

2026 Voter Guide



GEORGIA TRUST FOR LOCAL NEWS ♦ 1

Voting in the Georgia 2026 midterm elections? HERE'S KEY INFORMATION

By Sundi Rose
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Georgia's 2026 general election could be one of the most impactful in the country, so residents need to be sure they understand how to register to vote and where to find their polling place.

Georgia is among the top battleground states in the country this cycle, and the state's results could mean key Senate control.

This year's ballot has an open governor's race, every seat in the Georgia House and Senate, one U.S. Senate seat, and all 14 U.S. House seats.

This means voter turnout in Georgia will be one of the biggest factors in determining some of the most important political decisions in years to come. This also means voters need to know how to register, and where to vote long before the Nov. 3 election.

Here's how to locate your polling place, and what you will need when you get there.

Dates before Nov. 3 Election Day

Aug. 17-Oct. 23: First day and last day to request an

absentee ballot from your county's election office to vote by mail.

Oct. 5: Last day to register to vote.

Oct. 13-30: First day and last day to vote in person during the early/advance period.

Voter registration

Before you can cast

Voting options

Polls are open from 7 a.m. to 7 p.m. on Election Day. If you are in line by 7 p.m. you will be allowed to cast your ballot even if the polls have officially closed.

What to bring

Georgia law requires voters to present a valid photo ID when voting in person. Acceptable forms include:

- Georgia driver's license
- Valid U.S. passport
- Valid government-

issued photo ID

- Free Voter ID Card (voters must apply in person at any county registrar's office or Department of Driver Services Office, free of charge.

Assistance and accessibility

If you need special assistance or have questions about accessibility, contact your county's election office. They can provide information about voter assistance and polling place accessibility.

Remember: Your vote matters. Be informed, be aware and make sure you're following all the rules and regulations

Never voted in Georgia?

What you need
to know before Nov. 3



By Kathryn Crockett
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For someone who has voted in Georgia for years, the process can feel almost automatic. You register. You check your precinct. Maybe you vote early. Maybe you show up at your neighborhood polling place on Election Day.

But for someone doing it for the first time — a teenager who just turned 18, a new Georgia resident, someone who recently became a citizen or simply someone who has never voted before — just figuring out where to start can be surprisingly confusing. There are registration deadlines, absentee ballot deadlines, early voting dates and identification requirements.

Where you can vote depends on when you vote. And registering to vote is not quite the same thing as confirming that your registration actually made it on to the rolls.

The good news is that the basic process is much simpler than all of that makes it sound. If you want to vote in Georgia's Nov. 3 general election, there are three essential steps: register by Oct. 5, check your registration, and decide how you want to vote.

How voting works in Georgia

Voters must be registered by Oct. 5. Georgia does not have same-day voter registration. That makes Monday, Oct. 5, the most important date for anyone who is not already registered to vote. Miss it, and you cannot show up Nov. 3, register at the polling place and cast a regular ballot.

There is no Election Day registration and no provisional ballot that fixes a missed registration deadline in the state of Georgia.

For most people, though, getting registered is free and takes only a few minutes. To

register in Georgia, a voter must be a U.S. citizen, and a legal resident of Georgia and the county where he or she intends to vote. Registration can begin at age 17 1/2, but the voter must be 18 by Election Day to actually cast a ballot. Voters also cannot currently be serving a sentence for a felony conviction or have been declared mentally incompetent by a judge.

If none of those restrictions apply to you, you're ready for the next step. The easiest way to register depends on your ID. If you have a Georgia driver's license or state-issued identification card, the simplest option is usually to register online through the Georgia Secretary of State's voter registration system. The system compares your information with Georgia Department of Driver Services records and uses the signature already on file.

Don't have a Georgia driver's license? You can still register. The state's paper voter registration application allows applicants without a Georgia license or ID to provide the last four digits of their Social Security number instead. The application can be mailed or delivered directly to your county elections office. A mailed application counts if it is postmarked by Oct. 5. But if you find yourself trying to register at the last minute, taking the application directly to your county elections office eliminates the question of whether it received the correct postmark.

You also may have encountered voter registration while getting or renewing a driver's license or state ID at DDS. Georgia driver's license and ID applications include a voter registration section, but checking the registration box does not mean you should simply assume everything went through.

How to confirm you're registered to vote in GA

Georgia has a website called My Voter Page, and if you learn only one election website, make it this one. A few days after registering, look yourself up. My Voter Page can tell you whether your registration is active, where your Election Day polling place is, where you can vote early, what will appear on your sample ballot and the status of an absentee ballot.

Your county should eventually send you a precinct card, but you don't need the card to vote and there is no real

Essential information for voting in Georgia in 2026

By Sundi Rose
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Georgia's Nov. 3 general election is closer than it feels, and the voter registration deadline is Oct. 5. For those who have recently moved to the state, turned 18 or are new to voting can feel like a tricky process.

Here's who is eligible to vote, how to get on the voting rolls, what to bring to the polls and where barriers exist to vote in Georgia.

Who can vote

Georgia's requirements are straightforward but are strict on timing.

Voters must be:

- A U.S. citizen
- A legal resident of Georgia
- At least 17½ to register and 18 to vote.

Voters cannot:

- Be serving a felony sentence
 - Be legally ruled mentally incompetent by a court.
- Voting rights are automatically restored when a full sentence, including parole and probation, is served and no pardon or expungement is required.

How to register

The Georgia Secretary of State's website offers explicit rules on how to register to vote. The cut off date is 29 days before Election Day, Monday, Oct. 3.

- Online through the Secretary of State's portal

- By mail to Secretary of State PO BOX 105325 Atlanta, Georgia 30348-9562
 - In person at your county's election office.
- Check registration status anytime at Georgia's My Voter Page to verify registration and find your polling place.

After you register, the local voting office will send a precinct card, which lets you know how to find your polling place. You don't need to bring this with you. However, if you have misplaced it or haven't received it within three or four weeks of registering, you should contact your county's election office.

You can also find your polling location at the My Voter Page.

What you'll need at the polls

Georgia requires photo ID for in-person and absentee voting. Accepted forms include:

- Georgia driver's license
- U.S. passport
- Government or state employee ID
- Valid tribal photo ID containing a photograph of the voter
- A Georgia Voter Identification Card issued at any county registrar's office or Department of Driver Services
- A student photo ID from a Georgia public college or university (private-college IDs may not qualify).

Voting barriers

See **ESSENTIAL**, 5

Dates to remember

Sept. 19 — Sample ballots become available

At least 45 days prior to Election Day, sample ballots for the General Election will be available for review. You can view your sample ballot by logging into your My Voter Page.

Oct. 5 — Registrars begin mailing absentee ballots

This is the first day county registrars may start mailing out absentee ballots to voters who requested them. This is only the first day. Some registrars may begin mailing out absentee ballots after this date.

Oct. 5 — Voter registration deadline

This is the last day eligible Georgians can register to vote in the General Election.

Oct. 13 - 30 — Early voting

This is the three-week early voting window.

Oct. 23 — Last day to request absentee ballots

This is the last day you can request absentee ballots from your county registrar. Completed and signed absentee ballots must be received by 7 p.m. on Election Day, November 3, 2026.

Nov. 3 — Election Day - General Election

Polling places are open on Election Day from 7 a.m. to 7 p.m. Registered voters may vote in person at their designated polling precinct on Election Day. You can find your precinct on your My Voter Page or by contacting your County Board of Registrar's Office.

Source: georgia.gov/georgia-general-election-2026

See **VOTED**, 5

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Race for GA governor’s office in the national spotlight

By Nathaniel Jordan
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Georgia voters will elect their next governor in the Nov. 3 midterm. Former Atlanta Mayor Keisha Lance Bottoms (D) will run against Jackson Healthcare founder Rick Jackson (R). Former President Joe Biden endorsed Bottoms in May, while Jackson defeated Trump-backed Burt Jones in a narrow primary election.

The two candidates have feuded in recent months. Bottoms confronted Jackson outside an Atlanta hotel over campaign ads that targeted her husband, Home Depot executive Derek Bottoms. Bottoms has also advocated for multiple debates across the state, including in cities like Macon, Savannah and Columbus. Jackson previously pushed for a singular town hall debate.

The race has drawn national attention as well. Democrats came surprisingly close to winning the gubernatorial race in 2018, when Stacey Abrams lost by only 55,000 votes. While Bottoms was easily the most high-profile Democratic candidate in the primary, some in the party have doubts about her ability to defeat Jackson.

Bottoms gained some national notoriety as Atlanta’s mayor years ago, particularly when she spoke out as Atlanta protested following the death of George Floyd. She has faced criticism for her lackluster lone term in that position but is hoping to replicate — and improve upon — Abrams’ success to topple Jackson.

National politics loom large in the race, particularly after a heavyweight battle in the Republican primary between Jackson and former Lieutenant Governor Burt Jones, who dueled for support among Georgia’s Republican politicians as much as its red voter base.

Jackson repeatedly leaned on platforms about harsher immigration policy and anti-abortion laws, aligning with President Donald Trump in that race — he even said he would be Trump’s “favorite governor.” But Jackson has since released a policy agenda that mentions few of those talking points as he no longer contends with Jones.



Keisha L. Bottoms

Keisha L. Bottoms

Bottoms most recently served in the White House as the senior advisor for public engagement to Biden from 2022-2023. Prior to that, she was Atlanta’s mayor from 2018-2022, becoming the city’s first mayor to serve in all three branches of government. Through Bottoms’s tenure, Atlanta experienced a citywide cyberattack, the COVID-19 pandemic and major protests over police brutality and injustice.

“As mayor, I led Atlanta through difficult times, supported small businesses, raised pay for first responders, and expanded affordable housing,” Bottoms said in her May 2025 campaign launch. “I will be a governor for all Georgians.”

The former mayor rose to prominence in a 2020 speech addressing the death of George Floyd and the resulting protests. Bottoms took a stance against police brutality while drawing a line at violent protests that occurred across the country. Soon after, Bottoms was among a list of names that could run as Biden’s Vice President, though his campaign eventually ran with Kamala Harris in August 2020.

Bottoms’s campaign has faced two separate state ethics violations, which called for a \$37,000 fine in 2017 and \$36,000 in 2021. The violations stem from issues with campaign paperwork and donations that exceeded state limits. In late August, Bottoms unveiled an ethics policy that would limit Georgia politicians’ ability to personally profit from their positions.

- Top issues and initiatives:
- Lowering healthcare costs and expanding Medicaid
 - Decreasing the cost of living and expanding government assistance
 - Encouraging government transparency
 - Modernizing state education with an emphasis on financial literacy
 - Helping local farmers reach larger markets
 - Supporting small business owners
 - Increasing law enforcement resources and expanding crime-prevention programs
 - Increasing education spending



Rick Jackson

Rick Jackson

Jackson first entered the political world in the 2010s, when he donated millions of dollars to the Republican National Committee. Jackson’s early ventures largely focused around privatizing Georgia’s foster care system, inspired by his own childhood experience as a foster child in Atlanta.

“Foster parents are true heroes, but most of them don’t have a checkbook big enough to buy influence,” Jackson wrote in a March 2026 Instagram post. “Those are the Georgians I’m fighting for.”

Now a billionaire healthcare executive, Jackson has funneled more than \$100 million into his campaign since it launched in February. His resumé spans across nearly 40 years in the healthcare industry. His most notable venture is the founding of Jackson Healthcare in 2000, which is now valued at more than \$3 billion. Jackson’s campaign portrays him as a political outsider, echoing Trump’s 2016 presidential run.

Jackson came under scrutiny in June after Jackson Healthcare subsidiary Avant Healthcare Professionals settled a lawsuit that alleged the company underdelivered on promises to provide better housing and salaries to more than 5,000 immigrant employees. In the suit, plaintiffs claimed that Avant threatened to report employees to U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement if they resigned. Avant agreed to pay \$3 million days after Jackson received the Republican nomination. Left-wing activists have questioned Jackson’s anti-immigration stance, as he owns companies reliant on migrant workers.

- Top issues and initiatives:
- Lowering private healthcare costs and lowering reliance on Medicaid
 - Cutting property, sales and income taxes
 - Creating local jobs
 - Increasing protections for children across the state
 - Increasing support for local law enforcement agencies
 - Immigration enforcement against criminal illegal immigrants
 - Prohibiting DEI policies



Lydia Powell



Richard Woods

Georgia Superintendent of Schools: Incumbent, challenger both call for cutting back on standardized testing

By Rodney Manley
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The State School Superintendent manages public education in Georgia, serving as chief executive officer of the Georgia Department of Education and as executive officer of the State Board of Education. The superintendent oversees the allocation of state and federal education funds to local school districts, and sets and administers policies for curriculum standards and statewide testing.

Who’s on the 2026 ballot

Republican Richard Woods, the incumbent, taught high school social studies for 14 years and later served in various leadership roles that included principal, pre-K director and curriculum director. He was elected state school superintendent in 2014.

Democrat challenger Lydia Powell, an assistant high school principal, is also a former social studies teacher. In addition to educator and administrator, her roles have included culture and inclusion trainer and cheer and step team coach.

How they got here

Woods held off challenger Fred Longgrear in a tightly contested Republican primary, winning with 51.5% of the vote to Longgrear’s 48.5%.

Powell won three-candidate Democratic primary, narrowly avoiding a runoff with 50.5% of the vote but finished far ahead of second-place vote-getter Anton Anthony, who had 29.8%.

The campaign trail for GA school superintendent

Woods is campaigning on success in increasing school safety budgets, raising graduation rates and eliminating the Common Core standards from school curricula. He also pushed for legislation that gives the state more oversight in local school board finances – a direct response to the Dublin City Schools’ financial crisis.

Powell wants universal access to preschool education, less reliance on standardized testing and stronger student support networks in rural Georgia. She says by strengthening partnerships with social services, Department of Family and Children Services and school resource officers, districts can better address what Powell calls “whole-child needs.”

With national attention on Georgia’s U.S. Senate race, Ossoff and Collins meet

By Micah Johnston
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Georgia’s U.S. Senate race has garnered national attention for its importance to the Senate’s majority this year. Democrats are trying to defend a precious seat won in a state that voted for President Donald Trump in 2024, while Republicans want to pry the seat to pad their lead in the Senate, which they currently have a 53-45 majority in.

Incumbent Jon Ossoff’s seat is one of only two Democratic seats up for election in a state that President Donald Trump won in 2024, and the other — in Michigan — does not feature a Democrat incumbent seeking re-election.

With 35 of the 100 U.S. Senate seats up for election — that includes two special elections — Georgia’s outcome will be crucial on a national scale. Democrats hold 13 of the seats up for election, while Republicans hold 22.

Jon Ossoff

Ossoff has held the office since 2021, when he defeated Republican David Perdue 50.6% to 49.4% in a special elec-



Jon Ossoff

tion. His campaign for re-election has largely hinged on his track record in the Senate since. Ossoff’s campaign website noting his legislation centered on goals like capping the price of insulin, exposing abuse of children in the foster care system and defending women’s reproductive rights.

Ossoff, who was born in Atlanta in 1987, has emphasized reform as a campaign platform to attract progressive voters. He has also supported some bipartisan efforts in the legislature, including a crackdown on fentanyl passing through the U.S. bor-



Mike Collins

der and an expansion of technical training for housing construction in Washington.

The incumbent has faced some scrutiny about a potential run for president in 2028, though Ossoff has repeatedly said he will not run. Collins has criticized the possible 2028 campaign and noted Ossoff’s national pool of donors.

Quick key platforms:

- Accountability and reform of government corruption in the Senate
- Housing affordability
- Civil and human rights

Mike Collins

Collins won a somewhat gruelling Republi-

can primary to earn the chance to face Ossoff, earning 40.5% of the vote in the initial election before defeating former college football coach Derek Dooley in the runoff with 55.5% of the vote.

Collins was born in Jackson, Georgia in 1967 and was elected as the U.S. House representative for District 10 in 2022. His father, Mac Collins, served in the U.S. House for more than a decade.

Collins has noted his loyalty to President Trump and received an endorsement from him, often following his policies, particularly includ-



Josh McLaurin



Greg Dolezal

Georgia’s race for Lieutenant Governor to impact state Senate power structure

By Chelsea Madden
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The lieutenant governor is the second-highest executive position in Georgia and is a four-year term, with no term limits. The position is on the Nov. 3 election ballot. Burt Jones holds the position, but he is not running for lieutenant governor. Instead, he ran for governor but lost the Republican primary to Rick Jackson in a runoff.

The lieutenant governor supports the state by:

- Serving on state boards and commissions
- Maintaining order in the Senate chambers with debates
- Casting tie-breaking votes when the Senate is split
- Acting as the governor if the governor is not able to serve
- Managing bill movements and influencing how legislation flows.

While the lieutenant governor does lead the Senate chamber for the state, the position is significantly impacted by the Republican majority in the Senate. That resulted in Democratic candidates debating who would be best at crossing the aisle during the primaries.

Nonetheless, the power afforded to the position is a significant one, assuming the chamber’s Republican majority does not attempt to alter the guardrails around the position, as the Atlanta Journal-Constitution alluded to in August.

Here’s who is running for Lieutenant Governor of Georgia:

Democratic candidate		Republican candidate	
Josh McLaurin		Greg Dolezal	
State Sen.	Josh McLaurin	State Sen.	Greg Dolezal
	(D-Sandy Springs)	(R-Cumming)	represents District 27,

Springs) is serving his fourth term in the legislature. He graduated from the University of Georgia and is a Yale-educated attorney. McLaurin represents the 14th Senate District, which includes Sandy Springs, Roswell, John’s Creek and Alpharetta. He secured \$1 million in the state budget to help support veterans’ post-traumatic stress.

“I’m not here to do culture war,” McLaurin posted on Facebook in August. “I’m here to focus on what matters. That’s what voters want.”

McLaurin’s main platforms:

- Reinvest in working families
- Stand with workers and strengthen labor
- Increase affordable housing
- Make healthcare more accessible
- Stand for democracy and fundamental rights.

Healthcare emerged as a priority for McLaurin as he sought the Democratic nomination this year. He also focused on repealing Georgia’s six-week abortion ban and trying to put limits on corporate ownership of housing.

To accomplish these goals, McLaurin said, bipartisan work will be crucial. He has touted his ability to work across the aisle.

McLaurin defeated Nabilah Parkes and Richard N. Wright in the Democratic primary this year. McLaurin netted 41.4% of the vote in the first election, then received 54.9% of the vote against Parkes in the subsequent runoff.

which covers most of Forsyth County. He worked for over a decade in ministry and has worked as tour manager for Christian singer Chris Tomlin. Dolezal helped launch the Passion Conferences in Atlanta for Christian college students to gather, sing and worship. He chairs the Georgia Senate Transportation Committee.

“We need a true conservative with backbone that will push back against the radical left and save America,” Dolezal says on his website.

Dolezal’s main platforms:

- Immigration policy/secure borders
- Lower taxes and invest in infrastructure for long-term growth
- Home ownership and property taxes
- Access to quality education for children and parental choice in education
- Pro-life policies to defend life.

Dolezal’s campaign hinges on his allegiance to President Donald Trump. His campaign website says, “Others folded, but Greg Dolezal never flinched,” in regards to other GOP politicians’ loyalty to Trump.

As a result, Dolezal has advocated for many items in the legislature aligning with Trump’s key issues, including more thorough immigration policy and election integrity.

Dolezal beat a field of seven candidates for the Republican nomination, first advancing to the runoff with 23.1% of the vote in May before defeating John F. Kennedy of the Middle Georgia area in the runoff. Kennedy outpolled Dolezal in the initial election but lost in the runoff.

Ga. Secretary of State race features a former TV showrunner and a political veteran

By Nathaniel Jordan
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Georgia will elect a new Secretary of State this year, as incumbent Brad Raffensperger (R) made an unsuccessful run for Governor in the spring. Penny Brown Reynolds (D) and Tim Fleming (R) are the two candidates on this year’s ballots. The Georgia Secretary of State is the official keeper of the Great Seal of Georgia and oversees licensure and registration for nonprofits and businesses. Certain workers also require state licensing, such as nurses, contractors and plumbers. The office also oversees elections, which is a hot topic for this year’s race in the wake of the SAVE America Act, a bill that would add more stringent identification requirements for U.S. voters. Supporters argue the bill will increase election security and limit voter fraud, while opponents say it will limit the ability of American citizens who lack transportation or certain forms of ID. With a high-profile incumbent in Raffensperger out as a candidate, two newcomers — coming from different backgrounds — will face off for the seat.



Penny B. Reynolds

Reynolds served in the state legal system for around a decade, most notably as a judge. She left in 2008 to run the Daytime Emmy-winning show, “Family Court with Judge Penny.” She spent the better part of the 2010s involved in business ventures before returning to her alma mater Georgia State University as a professor. Reynolds joined the Biden administration in 2022, working as the USDA Deputy Assistant Secretary. “The people are owed integrity,” Reynolds said in an August interview with Georgia Conservation Voters. “As a judge, I’m impartial because that’s what it’s supposed to be about — making fair, free elections.” The former judge has spent 2026 campaigning throughout the state with other prominent women of color. Organizations like the Krimson PAC and Georgia Association of Black Women Attorneys endorse Reynolds. Reynolds has said that she will fight for the rights of women and minority groups in the South. Activists and researchers say minorities are disproportionately impacted by restrictions on voter identification. “This is my civil rights moment and this is my moment. And it’s for Georgia, for all of us,” Reynolds said in the August interview. She voiced plans to lead the Secretary of State office like a CEO. Reynolds has led a nonprofit, and said she believes a business mindset could help modernize licensing and



registration procedures.

Top issues and initiatives:

- Expand voter access Restoring public trust in elections
- Remove barriers for local businesses, especially in rural areas
- Install new voting equipment statewide
- Protect seniors from fraud
- Increase data protection



Tim Fleming

Fleming boasts a 24-year long resume in Georgia politics, running on the phrase “Experience Matters.” He’s worked under Governor Brian Kemp in several political campaigns, including an 8-year tenure in the Secretary of State Office as Kemp’s assistant. Before joining the Georgia House of Representatives in 2022, Fleming served as Kemp’s first Chief of Staff. Fleming received an endorsement from President Donald Trump via a post on Truth Social, in which Trump called Fleming a “MAGA Patriot.” “I will be ready to lead — not learn,” Fleming said at a Marietta rally in July. “I also appreciate President Trump’s leadership in championing the SAVE America Act.” Fleming, along with other Republicans, has called for investigation into Georgia’s 2020 election. He said there were “irregularities” in the polling. At the state house, Fleming chaired the Blue-Ribbon Study Committee on Election Procedures. “The legitimacy of our government — local, state and federal — rests squarely on the public’s trust in the electoral process,” Fleming said in July during the committee’s first meeting. Beyond elections, Fleming consistently supported “cutting the red tape.” In other words, he wants to remove unnecessary or complicated restrictions, which would allow more small businesses and local professionals to receive state licensing. “It’s my belief that governments should be there to help our taxpayers, not put up roadblocks,” Fleming said on a podcast in May.

Top issues and initiatives:

- Supporter of the SAVE America Act
- Election security and accessibility
- Streamlining registration and licensing
- Improve the department’s customer service
- Allow Georgians to enter the workforce faster

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New state attorney general to be decided



By Payton Towns III
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The new attorney general for Georgia will either be a current member from the house of representatives or a current member in the Georgia State Senate.

Democrat Tanya Miller, who is a member of Georgia House of Representatives representing District 62, and Republican Brian Strickland, who is representing District 42 in the Georgia State Senate, will be vying for attorney general after Chris Carr did not seek re-election for the position, choosing instead to run for Governor of Georgia, though he was eliminated

in the primary.

The AG advises the governor and other state agencies, boards and commissions. The AG's office can represent state departments in civil court, represent the state in the Supreme Court of the United States and his office can review and prepare state contracts and legal agreements. Across the state, the AG's office can oversee agencies that go up against human trafficking, gang activity and Medicaid fraud. This office also does capital felony appeals before the Supreme Court of the state as well as prosecuting public corruption and illegal acts when it comes to state business.

Miller won by a big margin over Robert Trammell gaining 461,643 votes (84.6 percent) to his 83,983 (15.4 percent) in the Democratic primary on May 19.

Strickland did not have much of a problem either, receiving 366,251 votes (71.9 percent) as his opponent Bill Cowser who received 143,260 (28.1 percent).

Miller has more than two decades of courtroom experience as a prosecutor and assistant district attorney in Fulton County and served as an attorney in the U.S. Department of Justice.

Strickland is an attorney and partner in a local law firm in Atlanta.



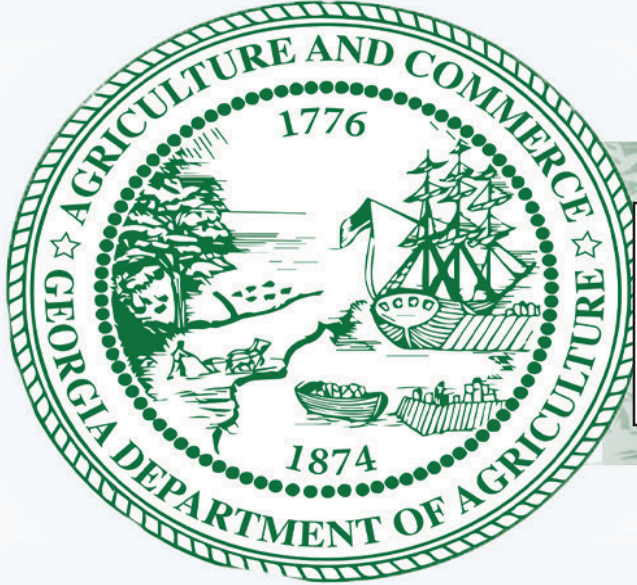
Tanya Miller



Brian Strickland

Miller wants to focus on enforcing the law and supporting law enforcement with training and programs to help solve crimes and prevent them. She wants to focus on programs that will divert nonviolent, first time offenders from the prison system while reducing recidivism and putting formerly incarcerated people on the right path to jobs.

Strickland wants to protect and hold those who have committed crimes accountable for their actions. He said the attorney general should focus on those who commit violent crimes, those running organized criminal networks, gangs, human trafficking, fentanyl distribution, consumer fraud, identity theft, elder abuse and scamming those who are vulnerable.



Incumbent Agriculture Commissioner Faces Democratic Challenger

By Chelsea Madden
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The Agriculture Commissioner seat is open for election on Nov. 3, 2026. The incumbent commissioner, Tyler J. Harper (R), will run against Katherine Juhan-Arnold (D).The Agriculture Commissioner is a four-year executive role for the Georgia Department of Agriculture with no term limit.

The Agriculture Commissioner regulates and supports the state's agriculture industry by monitoring safety in food and agriculture products. The commissioner is also responsible for marketing and promoting Georgia's agriculture while overseeing agricultural programs.



Tyler J. Harper

Tyler J. Harper

Harper is Georgia's 17th Agriculture Commissioner and has served since 2023. He is a 7th-generation farmer and small business owner. He lives in Ocilla and, before becoming commissioner, graduated from the University of Georgia with a bachelor's degree in Agriculture Engineering. He also has an associates degree from the Abraham Baldwin Agricultural College (ABAC). Harper is also a state senator and serves on committees for Natural Resources, Public Safety and Agriculture.

"The challenges facing many Georgia families are not lost on me. I buy my own groceries, I pump my own gas, and I put my boots on one at a time in the morning just like the 400,000 other Georgians who work in our state's #1 industry," Harper's website states.

The website also notes expanding rural broadband access for farmers as

a key goal for Harper. "Georgia's farmers will need critical infrastructure like rural broadband and high-speed connectivity to remain competitive," the website states.

Harper's website does not note his position on data centers.

Issues and initiatives:

- Prioritizing local and family farmers
- Advocating on behalf of Georgia growers and secure trade deals that puts Georgia farmers first
- Strengthening food safety and security programs
- Delivering funding to farmers when disaster strikes
- Investing in the next generation of Georgia farmers

Katherine Juhan-Arnold

Juhan-Arnold grew up in Georgia and is the founder of Baby Katie's Pharm & Kitchen, a nonprofit that connects farmers with markets and families with quality food. Juhan-Arnold holds experience in living through hard times with her family and seeing the true struggle of access to food and market fairness.

"Katherine understands that agriculture isn't just about farmers — it's about families. It's about making sure food is safe, markets are fair, and rural communities have the support they need to thrive," according to Juhan-Arnold's website.

Juhan-Arnold's campaign website notes her apprehension about data centers, a growing hot-button issue in Georgia. She says she will have "Agricultural Resource Impact Screens" for large developments and also keep a close eye on water use in data centers. "We can welcome growth—but it has to respect Georgia's natural resources and the people who depend on them," her website states.

She has a similar stance on cannabis use, saying she will "stay in her lane" but be prepared to enforce clear regulations for marijuana.

Issues and initiatives:

- Strengthening food access
- Protecting consumers
- Supporting farmers
- Maintaining oversight and ensuring market integrity



Katherine Juhan-Arnold



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ing harsh stances on im- migration.

Collins was one of the key supporters of the Laken Riley Act, a law expanding authority for immigration agencies to detain immigrants who are in the country illegally and accused of a crime. The law was named for the UGA student who was murdered while jogging on campus.

Other campaign plat- forms include cutting federal spending and protecting gun rights, according to Collins’ campaign website. Collins has faced scru-

tiny for a number of items, including a scandal involving his former chief of staff, Brandon Phillips, allegedly misus- ing taxpayer money. Col- lins has since attempted to distance himself from Phillips.

Collins has also been criticized for his son-in- law, David Allen Scheer II, having links to Nazi imagery and white na- tionalist beliefs on so- cial media.

Ossoff has publicly at- tacked Collins for both items.

- Quick key platforms:
- Tougher border/im- migration policy
 - Second Amendment rights
 - Cutting federal spending

From 1 ESSENTIAL

You may be excluded from voting in Georgia for a few reasons that quietly keep eligible Georgians off the rolls.

Criminal conviction records.

According to The Sentencing Project, more than 249,000 Georgians are barred from voting due to a felony-level conviction. This exceeds the national average and falls disproportionately on Black resi- dents.

Confusing laws and complicated language make the problems worse. You can vote in Georgia with a conviction record under a few specific circum- stances.

You can vote in Georgia if:

You are not serving a sentence for a felony convic- tion.

You are “off paper” (completed incarceration, pa- role and felony probation).

You are serving a felony First Offender or Condi- tional Discharge sentence and the status has not been revoked.

Your sentence is complete. Your right to vote is automatically restored, and you just need to re-reg- ister

You meet the other requirements for voting and are registered.

If you feel your voting rights have been disenfran- chised

There are several nonpartisan groups that help voters overcome barriers and get to the polls

VoteRiders offers free help getting the ID needed to vote. Call or text 866-432-8683 for free assistance.

Georgia Justice Project helps people confirm sen- tence completion and correct wrongful registration denials, including a Certificate of Sentence Comple- tion request line at 678-783-4337.

League of Women Voters of Georgia runs VOTE411. org, a nonpartisan hub for registration, ID rules and ballot lookup available in English and Spanish.

PBS Learning Media offers online free courses through their Civic Collection.

Vote.Org offers a “Everything you need to know” page for new voters.

Voters who can’t access the necessary items to vote

This barrier is less about whether Georgia legally permits registration and more about whether a per- son can realistically complete the available process.

The National Conference of State Legislatures reports Georgia’s rural population to be approxi- mately 25% of the state’s total number, and it will be hardest for these rural communities to overcome accessibility barriers.

Problems facing voters

Some of the most common problems for voters are practical. Not everyone has reliable internet ac- cess or knows how to navigate online forms for reg- istration or locating poling places. Transportation to a registrar’s office or polling place isn’t a given for every voter, and this can become an impediment for voters who don’t own a car or can’t afford pub- lic transportation.

Mail-in ballots carry their own quiet costs, too, like postage or access to a printer. And a Georgia- issued license or ID remains a real hurdle for some young voters, recently arrived residents, or anyone who’s lost key documents.

Beyond those everyday obstacles, researchers point to bigger structural problems. The Carnegie Foundation names language barriers, voter roll purges, closed or consolidated polling places, and underfunded election offices as key culprits. These compound with confusing provisional ballot rules, cutbacks to early voting and voting hours, and poorly trained poll workers for further complications. Partisan election administrators, sparse public in- formation, voter and poll-worker intimidation, and weak civic education can often round out the list.

Voting is your right as a Georgia citizen, and you should educate yourself on these rights so your voice can be heard.



From 1 VOTED

son to wait for it before checking your registration yourself.

This isn’t just advice for first-time voters. If you’ve moved, changed your name, skipped several elec- tions or simply cannot remember the last time you checked your registration, take a couple of minutes and look yourself up. If something is wrong in Au- gust or September, you have time to fix it. Discov- ering the problem while standing at a polling place on Nov. 3 makes things considerably more compli- cated. If your registration shows as “pending,” con- tact your county elections office. In some cases, the state may need additional documentation to verify your eligibility.

Once you’re registered, you have three choices. This is another part of Georgia voting that sounds more complicated than it needs to be. You can vote early in person, vote by mail or vote in person on Election Day. It’s important to understand that the rules are slightly different for each.

Want to vote early? Early voting runs from Oct. 13 through Oct. 30. During early voting, you aren’t lim- ited to your normal Election Day precinct. You can go to any early voting location in the county where you are registered. That distinction matters.

If you’re registered in Lee County, for example, you vote at a Lee County early voting location. If you’re registered in Dougherty County, you vote at a Dougherty County location. Counties must offer at least two Saturdays of early voting and may offer Sunday voting as well. Locations and hours can vary by county, so check My Voter Page before heading out.

Want to vote by mail? Georgia does not require you to provide a special reason for requesting an absentee ballot. Applications for mail ballots can be submitted through the state’s absentee ballot sys- tem or your county elections office, and Oct. 23 is the deadline to request one for the Nov. 3 election. But there is another deadline that matters even more once the ballot is in your hands.

Your completed ballot has to arrive at the county elections office by 7 p.m. on Election Day. Unlike a voter registration application, simply putting an absentee ballot in the mail by the deadline isn’t enough. A postmark does not rescue a ballot that arrives too late.

Prefer Election Day? Then things are very tradi- tional. Election Day is Tuesday, Nov. 3, and polls are open from 7 a.m. until 7 p.m. Unlike early voting, you cannot simply choose whichever polling place in the county is most convenient. On Election Day, you vote at the precinct assigned to your registered address. My Voter Page will tell you exactly where that is. And if you’re standing in line when the clock hits 7 p.m., stay there. Anyone in line at closing time is still entitled to vote.

And, yes, you need a photo ID. Georgia requires voters to show photo identification when voting in person. For many voters, that simply means showing a Georgia driver’s license — and an expired Georgia driver’s license is acceptable. Other acceptable IDs include a valid state- or federal-government-issued photo ID, U.S.passport, military photo ID, tribal photo ID, certain government employee IDs and student identification from a Georgia public col- lege or university. A student ID from a private col- lege does not qualify.

If you don’t have an acceptable photo ID, that does not necessarily mean you can’t vote. Georgia county registrars and DDS can issue a free voter identifica- tion card to eligible voters. Call your county elec- tions office before Election Day and ask what docu- ments you need to bring.

What if I’ve moved? Update your registration. Your address doesn’t just tell election officials where to send mail. It determines which local races you are eligible to vote in and where you vote on Election Day. The same basic advice applies if you’ve changed your name. Update your voter registration rather than waiting until you’re standing at the polls to straighten it out.

College students have a choice about which ad- dress they consider home for voting purposes — their family home or their campus-area residence — but they cannot register at both.

What if you have a felony conviction? This is one area where Georgia’s voting rules are often misun- derstood. A felony conviction does not necessarily mean someone permanently loses the right to vote. In Georgia, the restriction applies while a person is serving the sentence, including prison, probation and parole. Once the sentence is complete, the right to vote is automatically restored. There is no sepa- rate pardon or restoration hearing required.

But there is one step the voter still has to take. Register again. Completing a sentence restores eli- gibility, but it does not automatically put someone’s name back on the voter rolls. People sentenced un- der Georgia’s First Offender Act or conditional dis- charge, people being held in jail awaiting trial on pending charges and people serving misdemeanor probation remain eligible to vote. Anyone unsure how those rules apply to a particular case should contact their county elections office or seek legal assistance rather than assuming they are ineligible.

What if I don’t have a permanent address? Georgia also has procedures for voters experiencing home- lessness. Under current state law, an unhoused vot- er uses the county registrar’s office as the mailing address for election purposes, with election mail available there for pickup. Because those circum- stances can vary, contacting the county elections office directly is the simplest way to make sure the registration is handled correctly.

Military members and Georgians living overseas have a separate federal absentee voting process and should also contact election officials as early as pos- sible. So what do I actually need to remember? If all of this still feels like a lot, forget the election-law terminology and remember five dates:

- Oct. 5: Register to vote.
- Oct. 13: Early voting starts.
- Oct. 23: Last day to request a mail ballot.
- Oct. 30: Early voting ends.
- Nov. 3: Election Day. Polls are open from 7 a.m. to 7 p.m.

And between registering and voting, check My Voter Page.

That’s really the process. You don’t need to un- derstand every Georgia election law before you par- ticipate in an election. You don’t need to know the name of every office on the ballot before you regis- ter. And you don’t need to wait until Election Day to figure out where you’re supposed to go.

Register. Check your information. Look at your sample ballot. Decide when and how you want to vote. And if you’re confused, call the people whose job it is to help southwest Georgia voters: Here’s who to call:

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Southwest Georgia Voters Help Contacts

Dougherty County
222 Pine Ave., Suite 220, Albany
(229) 431-3247
8:30 a.m.-5 p.m. Monday-Friday

Lee County
100 Starksville Ave. N., Suite B, Leesburg
(229) 759-6002
8 a.m.-5 p.m. Monday-Friday

Terrell County
955 Forrester Drive S.E., Dawson
(229) 995-5066

Worth County
201 N. Main St., Room 10, Sylvester
(229) 776-8208
8 a.m.-5 p.m. Monday-Friday

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Voters in other Georgia counties can find their lo- cal elections office through the Georgia Secretary of State’s My Voter Page. The Georgia Secretary of State Elections Division also can be reached at (404) 656-2871, and the state’s voter hotline is 1-844-537-5375.

Election Protection, a nonpartisan voter assis- tance hotline, can be reached at 1-866-OUR- VOTE (1-866-687-8683).

Election Protection, a nonpartisan voter assis- tance hotline, can be reached at 1-866-OUR- VOTE (1-866-687-8683).

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Rates, tort reform key in Georgia insurance commissioner race

By Evelyn Davidson
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The Georgia insurance and safety fire commissioner is a four-year, no term-limit executive role in the state government.

The commissioner leads Georgia insurance industry regulation and state fire safety efforts through standards and best practices set by the National Association of Insurance Commissioners.

This seat is up for election on the Nov. 3 ballot. The incumbent, John F. King (R) is running against Keisha Sean Waites (D) and Colin McKinney (L).



John F. King

Republican nominee John F. King

Appointed by Gov. Brian Kemp in 2019 before being elected to a full term in 2022, King became the first

Hispanic statewide official in Georgia. He grew up in Albany, served in the U.S. Army National Guard, worked as an Atlanta police officer and was chief of police for Doraville.

“When I was appointed Insurance Commissioner, I inherited a broken agency,” King wrote in an Aug. 18 Facebook campaign post.

King said finishing the work he started is part of his campaign for reelection.

His top issues and initiatives:

- Recovering taxpayer money from insurance companies
- Holding insurance companies accountable through fines
- Tort reform
- Switch from Obamacare to the state-run Georgia Access
- Strengthening partnerships with law enforcement and first responders
- Holding arsonists and other fraudsters accountable through investigations headed by the commissioner’s office
- Disaster support in the form of claims villages which connect impacted citizens with providers.

Democratic nominee Keisha Sean Waites

Waites served three terms as the Georgia House District 60 representative for southeast Atlanta. She is a former Atlanta City Council member, though she resigned before



Keisha Sean Waites

completing her full term. She worked in the U.S. Small Business Administration Disaster Assistance Division and held roles in the Legislative and External Affairs divisions of the Federal Emergency Management Agency.

At FEMA, Waites worked on recovery response efforts in the wake of Hurricane Katrina in 2005 and was on the external affairs team to help after the Haiti earthquake in 2010. She also helped organize tests of lead in Flint Michigan’s water in 2016.

Waites faces several ethics violations for using taxpayer money to print and mail campaign newsletters, according to The Atlanta Journal-Constitution. After resigning from city council, she received cease-and-desist letters for filming campaign videos in-

side Atlanta City Hall.

Cost of living is a high priority for Waites in her campaign.

“Georgia families are paying some of the highest insurance rates in the country — for their homes, their cars, and their healthcare,” Waites wrote in an Aug. 13 Facebook post. “As a homeowner, driver, and taxpayer, I know exactly how painful and frustrating this system has become. Georgians deserve relief, accountability, and leadership that understands their struggle firsthand. I’m running for Insurance Commissioner to deliver that change.”

Her top issues and initiatives:

- Reviewing and challenging unjustified rate hikes for auto and home insurance
- Ending zip code and credit score discrimination, including bringing modern equipment and faster response times to underserved and rural Georgia areas
- Developing a fraud strike force to mitigate insurance scams targeting seniors and other vulnerable groups.

Libertarian nominee Colin McKinney

McKinney is an emergency medicine doctor in Athens. His goal as commissioner is to provide “the most free-market solutions possible,” according to his campaign webpage, while focusing on fraud protection, enforcement of contracts and justice.

“Georgians deserve a better relationship with their insurance,” he wrote in an X post Jan. 23.

His top issues and initiatives:

- Making health insurance plans outside of employers and across state lines more accessible.
- A free insurance market,



Colin McKinney

where there is more competition and Georgia consumers can join co-ops to negotiate better rates.

- Autonomy in insurance choices for each individual citizen
- Fair prices
- Enforcing contracts and revoking licenses of insurers who abuse policyholders
- Enforcing contracts with providers when insurers require arbitration.

Two first-time candidates looking to win state labor commissioner race



Nikki Porcher



Barbara Rivera Holmes

By Payton Towns III
payton@courierheraldtoday.com

Two first-time candidates are vying for the Georgia Department of Labor position, even though one is currently the incumbent.

Republican Barbara Rivera Holmes was appointed to this position on March 18, 2025 by Gov. Brian Kemp. She served as president & CEO at Albany Area Chamber of Commerce before becoming the vice president of the Albany-Dougherty Economic Development Commission. She has also been an award-winning journalist.

Democrat challenger Nikki Porcher has served in the United States Air Force and has had a career working as a school teacher and advocating for small businesses.

Holmes faced no opposition in the Republican primary on May 19, 2026, receiving 775,173 votes.

Porcher received 200,734 (61.9 percent of the vote) against Michelle Sanchez, who picked up 123,306 (38.1 percent of the vote) during a runoff held on June 16. Porcher, who picked up 310,559 votes (30.8 percent), and Sanchez,

who received 260,928 votes (25.9 percent) were the top two in the five-candidate field on May 19. Brett Hulme (199,859 votes for a 19.8 percent), Christian Wise Smith (136,390 votes for 13.5 percent) and Jason Moon (101,257 votes for a 10.0 percent) were the other candidates in the field.

Holmes has gone on the record believing she has brought in results since taking over more than a year ago. She made it her mission to modernize the old systems. She has traveled the state to listen to people and talk with small business owners who are looking to find skilled workers as well as talk with different community leaders. Her goals are to expand dynamic workforce training partnerships for a strong workforce for the modern economy. She also wants to connect workers in the state with higher-wage, mortgage-paying jobs in order to help Georgia families and make their communities better.

Porcher says she will work for everyone in the state. She wants to see fair pay, workforce opportunity, support for small businesses, and

systems that work for employees in Georgia. She believes everyone working in the state should have dignity and stability when it comes to their employment.

Porcher has served in the military and as an educator and wants to continue helping people build stability through their employment. She has led a national non-profit that has helped many small businesses across America and is running for labor commissioner as she strives to make sure that person works for everyone.

The labor commissioner heads up the Georgia Department of Labor, managing labor laws, the statewide workforce services and unemployment insurance. When it comes to unemployment insurance, the commissioner processes claims, pays eligible benefits, prevents fraud and resolves appeals. They also report labor market information, run career centers to help those seeking employment, enforce Georgia’s child labor provisions and make sure the necessary notices are seen by workers. The person in this position also does employer compliance.

GA ballot amendments

By Kyle Dominy
kyle@courierheraldtoday.com

Georgia voters will be charged with deciding the fate of three constitutional amendments on this year’s ballot.

They include measures to shore up funding for the future of 911 systems, an increase on the amount of agricultural and timber property that can be classified for conservation use, and changes to how probate judges are elected across the state.

Here’s what voters can expect:

Authorize Creation of Next Generation 911 Fund Amendment:

This amendment will allow the state legislature to create and dedicate a revenue stream to fund statewide expansion, maintenance and the operation of 911 systems. This includes

the transition from aging analog systems, reliant on hardware, to the digital Next Generation 911 emergency network.

The amendment is endorsed by the Georgia Communications Authority and the Georgia Municipal Association, as well as is supported by Ga Senate Minority Leader Harold Jones.

Increase Acre Limit for Agricultural and Timber Conservation Use Property Tax Classification Amendment:

This amendment would increase the maximum acreage of agricultural and timber property, from 2,000 to 4,000, that can be classified as bona fide conservation use property, therefore taxed at 40 percent of its value.

To be a part of this special tax program, landowners must enter into a 10-year agreement with the state for

a minimum of 10 acres for conservation use. Enrolled land must be used for raising crops and/or timber or preserving wildlife habitat.

The first conservation land use program passed by voter approval in 1990.

Require Nonpartisan Elections for Probate Judges Amendment:

If passed, this amendment would transition Georgia’s probate judges to non-partisan ballots. Georgia’s probate judges handle a myriad of legal issues, mostly civil, including validating wills; appointing representatives to handle estates; and resolving disputes.

Other judicial seats across the state, including the Georgia Supreme Court, are already elected on non-partisan ballots.

