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A boil water advisory has been rescinded for the city of Fulton. See page 3.

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# Republicans pick Tran as new county commissioner

BY JASON E. SILVERS  
The Fort Scott Tribune

The Bourbon County Republican Party unanimously appointed Samuel Tran as the new county commissioner for the First District during a convention Thursday evening at Fort Scott Community College.

The 12 precinct men and women authorized to vote at the convention, whose precincts are within the “old” First District prior to redistricting late last year, are Woody Brown and Jennifer Williams of Timberhill Township; Glenda and Bill Lalman of North Scott; Boa Casper and Deb Martin of Millcreek; Tony and Kaity Bradbury of Franklin Township; Angela Soetaert and Jeff Reed of Marmaton Township; and Brent Smith and Nancy Holt of Marion Township.

Tran was unanimously chosen from three candidates who spoke on issues ranging from zoning to spending and fielded questions from the public. Other candidates who were nominated were Rick Allen and Lynne Oharah.

Kaety Bowers, chairwoman of the Bourbon County Republican Party, said three proxy votes were cast.

Bowers said all candidates had been vetted and meet the requirements for the appointment. Candidates must be a registered Republican resident of District One and be present at the convention, and must be nominated and seconded by a registered Republican of Bourbon County and meet all other statutory and constitutional qualifications for the position, according to submitted information.

The convention took place to appoint a replacement for former commissioner Brandon Whisenhunt, who was appointed in April 2024 and resigned from the seat June 2. Tran will fill the remainder of Whisenhunt’s term and would have to run for election in the fall of 2026.

Tran and Allen received nominations from members of the committee while Oharah nominated himself. A fourth applicant, Mike Embry, did not receive a nomination.

Tran, who has been vocal on topics such as zoning and solar projects during county commission meetings, said he has been a Bourbon County resident for four years. He said this year is the 50th anniversary of the immigration of his family to the United States from Vietnam.

He said his family came to the U.S. with limited assets and he has since earned a college degree and become involved in government and politics.

“I’ve experienced the American dream and I’m still living it now,” he said.

As commissioner, Tran said he will work to achieve “teamwork and collaboration” with citizens and other county officials.

“We must set aside our differences for the future,” he said.

Candidates were allotted time to address the convention and answer questions from the public. After a short break, precinct men and women, as well as the Republican officers, conducted candidate interviews in closed session. The voting took place by written secret ballot.

According to submitted information, the convention chair will sign the Certificate of Election, under oath, stating the name of the person elected to fill the vacancy. The certificate will be sent by hand delivery or by registered mail within 24 hours, or the next regular business day to the governor with a copy to the Secretary of State.

The following are excerpts from the candidates’ remarks and responses to questions from the public:

Allen said he is a life-long Bourbon County resident who currently lives in Uniontown and helps his father with a cow/calf operation. Allen said he has worked for 20 years as an

insurance claims adjuster.

Allen’s experience includes volunteering with the Ruritan Club, serving a brief stint as mayor of Uniontown, and coaching high school basketball at Christian Learning Center.

“I’m hoping everybody gets a chance to voice their opinions on hot-button issues,” he said.

Allen said he would take an “open minded” approach as commissioner and “listen to opinions,” with the goal of having discussions that work toward agreement.

Oharah resigned as county commissioner in 2022 to take a position as maintenance director for the county’s medical building, the former Mercy Hospital building. He spent nearly two decades in public service, serving two years as state representative and 10 years on the USD 235 Board of Education.

Oharah said his career has included construction, a 31-year stint with Southwestern Bell and four years of service in the U.S. Navy.

Oharah said the county’s budgets are “in a mess” and he would bring experience in the budgeting process to the table.

“If you elect me, I would strive to balance our budget,” he said, adding he would also work to reduce taxes.

**Questions**

Tran said he has heard both sides of the zoning debate, but has not made a decision. He said he believes zoning is about “protecting the public,” and not “government overreach.”

“We need to have a conversation and be frank and forthright about the issue,” he said. “I’m not pro zoning, but we’re moving into the 21st century.”

Tran said zoning has cropped up as “the people have spoken. They’re talking about zoning.”

Citizen Brad Blythe asked candidates for their stances on the topic of zoning, a recent hot-button issue in the county.

Allen said he is “open to discussion” on the topic, which is on the table due



Jason E. Silvers/Tribune photo

**Samuel Tran, standing, speaks during a convention to appoint a new Bourbon County Commissioner Thursday evening on the campus of Fort Scott Community College. Listening in are, from left, candidates Rick Allen and Lynne Oharah, and chairwoman of the Bourbon County Republican Party, Kaety Bowers.**

to the arrival of solar energy developments in recent years.

“I haven’t heard a good argument for,” he said.

Allen said he supports property rights, “but how do you limit other property owners an opportunity to make money on their land?”

“I’m more worried about the powers of government and how they use it,” he said.

Oharah said he is “not really for zoning,” which he said “does give protection to some landowners.”

“Zoning needs to be sold and voted on by the public,” he said.

Oharah said zoning in the county would need to be commercial, not residential. He said zoning leads to discussions on codes, which he does not support.

Citizen JD Handly voiced his concern with the need to again fill a commission seat and said his hope is to “right the ship.”

“At this point, we have to be the laughingstock of Southeast Kansas,” Handly said. “We have cancer.”

Handly asked candidates if they are prepared for the commitment needed for the position.

Tran introduced himself to Handly and said he did

not share Handly’s feelings, adding he has “faith” in the elected officials. Tran also said his focus would be on the citizens.

“I don’t owe anybody in this county,” Tran said. “I am going to do what I feel and believe is best. I will admit to mistakes and try to fix it. We have issues. There’s a good ol’ boys network here, let’s call it out. For me, it’s always going to be about you because what we do affects you.”

“We need to hold ourselves a little more accountable as a party,” Allen said.

Allen said county officials need to address one of the “core problems,” which is money.

“Republicans and Democrats are arguing over spending money,” he said. “We need to have people we trust, highly skilled people.”

Oharah said the job of a commissioner is “very hard” and commissioners should work together with other elected officials in the community. He said commissioners need to “rein in spending” in order to move toward financial stability. He said Bourbon County is ranked low in median income.

“We want a stable envi-

ronment for our citizens,” he said.

Citizen Jill Franklin asked candidates about the largest portion of the county budget.

Allen said insurance is the biggest part, and he talked about negotiating a policy with a different insurance carrier.

“It takes effort to find the right resources,” he said.

Train said insurance is a portion of the budget, but the largest capital expense is “people.” He said he does not have all of the answers, but he will “talk and listen” to officials and citizens. He said positions may have to be cut.

“We’ve been doing the same thing over and over and the price keeps going up,” he said. “You have to look at things outside the box, and be open minded to the change. We have money, but we have a huge spending problem.”

Oharah talked about employee benefits and wages. He said cutting benefits can lead to losing employees.

“You have to be careful on how to approach it,” he said. “We need to make sure we’re saving the money. You ask for what you need, not what you want.”

## Public meets two finalists for FSCC president position

BY JASON E. SILVERS  
The Fort Scott Tribune

The public had a chance to meet and ask questions of the first two finalists for the position of president at Fort Scott Community College during forums Friday afternoon at the Danny and Willa Ellis Family Fine Arts Center.

The forums took place

after the FSCC Board of Trustees conducted two special meetings earlier Friday concerning the presidential search in the Hedges Administration Building. The board went into executive session for the purpose of discussing non-elected personnel as they interviewed the two finalists – Dr. Larry Guerrero and Dr. Anthony (Tony) Kinkel.

Trustees are scheduled to conduct two special meet-

ings from 8:10 to 11:15 a.m. and from noon to 3 p.m. Monday. Two additional forums are scheduled to take place from 3 to 3:45 p.m. and from 4 to 4:45 p.m. Monday with the final two finalists. No action was expected to follow the special meetings.

**Dr. Larry Guerrero**

Guerrero said he has 28 years of experience in higher education and has worked with graduate and

undergraduate programs, building enrollment through working with deans, provosts and the president. He said he has been trying to get an idea of what FSCC is looking for in a president.

“I had a passion to move into higher education administration,” he said.

Guerrero began his career as a graduate instructor in the 1990s in Oklahoma and advanced to the positions of department chair and

dean at various institutions in Oklahoma, New Mexico and Texas. He has served as interim provost/vice president of academic affairs/student services at Northern New Mexico College since 2023. Guerrero has a bachelor of science in health education, a master’s of education in secondary education and a doctor of education in applied educational studies.

He said he has been part of adjustments and changes

made during accreditation visits by the Higher Learning Commission.

Guerrero said during his time at Kilgore College in Texas, the college reopened its nursing program and students in the program maintained a 100% pass rate on the National Council Licensure Examination (NCLEX) for three years.

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WEATHER

Isolated showers and thunderstorms after 1 p.m. Patchy fog before 9 a.m. Otherwise, mostly sunny, with a high near 86. Chance of precipitation is 20%.



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