

We reached out to all the Sheriff Candidates and thought it would be great to have written answers to questions so you could review their responses to 4 questions to help you discern who receives your vote on June 11th. We asked them to be concise and to the point in their answers. We have 5 good candidates to choose from and we hope this style of written answers helps you to narrow down your choice as to who deserves your vote. All 5 candidates responded to our request. See below:

Question 1 Prioritization is a key component in law enforcement management. Name your top 3 priorities if elected and why.

Tommy Blankenship's Answer:

- 1) Effective and Efficient Leadership. Leadership is the most important aspect of any business or entity, regardless of what their mission is. The sheriffs office must have a cohesive leadership unit that understands the needs of our communities and our officers. They all must understand the concept of leadership through service.
- 2) Customer Service: The Pickens County sheriffs office exists to serve the citizens of Pickens county, not to employ adults and provide benefits packages. Our culture must be a culture of service where we place the citizens first. This is accomplished through leadership, and training to provide the citizens the most competent and productive deputy.
- 3) Physical and Mental Health of Officers: You cannot serve others, if you are in no condition to be of service. I have always had a passion for physical training and I'm a strong believer in protecting the mental health of our officers through mentorship and access to peer support groups. Neither of these avenues to well-rounded health will be optional. It is my job to take care of my men and women.

I believe focusing on these priorities from a leadership standpoint will create a culture at the agency that will lead to better deputies serving their communities wholeheartedly and truly fighting against the evils that are perpetuated against our citizens on a daily basis. This is how we build relationships of trust and create a culture of fighting together to keep our communities safe.

David Harrison's Answer:

One, restore the proper amount of Deputies assigned to Uniformed Patrol and cut out unnecessary administrative positions.

Two, bring back proactive policing to deter crime, reduce illegal drugs within our community.

Three, uphold the Constitution and be a leader who will be the final stand between the government should infringe on our citizen's rights.

Damon Hubber's Answer:

1. Active Shooter Training for all First Responders is a must to minimize casualties in a mass shooting incident. Training together will ensure that we are all on the same page and understand one another's responsibilities. We will train in multiple locations throughout the county with schools being our priority so we are all familiar with the different floor plans of each school.

2. Re-Instate a local chapter of Crime Stoppers in Pickens County. Having a Crime Stoppers Chapter in our county helps bridge the gap between law enforcement and the community. Law enforcement will meet with all board members monthly and share information on crime as well as what is going on within our community. This keeps the community engaged in law enforcement related matters which will help reduce crime and maintain transparency between the Sheriff's Office and the community.

Chuck James' Answer:

Priority #1: Increase the Number of Patrol Deputies: Ensuring the adequate deployment of deputies is my

number one priority. Presently, the Pickens County Sheriff Office has 115 deputies serving a population exceeding 133,000 residents. In contrast, Oconee County, with just over 80,000 residents, employs 123 deputies. This discrepancy results in Pickens County being understaffed, with only 1.3 deputies per 1,000 citizens in unincorporated areas—far below the regional average of 2.0 deputies per 1,000 citizens. This disparity becomes even more troubling, considering that Pickens County's population has grown by 12% since 2010 and is projected to grow by another 7-8% by 2030. Addressing this issue is paramount for maintaining public safety and meeting the demands of our rapidly expanding community. By increasing the number of patrol deputies, we will not only reduce response times but also bolster proactive drug enforcement and enhance our ability to address critical issues like traffic control. In doing so, we ensure that our law enforcement is responsive, proactive, and effective in safeguarding the residents of Pickens County.

Priority #2: Increase School Safety: School safety is crucial because our campuses house the most vulnerable members of society: our children. They deserve to focus on education, not personal security. As Chief Deputy, I've strengthened school resource officer (SRO) training and provided improved weaponry to ensure they are fully equipped to handle active threats. If elected Sheriff, I'll collaborate with the school district to increase the number of SROs on campus and coordinate with the school district by exploring the possibility of supplementing security with armed private security (SC House Bill 4649) to create a secure learning environment. We'll continue to conduct simulated active shooter drills with our deputies to refine their response skills. Local law enforcement, private security, and school staff will participate in coordinated training exercises to foster teamwork and communication. By empowering SROs and private security with rigorous training and strategic partnerships, we'll ensure they can safeguard our students while creating a supportive educational atmosphere. My priority is to provide a multi-layered security approach that guarantees our children can learn and grow in a safe and secure environment.

Priority #3: Combat the Opioid Crisis: The opioid epidemic requires decisive action. The Pickens County Sheriff's Office, in partnership with Pickens County Behavioral Health, has utilized opioid settlement funds for substance abuse counseling in the detention center since February 2023. The Pickens County Sheriff's Office is actively working with the South Carolina Opioid Recovery Fund Board to utilize these same funds to aid in opioid overdose investigations. The requested grant, which was filed earlier this year, includes specialized technological resources and grant-funded positions focused on gathering intelligence on the source of opioids entering Pickens County. If elected, one of my top priorities would be to secure technological tools and personnel dedicated to gathering intelligence on opioid transactions within Pickens County so that we can further work to identify how this poison is entering our community and hopefully save more families the heartache of losing a loved one. If elected, one of my primary priorities would be securing additional tools and resources.

Michael Ticknor's Answer:

1) Get to the root of our drug problem - Most of the problems we see in Pickens County are directly related to drugs: fights, thefts, domestic violence, uninsured motorist accidents, drug overdoses and deaths. I will put leadership in place that will bring a burning heat to the drug world. I want drug dealers to be telling each other, "You should avoid that place, those guys are relentless". But adults aren't the root of our problem. Statistics say that drug use and abuse typically starts with 12-14 year olds so I will work to get a DARE style education in our public schools. I believe I am the guy that can get it done because I have worked in Pickens County Schools as an SRO for 6 years (Some of my former principals and assistant principals' work at the School District Office and they know me and my character). I have also been a DARE instructor for 2 years and have taught over 100 individual classes. I believe if we can educate the next generation on the dangers of drugs it will significantly lower the amount of buyers. And if you don't have buyers the sellers will move on.

2) Get our Sheriff's Deputies in acceptable Physical Condition. Where they are physically able to do the job they are being paid to do - Our Sheriff's Deputies being physically fit is important for you the citizen. When you call 911 at 3am saying there is someone at your back door trying to break into your house. Or when someone has interrupted your kid's birthday party at the park and they are trying to physically fight everyone and won't quit (Possibly a drug use situation). Or when your sweet grandfather who has dementia has wandered away from his home, you expect that the Deputy that is dispatched to your call will be able to physically help you and resolve the situation. How would you feel in those desperate situations if they couldn't? The South Carolina Criminal

Justice Academy has a physical fitness standard (And test) that has to be passed in order to graduate police academy. The Pickens County Sheriff's Office will have that same physical fitness standard (And test) for a deputy to continue to be a front line deputy (All Road Officers, SRO's, Warrant Service Officers, Narcotics Officers, ect.). Deputies will be given six months to reach that standard or face disciplinary action, reassignment of duties (not a promotion), and/or up to possible termination. Our physical fitness standard will be there solely to make sure the deputy has the ability to perform their expected duties. I understand that for some this will be hard to hear. But our job requires us to be ready to handle some very hard situations. And if we can't handle them who else is there to call?

3) Protect the Reputation of the Sheriff's Office – Ever since I was a little kid I have always considered the Police to be "The Good Guys". As I have been involved in police work for many years now I have observed that just a few officers can tarnish how the public perceives us as a whole. When deputies have moral failures like: sleeping with someone else's spouse (sometimes while on duty), being overly physically violent with law breakers, or even manipulating a police report. If these are not dealt with (or they are dealt with minimally) they have a way of making citizens believe the whole group is corrupt. But that is not the case! A great majority of police officers are good, and as Sheriff I will not allow the actions of a few to bring down the group. I will be willing to let deputies go that have weak morals. Our Deputies have a gun, badge, handcuffs, the authority to take your freedom, and the authority in some cases to take your life; so they need to be morally good.

Question #2 List your top 3 reasons you are the best choice for Sheriff of Pickens County.

Tommy Blankenship's Answer:

1) I am truly a lead by example kind of person. I don't just talk about leading by example I walk that path daily. My lifestyle is respectable to any citizen and I do not engage in any activities or behaviors that could lead to actions that could cost the office of the sheriff any respect. I train on a regular basis to be sure that I am an asset and not a liability in any situation. I serve the citizens of Pickens County not only in my position at the sheriffs office, but also during my free time. I also make it a point to educate myself on a regular basis through reading and studying.

2) I am the only candidate with extensive experience in drug investigations that go further than the scratching the outer layer of that world. I have worked investigations utilizing informants to get inside of homes where drugs and many other illicit items were being distributed. I have performed undercover roles during numerous cases and operations gaining insight others do not have about the criminal element.

3) I know every officer at PCSO and the Detention Center by name and know something about almost every one of them. I believe that building a relationship is the first step in building trust. The officers at PCSO are more than just numbers or positions. That culture will extend into the communities to build relationships and trust so that we can most effectively serve our county and work together to make Pickens County a safer place to live.

David Harrison's Answer:

Twenty-four year career in law enforcement, with an extensive background in illegal narcotic and criminal interdiction. The only candidate born and raised in Pickens County who grew up here when the community was much smaller, and safer. Ready and able to make the necessary changes that will benefit every citizen who is affected by the ongoing crime in the county.

Damon Hubber's Answer:

1. As the supervisor over School Enforcement, I was responsible for ensuring that 75,000 students and 10,000 School District Employees were in a safe learning environment daily. I conducted risk assessments and coordinated Active Shooter Training for all Deputies, EMS and Firefighters several

times a year.

2. During my time as Emergency Management Director, I was responsible for the safety of 450,000 citizens daily. When handling a large scale, critical incident, I was responsible for managing 200+ First Responders depending on the size of the incident. I was responsible for handling any natural disasters, plane crashes, hazardous material spills, active shooter incidents, search and rescue missions, etc. I was also responsible for overseeing a \$300,000.00 budget. During my 5 years as Director, I responded to and managed two tornadoes (Simpsonville and Lake Lanier areas) multiple plane crashes, many search and rescue missions, and HazMat incidents. I also responded to the tragic active shooter incidents at Townville Elementary as well as Tanglewood Middle School.

3. As Major over Investigations, Operations/Uniform Patrol, and Dispatch, I managed 250 employees. I was also responsible for ensuring that 220,000+ calls that were received yearly, were handled appropriately along with being directly involved in the daily decisions of the overall operations of the Sheriff's Office and the 56 million dollar budget. I coordinated the agencies transition to a new firearm and was able to accomplish this by selling seized guns instead of using tax payer money or money from our budget. This transition cost approximately \$300,000.00 and I am very proud of the fact that it was accomplished from selling old seized guns collecting dust on shelves.

Chuck James' Answer:

Experience: The role of Sheriff demands practical management expertise to ensure the safety and security of over 133,000 residents while overseeing nearly 200 employees and managing an \$18 million budget. As Chief Deputy of the Pickens County Sheriff's Office, I've gained substantial experience in managing a large-scale law enforcement agency and its budget. My leadership has equipped me with an in-depth understanding of how to effectively manage resources and personnel, streamline operations, and allocate funds strategically. This solid foundation uniquely prepares me to excel in the responsibilities of Sheriff, making me the ideal candidate for the role who is prepared to undertake the duties on day 1.

History of Delivering Tangible Results: As Chief Deputy, I've embraced opportunities to drive meaningful change in Pickens County. Recognizing the need for enhanced law enforcement presence, I've increased the number of patrol deputies, expanded the K-9 unit from one to seven at no additional taxpayer cost, and strategically invested in cutting-edge technology. These initiatives have produced tangible results: Pickens County achieved the second-largest reduction in property crime in South Carolina and now boasts the third-lowest violent crime rate statewide. Such results underscore my ability to identify challenges, implement practical solutions, and foster an environment where residents can feel safe and secure.

Community Experience: I'm the only candidate in this race with both executive management experience and a deep-rooted history of serving the citizens of Pickens County. Over the past 17 years, I've built strong working relationships with key community stakeholders, including the leadership of our municipalities, county council, and local leaders. These connections give me unique insight into the county's needs and challenges, allowing me to respond proactively and collaboratively. My established network, coupled with a deep understanding of local issues, ensures that I can address challenges effectively and strategically in ways that benefit the entire community. My comprehensive long-term plan is not just about making promises but delivering solutions that address the specific challenges of our growing community.

Michael Ticknor's Answer:

1) I have a diverse background - I believe if the only job you've had for most of your adult life is "Police/Corrections Officer" when situations arise as Sheriff you will most likely try to resolve the situations from only a "Police" perspective. That perspective can be a very limited perspective because most often police officers only see people in their worst moments (Family member has passed away, car accidents, their house has been broken in to, or they have committed a crime and need to be arrested). That's a limited perspective. It's not anything to be ashamed of, that's our calling, but it's the truth and it affects our decisions.

I have a very diverse background when it comes to jobs that I have had. I have been a

Police Officer but I have also worked in factories like BMW and Hitachi. I have been a pastor and performed weddings, funerals, and counseled kids and adults alike. I have also been in the military as a US Marine. I have seen people on their best days, their worst days, and everything in between. I have worked with people from all walks of life and all ages. I understand people and see situations from many different perspectives. I believe that will help me be a well-rounded Sheriff. A Sheriff who feels and thinks like the people he serves. I know the law but there is so much more to being Sheriff than just knowing the law. We work with/for The People.

2) I can/will work with anyone that does a great job - When I was first in the Marines I really struggled with my fellow Marines attitude. They had hard edges in their personality and in my first opinion they were just jerks and I didn't like them. But the more I thought about it the more I thought If we ever have to go to war, I want these jerks with me because they are going to get it done. Their personality fit their mission. I have friends that have lighter personalities and we get along great but I don't want to go to war with them. Their personality doesn't fit our mission. I believe if a leader only hires and promotes people that they like then you are not getting the best people for the job. I believe if a leader only hires and promotes people "Like them" you just end up with a group of buddies. That happens at a lot of Sheriff's Offices. The best people for specific jobs have very specific personality.

When I am the Sheriff of Pickens County I will hire and promote the best people for the job, we don't have to like each other. Keeping you safe is my priority, not collecting buddies! When leadership positions become available we will have interviews so we can see who has a desire for the job, but that is essentially the only thing the interview will do. Every day you work for the Pickens County Sheriff's Office you will be interviewing for a promotion to the next level. If you do a mediocre job for two years and when a position for a promotion opens up, you give the best two months of work you have ever given, you have failed the long-term interview. If you do a great job (Your best work) the whole time you work for the Pickens County Sheriff's Office your long-term interview is looking really good!

3) I have experience + character – If we were to vote for President based solely on experience we would vote for Nancy Pelosi, Mitch McConnell, or Joe Biden (they have been in politics forever). I don't believe just having "Experience" makes you the best candidate for the job. I have experience but I will be combining that with character (integrity, hard work, respect). It doesn't matter what you know if you can't be trusted to use that information for the good of the citizens you serve. Some people know a lot and have a ton of experience but they only use that information to help themselves and their friends. I will be a Sheriff for the people. Your safety and well-being will be what drives the use of my knowledge and experience.

Question #3: Who has influenced your life the most in the past 5 years and in what ways.

Tommy Blankenship's Answer:

I am an avid reader and have been mentored by many over the past 5 years, but no one has had a bigger influence than my wife during her battle with cancer. During her chemotherapy treatments, her surgeries, and her radiation she was consistently upbeat and determined to be a positive role model to our children and to her staff at her place of work. Even though her body was berated by the chemicals designed to kill her cancer, she managed to have a greater attendance record at work than the majority of her staff. I was motivated to be a better person through her resilience and found myself performing tasks I never thought possible because of her. This motivation has become an unshakable discipline that allows me to find ways to be a positive influence in every venture I pursue. Together we have taken what many would call a tragedy and have made it a testimony to what God can do when you work hard and trust Him!

David Harrison's Answer:

My mother and also my girlfriend. I have watched these two women overcome things that would have broken some of the toughest men that I know. Their will to keep moving in the face of tragedy has inspired me to dig deep within and press forward in my own life, no matter the situation.

Damon Hubber's Answer:

The biggest influence in my life is my youngest son, Tony. Several years ago he had a terrible motorcycle accident that could have ended his life but he survived. He fought through years of recovery and never let his injuries defeat him. On November 11, 2022 he graduated from the Fire Academy and has been a full-time firefighter at Piedmont Park Fire Department ever since. I am very proud of him and anytime I have a tough day I always think of him and all he has been through and accomplished with the odds stacked against him.

Chuck James' Answer:

Over the past five years, Chief Deputy Chad Brooks profoundly influenced my approach to leadership, setting a standard I strive to emulate every day. Having served Pickens County for an incredible 33 years, he was the embodiment of humility, integrity, and unwavering care for our community. As both my Captain and later as Chief Deputy, Chief Brooks never considered any assignment beneath his rank. He was always willing to roll up his sleeves and tackle even the most menial tasks if it meant contributing to the team's success. His dedication and work ethic shone brightly, setting an example for all of us. His humble approach taught me the true essence of leadership: being willing to do what needs to be done, regardless of titles or positions. He consistently demonstrated that caring for our community means leading by example, treating every task as an opportunity to make a difference. His unwavering integrity and focus on service left a lasting impression, shaping how I approach my responsibilities and inspiring me to lead with the same spirit. Chief Brooks' leadership style undoubtedly changed me for the better, and I am grateful for the lessons learned under his guidance. His legacy continues to guide my actions as I strive to lead with humility, care, and integrity, just as he did so well.

Michael Ticknor's Answer:

My dad! My dad is kind, honest, hardworking, loyal, fair, and his biggest quality is he will do the right thing no matter what the consequences. The greatest lesson I have learned from him is to do the right thing no matter the cost. The Bible says the Fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom. What that means is that one day we will answer to God for everything we have done in this life (what is seen and what only you and God know about). If a person believes this it causes them to do what is right and good no matter if no one is looking, because they know they will answer to God for their actions. As Sheriff I will do what is right and good, not because I want people to vote for me or because I want people to like me, but because I know that I will answer to God for my actions. On the flip side, what is right and good might not be popular and it may make people not like me or Vote for me. Either way I will still continue to do what is right based first on the Bible, then the US Constitution. My dad also treats everyone with kindness and respect no matter their title, their skin color, or even the amount of money they have in their bank account. I learned this from him as well. No matter who you are your police situation will be treated with the same urgency and effort as anyone else. This is why I have not accepted any donations from anyone for my Sheriff Campaign. I do not want anyone feeling like I owe them any "Sheriff Favors" because they donated to my campaign. Everyone will be treated fairly and based on the law.

Question #4: Senate Bill 915 nicknamed the Health Czar Bill in it's latest version April 24th states,

Section 44-1-100

If so ordered by the Governor, all sheriffs and constables in the several counties of this State and police officers and health officers of cities and towns must aid and assist the Director of the Department of Public Health and must carry out and obey his orders, or those of the Department of Public Health, to enforce and carry out any and all restrictive measures and quarantine regulations that may be prescribed. During a state of public health emergency, as defined in Section 44-4-130, the director may request assistance in enforcing orders issued pursuant to this chapter and pursuant to Chapter 4, Title 44, from the public safety authority, as defined in Section 44-4-130, other state law enforcement authorities, and local law enforcement.

Please tell us your position on this legislation and what you would do to protect your citizens from orders that are unconstitutional should this legislation pass.

Tommy Blankenship's Answer:

I am not in favor of any legislation that would allow an unelected official to generate any mandate that would infringe on the civil liberties of citizens and would never instruct my deputies to enforce such "Orders". I would also be willing to partner with other Sheriff's and Chief's to oppose this bill and speak out on behalf of the rights of our citizens.

David Harrison's Answer:

A Sheriff is an elected official tasked with protecting the citizens from a tyrannical government, and to protect life and property. A Sheriff does not answer to anyone outside of the citizens of Pickens County. Unjust, or unethical laws passed as a "knee-jerk" reaction should not be enforced, and a Sheriff has to use discretion, heart, and common sense when enforcing laws. The requirement for a Sheriff of this state to answer to someone that a Governor has appointed could not be more unjust. We all know how politics work in this state! I will not yield, and I will not force unconstitutional mask mandates, business closings, or any other event preventing our citizens from living free and peacefully.

Damon Hubber's Answer:

As Sheriff, I am an elected official that answers to and works for the citizens of Pickens County. Bill 915, aka Health Czar, would allow the Governor to give authority to the Health Department on how best to carry out mandates, quarantines, etc. within our county & state. Should this Bill pass and a complaint be lodged with the Sheriff's Office, I would investigate and determine the need to take any action. I will always default to the best interest of the citizens of Pickens County. I will not allow my Deputies to violate anyone's constitutional rights nor will I violate these rights as your Sheriff.

Chuck James' Answer:

As your Sheriff, my primary duty is to uphold the constitutional rights of every citizen. I have a serious problem with Senate Bill 915, which grants unelected bureaucrats in Columbia the power to impose mandates on lawfully elected officials, bypassing the will of the people. This kind of overreach undermines the principles of local governance and self-determination.

As a devout constitutional conservative, I believe the Sheriff's Office should never be subservient to unelected bureaucrats, particularly those who are detached from our local community and its specific needs. Sheriffs are elected by their communities to protect them, not to enforce arbitrary mandates that don't reflect the will of the people.

I want to be absolutely clear: as your Sheriff, I will not enforce healthcare mandates that infringe on individual freedoms. We live in a free society, and in a free society, it is the responsibility of each individual to make personal decisions regarding their healthcare needs. The role of the Sheriff is to

safeguard constitutional liberties and uphold the rule of law, not to dictate personal health decisions. The people of Pickens County deserve an elected Sheriff who will defend their constitutional rights against government overreach. I am committed to protecting and serving our community by upholding these rights and ensuring that our local governance remains strong, transparent, and reflective of the people's will.

Michael Ticknor's Answer:

This bill does not align with the constitution so I will not be enforcing it. This bill is also a slippery slope to complete government control so I will not be enforcing it. I am prepared to set a precedent with this bill and I am prepared to receive a lot of bad publicity from the main stream media. This kind of bill is what will reveal the kind of character my dad instilled in me. I look forward to making him proud and protecting our citizens from this type of government overreach.