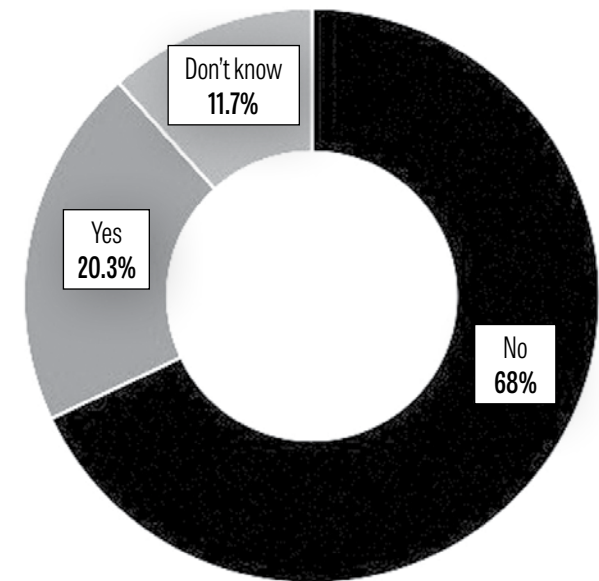


ONLINE POLL:

Nineteen local eateries will offer their take on a state tradition this week. Do you plan to partake in the Kentucky Hot Brown Trail?



This poll reflects the opinions of 128 respondents. Visit www.state-journal.com to take part in today's poll.

EDITORIAL

Race to succeed McConnell heating up in the Bluegrass State

The race for longtime Sen. Mitch McConnell's seat heated up last week when U.S. Rep. Andy Barr, R-KY, added his name — thus choosing to give up his House seat — to what is shaping up to be a competitive Republican primary election ballot next year. Former Kentucky Attorney General Daniel Cameron, who lost to Gov. Andy Beshear in the 2023 governor's race, has already declared his candidacy and has statewide name recognition.

Other GOP candidates who have also submitted their names include Mike Faris, Wende Kennedy and Jacob Trimble. Nate Morris, a Republican businessman, has also expressed strong interest in running as a political outsider, according to the Associated Press. McConnell, who became the longest-serving Senate party leader in history before relinquishing his leadership post at the end of last year, has held his seat for 40 years. He announced in February that he would not seek reelection. Barr, Cameron and Morris are dissociating themselves from the longtime senator and touting their alliance to the president with the hope of landing a coveted endorsement. "It will be a competitive primary," Scott Jennings, a Republican political strategist, explained. "Of course, the 500-pound gorilla is President Donald Trump. If he decides he prefers one of these candidates — or someone else — he can end the primary at a moment's notice by endorsing that person." State Rep. Pamela Stevenson and Jared Randall have filed to run in the Democratic primary. And while Gov. Andy Beshear is not interested in the seat — saying he "wouldn't trade a single day as governor for six years in the Senate" — his senior adviser, Rocky Adkins, a former lawmaker with deep political ties in the Bluegrass State, could be a potential candidate. Regardless of who the candidates are, it is important to note that a Democrat has not won a Senate race in Kentucky since Wendell Ford in 1992. And though it is nice to have a year without any elections, we are carefully watching the race to succeed McConnell in 2026.

THE State Journal

Joe Imel, Publisher
270-783-3273
joe.imal@bgdailynews.com

Chanda Veno, Editor
502-209-6340
chanda.veno@state-journal.com

Hannah Brown, Design Editor
502-209-6339
hannah.brown@state-journal.com

NEWS

Linda Younkin
502-209-6336
linda.younkin@state-journal.com

Phil Case
502-682-5995
phil.case@state-journal.com

Linda Boileau, Editorial Cartoonist
linda.boileau@me.com

ADVERTISING SALES

Meri Latek, Director of Advertising
502-395-3434
meri.latek@state-journal.com

CLASSIFIEDS/LEGAL NOTICES
classifieds@state-journal.com
public.notices@state-journal.com
502-871-4559

MAIN OFFICE

Sheri Bunker, Director of Customer Service
502-209-6305
sheri.bunker@state-journal.com

Jim Wainscott, Bookkeeper
502-209-6301
jim.wainscott@state-journal.com

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Empowerment or exploitation?

Children present at WKU drag show

On April 3, students and locals alike gathered on the campus of Western Kentucky University for the community's 10th annual drag show. Such shows have long garnered controversy, with some states essentially banning them outright. WKU's 10th-anniversary show was no exception, with Kentuckians expressing outrage at the presence of small children at the show. The use of taxpayer dollars to fund such a spectacle only heightened the tension felt across the state. The WKU Talisman called the scene one of "empowerment" but many argue the show is nothing more than exploitation.

One picture in particular drew incredible criticism. In it, a 4-year-old girl was photographed handing a tip to a drag queen known as "Gorgina George." Regardless of how one feels about the appropriateness of drag shows for consenting adults, everyone should agree that the presence and involvement of children in such openly sexualizing displays is indefensible.

WKU's drag show speaks to a larger cultural debate — one that raises uncomfortable but essential questions about parental responsibility, children's rights, and the use of public funds to subsidize adult-themed entertainment.

Even discarding the debate concerning the moral and constitutional legitimacy of drag shows, it is evident to the majority of Kentuckians that children should not be present at such displays. Detractors will argue that parents have a right to do with their children whatever they wish. After all, parental rights are a deeply conservative impulse, right? It is true that parents have the

right to raise their children how they see fit. However, this right is not absolute. The Kentucky Unified Juvenile Code maintains that while parents have the right to raise their children how they see fit, there are limits to this right. The code goes on to denote the "fundamental rights" of children "which must be protected and preserved." These rights include the right to food, shelter, and clothing, as well as the "right to be free from physical, sexual or emotional injury or exploitation."

The practice of grown men, scantily clad in women's clothing, performing in front of children would arguably meet the definition of sexually exploitative and emotionally injurious behavior. The state of Tennessee holds this view, which is why they banned drag performances in public places or in places where the performance "could be viewed by a person who is not an adult."

The bill is by no means prejudiced against the drag community, rather it also bans children from being present at establishments that host a slew of sexualized performances, including "topless dancers, go-go dancers, exotic dancers, strippers, male or female impersonators who provide entertainment that appeals to a prurient interest, or similar entertainers, regardless of whether or not performed for consideration."

Tennessee Attorney General Jonathan Skrmetti stated that while the state "respects the right to free expression... Tennessee's 'harmful to minors' standard is constitutionally sound and Tennessee can absolutely prohibit the exhibition of obscene material to children." Though the bill has been challenged, the 6th U.S. Circuit Court of Appeals

dismissed this challenge when it ruled that an LGBTQ+ theater company's complaint lacked the right to sue over the law. It is clear that the presence of children at these performances is a hot-button issue, which makes WKU's choice to host this show all the more egregious. The idea of a preschooler handing money to an adult performer at a sexualized display that is banned in a neighboring state is appalling. What is even more appalling is that state tax dollars went to fund this spectacle. The show was put on by WKU's Housing and Residence Life, which receives a budget of over \$5 million per year. Using such funds to host this show is simply unacceptable.

Kentuckians must hold our universities accountable for how they spend public monies. Last year, House Bill 402 and Senate Bill 147 were introduced to restrict where these performances can take place. Though the bills had wide support, they ultimately failed that session. In light of the recent controversy at WKU, Kentuckians should pray that such bills will pass in the 2026 session.

One of the performers, "Queen Venus Knight," states that "with the way the world is going, it seems like this might be our last year performing." If that's true, and it means shielding children from adult-themed displays, then let it be their last — and good riddance.

Jacob Ogan is executive assistant at the Commonwealth Policy Center and is pursuing degrees at Boyce College and the Southern Baptist Theological Seminary. Alongside his work at CPC, he serves in the President's Office at Southern Seminary and has previously interned with members of both the U.S. House of Representatives and Senate. He can be emailed at jacob@commonwealthpolicy.org.

LETTERS

EVERYONE HAS A ROLE IN PREVENTING CHILD ABUSE

Dear editor,

April is National Child Abuse Prevention Month — a time to recognize that protecting children is a responsibility we all share. At the Children's Advocacy Center of the Bluegrass, we serve children who have experienced sexual abuse across 17 Central Kentucky counties. Last year alone, we provided trauma-informed services to over 1,000 children and their families — free of charge. Child abuse thrives in silence. Whether you're a teacher, doctor, coach, or

neighbor, you can make a difference. Know the signs. Speak up. Make the report. According to the CDC, 1 in 10 children will experience abuse before age 18, and in 91% of cases, the perpetrator is someone the child knows and trusts. You don't need to be certain — if you suspect abuse, call 1-877-597-2331. Everyone has a role to play in preventing child abuse. This April — and every day — we hope you'll join us in creating a safer, healthier future for children in Central Kentucky.

*Winn Stephens
Executive director, Children's Advocacy Center of the Bluegrass
Lexington*

JEFFERSON'S WORDS RESONATE WITH WRITER

Dear editor,

Oh, that we knew more of our wonderful history and our founders. "Can the liberties of a nation be thought secure when we have removed their only firm basis, a conviction in the minds of the people that these liberties are the gift of God?" — Thomas Jefferson

*Phyllis Vincent
Frankfort*

