source

#### 4. Service Vulnerable populations

Animal

People

#### Debate start

#### 1A The Role of the County Commissioner as codified in County code

[https://library.municode.com/ga/pickens\\_county/codes/code\\_of\\_ordinances?nodeId=PTIRELA\\_ARTIBOCO](https://library.municode.com/ga/pickens_county/codes/code_of_ordinances?nodeId=PTIRELA_ARTIBOCO)

The above link is to the Pickens County code highlighting the role of the County commissioner responsibility **Section 1:11 Powers and Duties**. The flags have been assigned according to the candidate's ability to reflect the execution of the role related to the issues of importance to Pickentonian's. Some quotes are provided from the debate or Jasper News interview links are above next to the candidate name. Otherwise paraphrasing is provided that incorporates philosophical concerns also reflective of Pickentonian's priorities.

#### Debate start-Moderators

#### Chris Mora Pickens GOP Chair and Gary Newman Conservative Alliance of North Georgia

#### Q: What is the Role of County Commissioner?

★ RT: 

"Make sure the citizens of the county are represented" Guide sustainable growth providing needed infrastructure support schools, roads, Law enforcement, hospitals, EMS and sustained water source.

★ JTi: 

Believes the commissioner has a large role in developing the budget but the primary role is to "Serve as a system of checks and balances to our commission Chairman." When working with people side by side it can be easy to cave but if the budget doesn't support it we have to acknowledge that and look at a future time to address the need.

★ DS: 

Believes there is misunderstanding on the role of the commissioners. If there is a split decision between East and West the Council Chair will decide. The two most important things the commissioner is responsible for is

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- 1. Protecting the taxpayers wallet
  - 2. Protecting the future of this county while protecting the serenity of the county.
    - Developing infrastructure/services

★ RW: 

"I am here just to represent the citizens and protect them and their interests." Taxes, roads, water or whatever they want."

★ BC:   

The East and West commissioners are there to represent the people. We are not in the Day to day operations but we are planning for today, tomorrow and 20 years down the road. Help to set policy for the benefit of both sides of the county.

★ DG:    

Short answer "Leadership" Well-rounded and common-sense leadership. Understanding that we can't out-grow our infrastructure. We are going to focus a lot on our comprehensive land use plan tonight talking about growth management.

- 14 Departments of county government and all need our due diligence
- "We all talk about the upgrades but we have to find a balance" that's the role of the commissioner to assist the system
- The number one job is to protect the citizens
- Beyond seek out opportunities
- I am running my campaign on being the voice of the people
- I promise I will vote for what the people want not what I want







★ JTa:   

We have final votes on zoning, water expansion. Keeping the zoning in line with how it is set up now so we don't lose the identity of our community. Making sure we stay on top of the water source we are buying the majority of our water. Budgetary responsibility to our parks and airport. Manage the money properly and spend the people's money well.

**Q: How would you engage your constituents if a business wanted to come in they didn't want?**







★ RT:58:10   

- If it is something the citizens don't want I would have no problem voting against it. It would be good to have the citizens and the business discuss the concerns but in the end if the citizens don't want it that's what matters the most.

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- ★ JTi:59:14 
    - I am a really really big advocate for opening lines of communication. He gave an example of a business that wanted to expand with opposition from citizens and at a meeting they were able to negotiate a way forward. As commissioner we represent the citizen's and we have this comprehensive land plan and the land is already zoned. Open lines of communication and you gotta keep the people that elected you at the forefront of what you do.
  - ★ DS:1:00:26 
    - That's almost a political suicide question. So you've got to balance that with aesthetics standards. We have to balance revenue with what is right for the county and community. I have 46 acres next to the airport I didn't sell so it wouldn't become a junkyard. We need to protect personal properties from commercial properties with ordinances for aesthetics and setbacks.
    - Further add on the end industrial, commercial and federal development opportunities in Pickens county.
  - ★ RW:1:02:09 
    - So the short answer is I will do whatever the majority of my citizens want me to do. He then reflected on DS comments using the Highlands in NC as an example of the architectural standards. He seems to be in agreement that we need to keep aesthetics with the certain growth that is coming. He advocates for a building code.
  - ★ BC:1:03:21 
    - "We can't fight the growth" and they are right it's coming. We would have had to stop the hwy back in 1987. We can put ordinances, setbacks in place to take care of the citizens' concerns. Now if the citizens I represent in the West end of the county after I have explained the benefits to them tells me no and we have tried every avenue then it's no.
  - ★ DG: 55:04 
    - I am a good listener and I am all about economic development. If I am in a pocket of residents that are concerned about a business. I am going to listen to those citizens. We have to look at the comprehensive land plan we have until 2028. I am all about smart growth but for me smart is an acronym for slow, managed, appropriate, responsible and targeted. I have no problem voting against that is something we as a commission can legally do
  - ★ JTa: 57:12 
    - If there is a business the people don't want anything we can do such as that Rivian plant at Social circle. Yes I would try to fight that. We want to support small businesses in alignment with the comprehensive plan for proper placement. We want to control commercial growth in the rural part of the county.

**Q: If elected what would you wish to accomplish as Commissioner**

- ★ RT: 1:07:44 

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- I would like to see a recreation center at Roper Park. Built on the West end of the county somewhere. Along with hiking trails and a place where kids can play ball. Would like to see the Forested areas protected. Would also like to make sure economic studies are done before subdivisions are added or other businesses are started. If the watershed can handle the increase And how the animal habitat will be affected. Fire departments and Fire ratings insurance increases with new subdivision additions. We also need increased Law enforcement with increased growth you have crime. ( time called)
  - ★ JTi: 1:09:36 
    - There are two things I would want to get started on. Number one Is water. Pickens county is the only county in Georgia that does not have a major waterway or lake running through it. We import our water from Gilmer, Gordon or Cherokee. They are all 10-20 year projects. We have the potential for multiple options but we have to take a step. Number two we need a park on the West end. I Would like to incorporate historical landmarks.
  - ★ DS: 
    - Number one goal is that the citizens would say I served honestly and we are set up financially for our future.
  - ★ RW: 
    - Genuinely want to lower property taxes through tourism through ecotourism. 180 billion dollar industry. They want to leave the city and go to a working farm. By 2027 a 300 billion dollar industry. I just want to generate revenue without generating population. Supportive of Josh Tippens comments we need an independent supply of water.
  - ★ BC:1:14 
    - Grantview watershed project finished almost there. I would like to see a reservoir built that is beneficial for everyone. And I would like to figure out a way that the people working for the county that they are being paid what they are worth without increasing taxes.
  - ★ DG: 
    - I don't want to raise taxes. Growth is coming. I want to look at our water source. County doesn't offer sewage.
  - ★ JTa: 
    - Preserve this lifestyle as a rural community. We are going to have some growth. Encourage large tract homes or family compounds.

**Q: Would you support increasing the number of commissioners to 5? This was not rated deliberately; none is required based on opinion /hypothetical.**

★ RT:

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- Only 3 are needed at the moment. But would support increase if growth continues to divide into 5 areas would make project management easier. Each commissioner would have more time with each citizen.
  - ★ JTi:
    - I don't necessarily think we need 5 commissioners right now. If the need warrants I wouldn't be opposed to it.
  - ★ DS:
    - I don't have a problem with it. I think some people went down to the capital and had it changed to 3. The more the merrier. I think the people would be better served.
  - ★ RW:
    - 12,800 on the west side and 34 k in the county. I think 3 is a good number and I am with David on that.
  - ★ BC
    - Not now and no time in the future. Now as the county grows it will have too.
  - ★ DG
    - Three is a good number. If there is 5 then 2 could potentially pow wow against the others.
  - ★ JTa
    - Three keeps us all honest.


**Rating on the Issues important to voters and the four following criteria; core competence, character, philosophy and electability.**

Core competence represents *skill, training and experience*. *Character* refers to a track record that gives confidence to the voter. *Philosophy* that is reflected in a record that reflects fiscal responsibility and other conservative values. Finally, *electability* having self possessed confidence, perseverance and a sound campaign organization.

**Core Competencies**

**Skills/Experience and training -**

**Q: What specific skills do you possess that would make you an effective commissioner?**

- ★ RT: 30:40 
  - Peer Leader for Blind and visually impaired support group
  - Administrator for Peer support group in North Ga for blind and visually impaired
    - I help people try to achieve their goals
  - I have a business degree from KSU. I know how to work with the numbers and develop a management plan.





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- To control the growth and the future

★ JTi:32:40   



- I have been in leadership or management for the last 10 years.
- Project leadership
- The ability to listen and help find compromise

★ DS: 23:53    



- "I am a deal maker" I have been able to bring deals here no one else has been able to do it's proven
- The VA, dialysis to multiple restaurants.
- That's what I do "I think outside the box." "I can make things happen with the money that I have."
- No matter how much I hear about someone or what they think about me I am always open minded. What is best for the group around me? In this situation that is the people of Pickens county East and West side.

★ RW: 25:18  



- "I am a developer, but not a typical developer."
- "I like to take my stuff and put it into the forest" People come here for that.
- "I grew up in West Cobb Co. I didn't even recognize it when I came back and I don't want that to happen here."
- "I just want to protect this place."
- I wouldn't care if the population never got above 40k but I know there is a way to generate revenue without increasing the population.

★ BG 26:32  

- Ability to talk to people But numbers are what makes everything. "I am a numbers guy."
- Boils down to numbers. "I am not exactly known as a guy with an open mind."
- "Keeping Pickens County Pickens County"
- The people in charge now I have no problem working with . I talk to Chris (Stancil is implied) all the time. At the end of the day my ability to reason with people is what will get it done.

★ DG 29:14  

- "I have the uncanny ability to connect with people"
- Chairman of the Chamber, Has been in Rotary. Now involved in the American Legion and a few others.
- I wanna be the voice and also listen to the people

★ JTa 30:08:  

- "I am a numbers person. I am a buyer for the nursery I work for. "

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- I am pretty good with a small group of people.
  - I am very good at listening to people and helping them out.

**Q:Have you Spoken with Current county Department Heads and what are their concerns (Leadership skill)**

★ RT:  

- I have talked to several. Concerns about the roads and schools and how it can fit into the budget.

★ JTi:   

- Yes, I have spoken to many and Mr. Cleghorn and I must have spoken to the same people because I heard the same things. They want fair compensation for what they do, they care about the community and they want the resources to provide the best services they possibly can.

★ DS:    

- "Same thing." I have met most of the department leaders. I have met 80-90% of the employees over time. They want to be able to provide for their family. They want to protect what they have grown up with here. To do that we have to trim the fat. There were some nice bonuses with Covid. There was a 5% raise but that didn't keep up with inflation. They are 2.2% behind. The only way to supplement that is to bring in other revenue. There are 281 hwy commercial properties on the West end that are undeveloped. So we have to work with the right businesses to get them here. Park and rec are the way to make the revenues in this county work. We also have some deep wells on the east and west ends to address our water problems. (Time called)

★ RW:   

- So I met with City water, county water, recycling, Keep Pickens Beautiful, Parks and Rec. I didn't hear about the hourly rate as much as I heard about the growth and that each department is behind. Each is close to max or at max water and sewage were given as examples.


★ BC:   

- "I've talked to several department heads. I've talked to several county employees." I have spent 4-5 years working in this department. The biggest concern is always project completion. Every single department. Every county employee I know gives 110%. Payscale and money to finish the project.

★ DG:  

- I have had multiple conversations. Parks and the west end. Even though I am on the East end. There are 14 different departments in the county with budget concerns.

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★ JTa: 

- No I have not. I look forward to it if elected. Improve Job sat

### Character ~ Transparency

**Q: What do you understand about the rules of Georgia's Open Meetings Act? In the context of a 3 commissioner county board?**

★ RT 22:53     

- Like everyone said "Basically for transparency."
- Prevent backdoor dealings and underhanded things
- Everything that is discussed is like an open door policy for the citizens

★ JTi: 19:19     

- Essentially to keep the work of the government in the public eye. With the 3 person board we cannot call each other. No back room deals.

★ DS: 19:34     

- "The Rules are in place to promote and protect transparency." To prevent previous events where conversations may have led to the appearance of backdoor dealings.

★ RW: 20:30   

- "To keep transparency to what we see in Washington DC doesn't happen here."

★ BC: 20:38     

- Isn't that what we call Sunshine laws?
- "Keep everything honest"
- "Like David said, stop the backdoor dealings and talk about things when we are supposed to talk about it."

★ DG 21:53    








- "Sunshine laws exist for the sake of transparency, and I think that's what we need."
- We need leadership but we need transparency in government.
- "I like to think I am one of those people who will be transparent. I don't have a lot of deep rooted family connections. I don't own a lot of land in this county." "I don't feel like I am in anyone's pocket"

★ JTa 22:30    

- Not much more to add " Keep us honest."

**Philosophy Management by conservative values including fiscal and others.  
No voting record available on candidates.**

**Q: What would you do to lower Pickens Operating costs and would it be a priority?**

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- ★ RT: 
    - Wouldn't be able to lower the current level of operating costs because we need a finite number of people to run the county. We need a really good management plan and strong workforce to make sure the money is spent in the right place. Growth is kept where the citizens want it.
  - ★ JTi: 
    - None of us have seen that budget. None of us can give an honest answer to that. You can see it online but you can't see the individual expenditures.
  - ★ DS: 
    - I do a lot of open record requests to educate myself. In the last 3 years we have spent 700k on economic development. We have not created one job. You can see every dime that is spent. You just have to ask. We have buildings that are being leased that we are paying for nonprofits. So there is a lot of fat to trim.
  - ★ RW: 
    - I looked at the budgets from Gilmer, Gordon, Cherokee, Pickens and Fannin. Fannin Co had 273 million spent by nonresidents in their county. Fannin County has 25k residents. 65 million for hotel/motel spending. They take 6% of that and give half to the county and half to the chamber. This is how the taxes are lowered for the citizens. I want to get those people to stop driving through Fannin to stop in Pickens. (Time called)
  - ★ BG: 
    - Negotiate the deal on the front end. "Yes, it would be a priority." Have to be working the deal. The cheapest is not always the best deal. Higher people that produce.
  - ★ DG: 
    - Best kind of economic development is pulling people off the highway. There are 15 miles of 515 in Pickens Co. 13 miles are in the city of Jasper. My priority would be collaborating with Jasper. Keep our county rural and preserved.
  - ★ JTa: 
    - To keep our costs down we have to control growth. Expand infrastructure pay for with impact fees. Parks expansion will need more taxes.

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**Q: What is your Position on Cleaning Voter Roles, Conducting Canvases, and Election audits.**

★ RT:  

- Cleaning the roles are proper and legal. Supports picture ID for absentee ballot. Three parties should be represented when the votes are counted. I think Pickens county does a really good job overall.

★ JTi:  

- Cleaning roles is important. We don't need ineligible people voting. As far as audits. There are varying degrees. Essentially getting back to 2020 being stolen on the local level I don't think you have anything to worry about. I am very rarely speechless. But we have a great board of elections to look at that.
- HB 683 5 person BoE

★ DS:  

- I don't think any elected official should be appointing anyone. I don't think it's on the commissioner level but anything we can do to protect the voter.

★ RW:   

- The 2020 election was stolen. Dominion machines need to go away and I would love to go back to paper ballots. I would also like the media to stop reporting on the outcome before it happens. There should be one democrat and one republican to count the votes. Controlled absentee votes.

★ BC: 

- Shouldn't be on there if you have not voted in 5 years. You should have to re-register. I agree with everything Watson said. Early Voting I get behind. The Ballot boxes are a joke. We have got to figure out a way to audit these processes. We have got to get something done so it doesn't happen again.

★ DG:  

- I am not a big fan of machines. I like paper ballots. I support ID provision. I am for auditing. Anything we can do to protect the integrity of an election then we need to do that.

★ JTa: 

- Anything we need to do for transparency. Chairman of the election board, someone with integrity and known in the community.

**Electibility**

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Having self possessed confidence, perseverance and a sound campaign platform and organization.

This was granted on debate and interview review if available Mr. Watson did not have an interview available for additional review.

★ RT: 









- Overall Mr. Tucker has a clear desire to serve Pickens county and will be true to the west constituents he would serve. However, during his explanations there is a tendency to abruptly transition from one issue to another without addressing the details of time and money as additional costs for example with economic studies to projects suggested. This also indicates lack of insight on the nuances of the issues. He understands the larger issues though I am unconvinced of his understanding on a municipal/county level in addressing some of our large esque problems like long term water provision, commercial development with guiding building codes,

★ JTi: 

- Mr. Tippens is polished in his answers and politically astute. His one significant miss was his lack of insight on the budget. What does that show? Maybe he doesn't know he can ask for specifics and compare the published budget available to all? Maybe he didn't want to appear invasive to the county staff? Don't know. He was definitely not prepared and that is significant. He has even positioned himself as the check and balance to the chair himself if needed on staying in budget. Which I found curious. His single focus on the long term issue of Pickens is water. Where Pickentonians may consider water and managed commercial growth equally important.

★ DS: 

- Mr. Souse has significant insight on building and ordinances for the aesthetic integrity of a community, commercial zoning, county resource use, zoning potential on east and west ends and the long term water needs and potential for revenue that brings as well. He wants to set Pickens county's financial future through development of the Parks and recreation though that needs to be brought out in more detail using a future reservoir as a water source and revenue source. Though he is not as polished or politically astute he is more emotive and happily talks with his hands but he says what he means.

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- ★ RW: 
    - Soft spoken single source is debate and he does not develop his message or platform well with details. He mainly offers platitudes which you cannot measure policy. He wants to develop ecotourism in Pickens as a source of revenue.
  - ★ BG:  
    - Comes across as arrogant and paternalistic at times in the way he speaks about the west side constituents and in general. Is not articulate about how to manage issues with policy adjustments just identifies that we need to address them.
  - ★ DG:    
    - He is a bit of a showman. Brings details to his discussions and reflects on the land use plan a great deal as a guiding tool.
  - ★ JTa: 
    - Seems like a nice guy who has a vision for Pickens county to stay rural. Does not articulate details of policy ideas or recommendations well. Does not demonstrate strong leadership traits throughout the debate.

