

The Henderson County Democratic Party endorses these candidates:

US SENATE

Roy Cooper

Roycooper.com

Why vote for Roy: He's always fought for us and will continue to do so.

Focus: "For too many Americans, the middle class feels like a distant dream. Meanwhile, the biggest corporations and the richest Americans have grabbed unimaginable wealth at your expense. I'm running for Senate because it's time for that to change." Roy has plans to reduce the costs of food, healthcare, utilities, childcare, and housing.

Experience:

- Governor of North Carolina from 2017 to 2025
- NC Attorney General from 2001 to 2017
- Holds undergraduate and law degrees from the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill

US HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

Jamie Ager

Agerforcongress.com

Why vote for Jamie: Connected to community, stands up for his beliefs.

Focus: Helene recovery, lowering costs, controlling government waste and fraud, reforming immigration, expanding services for vets and military families, growing small businesses and good jobs, local farms and healthy food systems, environment and public lands, community safety.

Experience:

- Fourth-generation farmer from Fairview and owner of Hickory Nut Gap Farm, a sustainable meat company with 25 employees
- Holds degrees in Environmental Studies with a concentration in sustainable agriculture and history from Warren Wilson College

NC SUPREME COURT

Anita Earls (Incumbent)

Earls4justice.com

Why vote for Anita: Justice Earls is a fearless fighter for our rights and freedoms.

Focus: Anita is a strong defender of civil rights and works to protect the rights and freedoms of all of us.

Experience:

- Elected to the NC Supreme Court in 2018
- The most senior Democrat on the court and one of two Dems on the 7-member court
- Appointed by Pres. Clinton to be a Deputy Assistant Attorney General in the Civil Rights Division of the U.S. Dept. of Justice
- Founded the Southern Coalition for Social Justice, a nonprofit legal advocacy organization that partners with historically marginalized communities across the South
- Holds a Bachelor of Arts degree from Williams College and JD from Yale Law School

NC COURT OF APPEALS (3 Candidates)

John Arrowood (Incumbent)

keepjudgearrowood.com

Why vote for John: Judge Arrowood brings experience, integrity and courage to his work on the bench, with 2,000 cases heard and more than 600 opinions written.

Focus: Fights for equal justice under the law.

Experience:

- Currently serves as a Judge on the North Carolina Court of Appeals (2017-present), a position also held 2007-2008
- Served as a Special Superior Court Judge in 2007, as well as working as a partner at James, McElroy & Diehl, PA
- An American Arbitration Association-accredited arbitrator and a certified mediator
- Worked as a Staff Attorney for the NC Court of Appeals and as a research assistant
- Earned a bachelor's degree in arts and graduated Magna Cum Laude from Catawba College. Earned his JD from the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill

Toby Hampson (Incumbent)

Judgetobyhampson.com

Why vote for Toby: Judge Hampson is experienced, dedicated, and committed to the rule of law.

Focus: Fights to protect our constitutional rights and our families.

Experience:

- Elected to Court of Appeals in 2018 with extensive experience in appellate law
- Over 16 years of experience as an attorney in the Court of Appeals
- Serves on the NC Bar Association's Appellate Rules Committee; is a Bar-certified specialist in Appellate Practice
- Has authored hundreds of opinions as a Court of Appeals Judge including authoring a dissent defending North Carolinians Right to Vote in the 2024 election
- Holds a bachelor's degree from American University and a JD from Campbell University School of Law

Christine Walczyk

Judgechristine.org

Why vote for Christine: She is fighting to restore confidence in the courts and rule of law.

Focus: Safeguarding the fundamental rights and liberties of those who appear in her courtroom with well-reasoned, swift, and nonpartisan decisions.

Experience:

- Most experienced district court judge in Wake County, serving for 19 years
- Served as Lead Judge in Family Court for many years; currently Lead Judge in the general civil court
- Practiced law in Raleigh with Grafstein & Walczyk, P.L.L.C.
- Graduated magna cum laude from the Boston College Carroll School of Management and holds a JD from the University of North Carolina School of Law at Chapel Hill

NC SENATE 48**Doyle Brown**

Brownforncsenate.com

Why vote for Doyle: Focused on helping people and spending tax money fairly.

Focus: “Your street not Wall Street.” Brown says our current state senator has not legislated on our behalf, citing slow Helene recovery. He believes in being fiscally conservative and looking at the impact of where dollars go. He believes your ZIP code should not determine how much money you get for school funding

Experience:

- Small business owner specializing in affordable housing and other real estate and business ventures
- Holds a bachelor’s degree in accounting and an MBA from Delaware State University

NC HOUSE DISTRICT 113**John Morgan**

Johnmorgan113.com

Why vote for John: John’s background as an accountant and experience managing multimillion-dollar military budgets makes him think about public resources with precision, care, and a commitment to using them wisely.

Experience:

- Operates a small business in Saluda that provides housing for full-time residents, including local workers and seniors
- United States Air Force for 21 years, working as a manager and a pilot. Retired as a Lieutenant Colonel
- Worked as a 747 captain with Atlas Air for 12 years, followed by 13 years as a simulator and classroom instructor
- Commissioner for the City of Saluda, overseeing the city’s water and sewer systems and gaining experience with the infrastructure needs of small communities
- Holds a bachelor’s degree in accounting and an MBA

NC HOUSE DISTRICT 117**Lynne Russo**

Lynnerussofornc.com

Why vote for Lynne: Lynne is running to ensure every family in Henderson County and Western North Carolina, including our teachers, farmers, veterans, and students, has the tools they need to thrive, and not just survive.

Focus: Lowering costs, strengthening public schools, accelerating Helene recovery; ensuring Western NC has a stronger voice in the state legislature and protecting local decision-making.

Experience:

- Holds a bachelor’s degree from the University of Minnesota
- Works as a nonprofit communications strategist

HENDERSONVILLE MAYOR

Jerry Smith

Jerrysmithformayor.com

Why vote for Jerry: Focused on keeping Hendersonville thriving.

Focus: Providing high-quality municipal services for residents, businesses and visitors; attracting industry and business investment; managing compatible growth for families and seniors; investing in more parks and public amenities; protecting established neighborhoods while attracting workforce and affordable housing; supporting the needs of our police and fire departments.

Experience:

- Practices law with the Derek Jones Law Office and is an adjunct instructor in the Public Safety Department at Blue Ridge Community College
- Teacher, coach at Hendersonville High School, 23 years
- Hendersonville City Council member from 2009 to 2023; served as Mayor Pro Tem from 2019-2021
- Holds a JD from North Carolina Central University School of Law, a master's degree in education from George Mason University, and bachelor's degree in arts from UNC Chapel Hill

HENDERSONVILLE CITY COUNCIL

Gina Baxter (Incumbent)

Baxterforhvl.com

Why vote for Gina: Gina fights to maintain our character while making it more affordable to live here.

Focus: Gina prioritizes intentional growth that seeks to encourage balance between the need for affordable housing and retention of community character. She is the liaison for the City's Environmental Sustainability Board, which focuses on outreach and education around sustainability.

Experience:

- On December 5, 2024, sworn in to fill vacant seat
- Works at a Henderson County family resource nonprofit, supporting teen parents
- Holds an Early Childhood Education associate's degree from Blue Ridge Community College in Flat Rock and a bachelor's degree in human development and family studies from UNC Greensboro.

Melinda Lowrance (Incumbent)

Why vote for Melinda: Melinda is a passionate voice for those who are needy in our community. She's a life-long resident of Hendersonville who has dedicated her life to serving and strengthening our community.

Focus: Managing growth while preserving the character and natural beauty of our community; creating affordable housing; taking care of those in need, especially young people with mental health issues.

Experience

- Appointed on May 2, 2024, to fill vacant seat
- Serves on the Hendersonville Board of Adjustments
- One of the initial members appointed to the City's Diversity & Inclusion Advisory Committee
- Serves as the Vice-Chair of the Henderson County Social Services Board; Board member for 13 years
- President of the Henderson County chapter of the NAACP
- Owner and operator of Mop Head Cleaning Service for 35 years

FLETCHER MAYOR

Preston Blakely (Incumbent)

Blakelyformayor.com

Why vote for Preston: Focused, effective and hard-working, Preston focuses on community engagement and improving Fletcher for its residents.

Focus: Helene recovery and becoming more resilient; expansion of the Cane Creek Greenway system; finishing Fletcher Town Center to create a gathering place for Fletcher residents; building community engagement; obtaining a new Henderson County Library.

Experience:

- Elected Mayor of Fletcher in 2021, re-elected in 2023
- Elected to Fletcher City Council in 2019
- Holds a Bachelor of Arts degree from University of North Carolina at Greensboro with a double major in Political Science and African American & African Diaspora Studies
- Holds a Master of Public Affairs from Western Carolina University
- Serves on the North Carolina Statewide Taskforce for Racial Equality in Criminal Justice
- Recently won the National League of Cities' Centennial Under 40 Impact Award, which recognizes and celebrates the achievements of elected officials under the age of 40 from the group's member cities, towns and villages

FLETCHER CITY COUNCIL

John "Brandon" Olsen

Olsenforfletcher.com

Why vote for Brandon: Brandon wants Fletcher to continue being a place where families feel supported, where local government is accessible and accountable, and where our decisions reflect the future we want for our children.

Focus: Completing the Fletcher Connects Bicycle and Pedestrian Plan; managing growth supported by infrastructure and protecting neighborhood character; completing park improvements.

Experience:

- Serves on the ABC Board, as Treasurer of Fletcher Youth Baseball & Softball league, and previously served on the board of New Fletcher Library Partners
- Currently works as a Data Analyst helping administer FEMA and U.S. Army Corps of Engineers disaster recovery programs nationwide
- Spent nearly a decade working in manufacturing, advancing from the production floor into leadership roles in both industrial printing and medical plastics. Worked in utility-scale renewable energy and disaster recovery. As an Origination Manager for a national solar developer, he led regulatory strategy, power contract negotiations, financial modeling, and managed a multidisciplinary team.
- Holds a bachelor's degree in economics from UNC Asheville

HENDERSON COUNTY BOARD OF EDUCATION

Mary Ellen Kustin

Votemaryellenkustin.com

Why vote for Mary Ellen: She brings passion, clear goals, and in-depth knowledge of the challenges facing our schools, from book censorship to gun safety, from the lack of resources to paying for school lunches.

Focus: “At its core, our democracy depends on widespread access to high-quality education. We therefore need strong public schools, and that starts right here at home. Strong public schools are safe and fully funded, and strong public schools teach honest and accurate information.”

Experience:

- Holds a bachelor’s degree in mathematics and a master’s degree in sustainable development and conservation biology as well as a master’s degree in public policy.
- Works in the nonprofit sector

Reid Barwick

Reidbarwick4hcps.com

Why vote for Reid: His mission is to guide students into adulthood with the ability to earn a living wage, contribute to their community, and feel pride in both their work and themselves.

Focus:

- Renew focus on vocational education
- Teach financial literacy and life skills
- Build student confidence and accountability
- Ensure graduates have a career path and options
- Prepare students for AI and future jobs

Experience:

- Professional background ranges from executive management in corporate hospitality procurement for resorts and casinos, to logistics and retail work in warehouses, grocery aisles, and package delivery