

Gatekeepers Association Questions

Charles Todd Henderson

Democratic Nominee for Jefferson County District Attorney

1. Why are you pursuing this office?

I decided to pursue the position of District Attorney because there is a real need for criminal justice reform. There are systemic issues that need to be addressed, and I don't see the incumbent engaging the community and seeking to bring about the change we need. It's time for us to address mass incarceration in a meaningful way, and that requires us to have a District Attorney that will be actively involved in our neighborhoods and our educational system as well as working with lawmakers at the local and state level to put in place transformative policy.

2. Who are your five largest contributors?

I have personally been the largest contributor to my own campaign because I believe it is a worthwhile and critically important investment in the future of this county. Aside from that, I've been supported by friends, colleagues, and attorneys. Labor Unions have also given me a great deal of support. I'm proud to say that I have NOT taken campaign contributions from any special interest groups that would seek to influence the way I operate as Jefferson County's next District Attorney. My opponent has received thousands of dollars in contributions from Jefferson County's biggest lobbyists, corporations, and CEOs.

3. What is your judicial philosophy?

My philosophy and approach to the District Attorney's office is centered on criminal justice reform and the belief that every prosecution is an individualized and unique circumstance that should be handled as such. Mitigating factors in people's lives should be considered. I will be firm when it comes to addressing violent crimes in our community so that we get violent offenders off the streets as swiftly as possible. For non-violent offenders, I believe we can really have an impact by creating second chance programs BEFORE these individuals are sent to prison and caught up in the system. It may be possible to allow reverse sentencing in some non-violent cases to allow for probation to be completed up front.

4. What are your three highest priorities?

Our top priority is to protect society and make every effort to see that our neighborhoods are a safe place to live and work. That means getting violent criminals off the street.

Secondly, we must address the drug problems, specifically heroin, that we're seeing in Jefferson County. I believe that mental health issues and drug addiction are medical problems that can't be solved by just sending folks to prison. We need to partner with specialized programs and non-profits to help people get better.

I also think it's a priority to look at long-term solutions to mass incarceration. We need to be reaching out to our young people in schools. Social workers should be available to help students deal with tough circumstances at home, and we have to make sure we're equipping young people with the skills they need to get a job so that they don't turn to a life of crime in effort to survive.

5. Where do you find motivation and inspiration for your job?

I find my motivation from the people in the community that I come into contact with on a daily basis. Over the past few years and through my work with CAC, I've really been able to build relationships with neighborhood officers as well as everyday people who live and work here. These people deserve better and I won't rest as District Attorney until they get it.

I also get inspired by the young men that I coach in football—seeing them work hard towards a goal and being able to shape their lives in some way. My faith is who I am, but my motivation and inspiration to continue this work comes from the individual people that God places in my path every day.

6. Approximately how many cases have you been lead counsel on?

I have represented over 600 clients, some on multiple cases during my years as an attorney. I've done criminal defense work as well as personal injury and domestic relations. In recent years, I've also specialized in working with veterans to help them receive their benefits and handle other legal matters.

7. How would opposing counsel characterize you? How would you describe yourself?

I think that if you were to ask opposing counsel about me, they'd say "he's a good guy." They would say they believe I'm honest, straightforward, and a strong advocate for my clients.

I would say that I'm passionate. I care about the work I do, and I always give my best regardless of my client's ability to pay. I was honored by the State Bar Association with the Pro Bono Award, and I think that says a lot about my dedication to serving people, especially those of us that need help the most.

8. Describe your current family life.

I'm the father of two sons—Jared, age 26, and Nathan, age 25. Jared is in the real estate business, and Nathan is a civil engineer. I worked hard to instill good values in them, and I'm so proud of the men they've become. They've been very involved in my campaign and that's something that has meant a great deal to me.

9. What are some of your community activities?

My community service dates back to when I was 8 years old collecting money on the street for the Sheriff's Department where I grew up. Then I became an Eagle Scout which taught me a lot about volunteerism as a young man. Currently, I sit on the Community Affairs Committee as well as the board of the Village Creek Society. You can find me participating in some type of neighborhood or youth outreach program almost every weekend. I also volunteer in legal clinics that serve homeless and underserved populations.

10. What church do you attend and what is your pastor's name?

I attend Church of the Highlands under the leadership of Pastor Chris Hodges. I'm an active member of the church having been a part of the prison ministry at the church as well as the Dream Team and Prayer Force United.