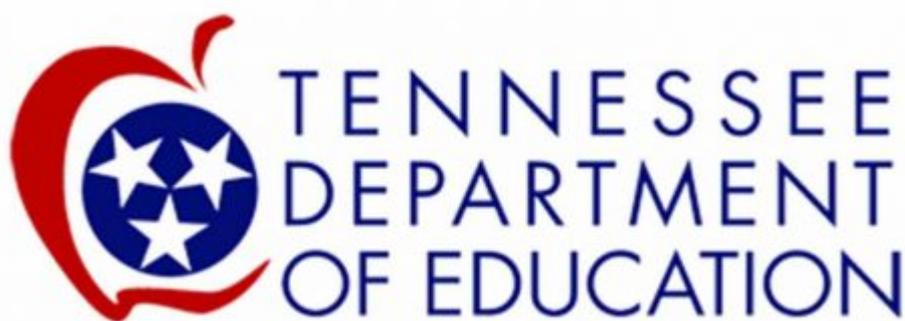


# Questar to bid for new testing contract with Tennessee

NASHVILLE, Tenn. – The company that administers Tennessee’s problem-plagued student assessment testing program says it still plans on throwing its hat in the ring to secure a new state contract so they can continue overseeing the same service in the fall.



Officials with Questar Assessment Inc. confirmed this week their plans to participate in the bidding process. The announcement comes just a few weeks after both state auditors and top education officials largely pointed to the company as the key culprit for the longtime failures of the TNReady test.

“Questar Assessment is planning to bid for the TNReady contract,” said Questar Assessment Chief Operating Officer Brad Baumgartner, in a Thursday statement. “We believe we have the right people and processes in place to best serve the state of Tennessee.”

Questar added that it “does not agree with several of the Tennessee comptroller’s findings,” but the company says it appreciated being included in the audit process.

Last year, Gov. Bill Haslam said the state plans on

contracting with a new vendor and is currently preparing the contracting process.

Shortly after, auditors released a lengthy report in December that held both the state and Questar accountable for failing to monitor and evaluate the testing program. However, the audit specifically pointed to Questar for failing to adequately staff customer support and the decision to switch its text-to-speech software which resulted in not only lengthy testing disruptions, but also led officials to briefly speculate the system was experiencing a cyberattack.

“

“We believe we have the right people and processes in place to best serve the state of Tennessee.” -Questar Assessment Chief Operating Officer Brad Baumgartner”

Baumgartner says Questar has since improved its “outbound” communication with state and school district staff and its customer support centers will continue to be properly staffed. The company says it also never indicated that a “cyberattack was certain.”

Additionally, fall testing that occurred late last year was deemed a success by both the state and Questar due to the lack of disruptions and technology challenges.

Tennessee Department of Education spokeswoman Sara Gast declined to comment to Questar’s response, saying the agency had already addressed the audit

At the time, Gast said “Questar’s performance was the root of the issues we experienced this spring.”

In 2016, the state cancelled its five-year \$108 million contract with a testing company because of repeated failures, including the inability of students to get online to take the tests and later with problems getting paper assessments

shipped to schools on time.

Then in 2017, state officials announced that nearly 10,000 of the tests were scored incorrectly. The following year, lawmakers scrambled during the final days of the legislative session to pass last-minute legislation ensuring no students, teachers or schools suffered as a result of repeated failures with the state assessment test.

That's because state law says teachers must be evaluated partly based on the tests, as well as students and schools.

---

# Questar Assessment Inc. Responds to TN Comptroller Report



# Questar®

**Minneapolis, MN,  
January 3, 2019**

– Questar Assessment Inc. is committed to serving Tennessee, its teachers, students, and parents.

Following the 2018 Spring administration of TNReady,

Questar Assessment hired an outside firm to perform a comprehensive review of its processes. Questar immediately

implemented several recommendations and will continue to implement others prior to the 2019 Spring administration.

“We understand the frustration with TNReady testing last spring,” says Questar Assessment Chief Operating Officer Brad Baumgartner. “We have a long history of successfully serving our customers, and we look forward to continuing those partnerships in the future.”

While Questar does not agree with several of the Tennessee Comptroller’s findings, we appreciate the thorough nature of the audit and inclusion in the process.

“Questar has always held the position that the pattern of data discovered during Spring TNReady administration was consistent with what could have been an attack, but we did not at any time indicate that a cyberattack was certain,” Baumgartner says.

In response to the Comptroller’s finding that Questar Assessment was not adequately staffed during testing, Questar has implemented a process to improve outbound communication with state and district staff should an event of this nature occur in the future.

“Because we had never experienced an issue of this magnitude, we had not developed appropriate outbound communication channels that would have better informed state and district staff. These channels are now in place, thanks to the work of the Tennessee Department of Education and Questar. Our centers will continue to be properly staffed for any additional questions,” Baumgartner says.

Fall testing has been successfully completed, and Questar is focused on the production and distribution of reports. Students across Tennessee took more than 72,000 tests, and the Tennessee Department of Education reported a smooth testing experience across all districts.

“We are not standing still. Questar Assessment is committed to continually advancing our processes, technology, and security,” Baumgartner says. “We look forward to serving Tennessee teachers and students this spring with the best testing experience possible.”

### **About Questar Assessment Inc.**

Questar Assessment Inc. is a K–12 assessment solutions provider focused on building a bridge between learning and accountability. As a wholly-owned, independently-operated subsidiary of [Educational Testing Service \(ETS\)](#), Questar Assessment shares a belief that better measurement solutions can make a positive impact on education. Questar Assessment takes a fresh and innovative approach to design, delivery, scoring, analysis, and reporting. The company is reimagining how assessments can empower educators by giving them the insights they need to improve instruction and fully prepare students for college or career. The company’s high-quality, reliable assessment products and services are easily scaled and tailored to meet the specific needs of states and districts at an unprecedented value. Educators trust Questar Assessment’s high-performing teams and dependable technology to minimize risks and ensure success for states, districts, schools, and students. Questar Assessment Inc. is based in Minneapolis, Minnesota. Learn more at [questarai.com](#).

---

**Trispot Darter fish found in  
Tennessee, Alabama and**

# Georgia is to be named to Endangered Species List

ANNISTON, Ala. (AP) – Federal officials are putting a fish whose habitat is threatened by development in southern states on the endangered species list.

The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service is adding the trispot darter fish to the list.

The trispot darter can be found in the Coosa River watershed in northern Alabama, northern Georgia and southeastern Tennessee. It also survives in the Conasauga River watershed, above the confluence with the Coosawattee River in Georgia and Tennessee, according to the Arizona-based Center for Biological Diversity.

Development along the Coosa River in Alabama, Tennessee and Georgia threatens the fish's water quality due to storm water runoff, Al.com [reported](#) .

The fish was believed to be extinct in Alabama for more than 50 years until it was discovered in Little Canoe Creek in 2008, according to the Center for Biological Diversity.

Being placed on the endangered species list makes it illegal for the freshwater fish to be caught or sold.

“Protecting the trispot darter under the Endangered Species Act will safeguard this colorful little fish for future generations and help protect water quality for nearby communities,” said Tierra Curry, a senior scientist at the center.

The wildlife service proposed a rule to put the trispot darter on the endangered species list in October 2017. The fish was first identified as needing federal protection in 1982, and

the center sued the agency in 2015 to get a legally binding date for such protection.

---

## **Funeral set for Lebanon High grad adds to 2018 Wilson County teen shooting deaths**

Services are scheduled Friday for a 2018 Lebanon High School graduate and member of College Hills Church of Christ who died after he was shot on Sunday, according to police.

Cameron Sean Luke Griffith, 19, is the most recent teenager killed in Wilson County from suspected gunfire in recent months. Griffith was driven to a Discount Tobacco store on North Cumberland Street, confronted by multiple people and then shot, according to statements made to police.

[Mt. Juliet High School student JayShawn Taylor, 16,](#) died after he was shot on Nov. 15, around the 200 block NW Clearview Drive in Wilson County, according to police. A 15-year-old was arrested in the case.

[Jacob Ethan Doughten, 19, and a 15-year-old boy](#) were both killed from gunfire on April 15, at a Pilot gas station on Murfreesboro Road in Lebanon, which investigators believe occurred during a robbery attempt as multiple people met for a

drug transaction.



Griffith wanted to enlist in the Navy this spring, according to his older brother Brantly Cox, 30. Music, video games and the Dallas Cowboys were all interests for Griffith, his brother said.

“He had the biggest heart of anyone I’ve ever known,” Cox said. “He’d always help me with stuff, whether it was something small like putting a bed together for one of my kids ... He was easygoing, laid back. He’d help anyone, he had the best heart.”

Lebanon police have not released further information on Griffith’s death or announced any suspects.

A \$1,000 reward is offered to anyone with information that leads to the conviction of anyone involved in the shooting, according to the department’s Facebook page.

Visitation for Griffith will be 2-7 p.m., Friday at the Ligon & Bobo Funeral Home, 241 W. Main Street, Lebanon. The funeral service is scheduled immediately after at 7 p.m., also at the Ligon & Bobo Funeral Home.

A private interment will be at Cedar Grove Cemetery.

Three suspects are charged in the case.

---

# Tennessee Election Results

NASHVILLE, Tenn. (AP) – Republican U.S. Rep. Marsha Blackburn won a grueling, expensive contest Tuesday to become the first female U.S. senator from Tennessee, keeping a key midterm seat under GOP control.

The congresswoman defeated Democratic former Gov. Phil Bredesen by closely aligning her bid with President Donald Trump, who drummed up support for her during three visits to the state that he won by 26 percentage points, including a rally alongside Vice President Mike Pence in Chattanooga two days before the election.

“

“Now, you don’t have to worry if you’re going to call me congressman, or congresswoman, or congress lady. Now, senator will do,” she said in her victory speech.”

– Marsha Blackburn

Blackburn calls herself congressman, not congresswoman.

Her win represents a rightward shift from the GOP senator she will replace, Bob Corker, who fell in line with Tennessee’s historical preference for more-centrist senators and at times was a vocal critic of Trump.

First elected to the House in 2002, Blackburn aligned with the tea party movement and regularly appeared on Fox News.

She opened her campaign by dubbing herself a “hardcore, card-carrying Tennessee conservative.” Before that, she made a name for herself as a state lawmaker who helped lead the revolt against a proposed Tennessee income tax in the early 2000s.

Pop superstar Taylor Swift even broke her political silence for the Tennessee contest when she went on Instagram to endorse Bredesen and encourage people to vote.

“I just really want those young people to know how important it is to the future of our country that you not get discouraged, that you stay engaged and you never, ever, ever give up,” Bredesen said Tuesday night.

Blackburn took aim at Bredesen for donating to Hillary Clinton and Barack Obama and receiving campaign checks from high-profile Democrats. Although Bredesen largely kept his distance from other well-known Democrats, Blackburn had no qualms bringing Trump and fellow national Republicans to Tennessee.



She welcomed in Pence three times. The president’s son Eric Trump, and U.S. Sens. Marco Rubio of Florida, Lindsey Graham of South Carolina, Joni Ernst of Iowa, Tom Cotton of Arkansas and Thom Tillis of North Carolina also came along for separate campaign events.

Voters like Cody Wheeler in the Nashville suburbs were skeptical about Bredesen’s promise to independents and Republicans that he wouldn’t toe the party line in Washington.

“I had a hard time believing his campaign,” said Wheeler, a

30-year-old Blackburn voter from Williamson County. “With Marsha, you knew what you were going to get.”

Corker, the outgoing senator, had backed Blackburn but refused to campaign against Bredesen, whom he considers a friend. Corker briefly heard out pleas from some peers last winter that he reconsider retirement, prompting a Blackburn spokeswoman to say anyone who thinks she can't win the general election is a “plain sexist pig.”

Afterward though, she managed to consolidate support across the GOP's various political circles, including from former U.S. Rep. Stephen Fincher, who briefly opposed her in the primary and called for Corker to run again upon dropping out of the race.

On Tuesday night, she was happy to claim a piece of Tennessee history for women in the Senate.

“And just imagine this: It is a conservative woman to boot,” she said to loud applause.

---

## **Dems gain in quest for House control but GOP retains Senate**

WASHINGTON (AP) – Democrats were gaining significant ground in the battle for House control Tuesday night, while Republicans held their Senate majority as voters rendered a mixed verdict in the first nationwide election of Donald Trump's turbulent presidency.

The results allowed both parties to claim partial victory, but

highlighted an extraordinary realignment of U.S. voters by race, sex and education. Republicans maintained their strength in conservative, rural states, while Democrats made inroads across America's suburbs.

With control of Congress, statehouses and the president's agenda at stake, some of the nation's top elections were too close to call.

Yet Democrats' dreams of the Senate majority as part of a "blue wave" were shattered after losses in Indiana, Tennessee, North Dakota and Texas. They also suffered a stinging loss in Florida, where Trump-backed Republican Ron DeSantis ended Democrat Andrew Gillum's bid to become the state's first African-American governor.

In the broader fight for control in the Trump era, the political and practical stakes on Tuesday were sky high.

Democrats could derail Trump's legislative agenda for the next two years should they win control of the House. And they would claim subpoena power to investigate Trump's personal and professional shortcomings.

Some Democrats have already vowed to force the release of his tax returns. Others have pledged to pursue impeachment, although removal from office is unlikely so long as the GOP controls the Senate.

Democrats won half the seats they needed to claim House control with dozens additional competitive contests remaining. Victories in contested races across Florida, New York, Virginia, Pennsylvania and Minnesota gave them cause for optimism.

Trump sought to take credit for retaining the GOP's Senate majority, even as the party's foothold in the more competitive House battlefield appeared to be slipping.

“Tremendous success tonight. Thank you to all!” Trump tweeted.

History was working against the president in the Senate: 2002 was the only midterm election in the past three decades when the party holding the White House gained Senate seats.

Nearly 40 percent of voters cast their ballots to express opposition to the president, according to AP VoteCast, the national survey of the electorate, while one-in-four said they voted to express support for Trump.

Overall, 6 in 10 voters said the country was headed in the wrong direction, but roughly that same number described the national economy as excellent or good. Twenty-five percent described health care and immigration as the most important issues in the election.

Nearly two-thirds said Trump was a reason for their vote.

Trump encouraged voters to view the first nationwide election of his presidency as a referendum on his leadership, pointing proudly to the surging economy at recent rallies.

He bet big on a xenophobic closing message, warning of an immigrant “invasion” that promised to spread violent crime and drugs across the nation. Several television networks, including the president’s favorite Fox News Channel, yanked a Trump campaign advertisement off the air on the eve of the election, determining that its portrayal of a murderous immigrant went too far.

The president’s current job approval, set at 40 percent by Gallup, was the lowest at this point of any first-term president in the modern era. Both Barack Obama’s and Bill Clinton’s numbers were 5 points higher, and both suffered major midterm losses of 63 and 54 House seats respectively.

Democrats, whose very relevance in the Trump era depended on winning at least one chamber of Congress, were laser-focused

on health care as they predicted victories that would break up the GOP's monopoly in Washington and state governments.

Yet Trump's party will maintain Senate control for the next two years, at least.

In Texas, Sen Ted Cruz staved off a tough challenge from Democrat Beto O'Rourke, whose record-smashing fundraising and celebrity have set off buzz he could be a credible 2020 White House contender.

In Indiana, Trump-backed businessman Mike Braun defeated Democratic incumbent Joe Donnelly. And in Tennessee, Congresswoman Marsha Blackburn defeated former Gov. Phil Bredesen, a top Democratic recruit.

In the leadup to the election, Republicans privately expressed confidence in their narrow [Senate](#) majority but feared the House could slip away. The GOP's grip on high-profile governorships in Georgia and Wisconsin were at risk as well.

Democratic Sens. Joe Manchin in West Virginia and Tammy Baldwin in Wisconsin won re-election. And in New Jersey, Democrats re-elected embattled Sen. Bob Menendez, who, less than a year ago, stood trial for federal corruption charges. The Justice Department dropped the charges after his trial ended in an hung jury.

Democrats' performance in the House battlefield was mixed.

In Virginia, political newcomer Jennifer Wexton defeated two-term GOP Rep. Barbara Comstock. The Republican incumbent had been branded Barbara "Trumpstock" by Democrats in a race that pointed to Trump's unpopularity among college-educated women in the suburbs.

In south Florida, former Health and Human Services Secretary Donna Shalala defeated Republican Maria Elvira Salazar.

Democrats failed to defeat a vulnerable incumbent in Kentucky,

where Republican Rep. Andy Barr won over former Marine fighter pilot Amy McGrath.

All 435 seats in the U.S. House were up for re-election, although fewer than 90 were considered competitive. Some 35 Senate seats were in play, as were almost 40 governorships and the balance of power in virtually every state legislature.

Meanwhile, several 2020 presidential prospects easily won re-election, including Sens. Bernie Sanders of Vermont, Elizabeth Warren of Massachusetts, Sherrod Brown of Ohio, Sen. Kirsten Gillibrand of New York and New York Gov. Andrew Cuomo.

Tuesday's elections also tested the strength of a Trump-era political realignment defined by evolving divisions among voters by race, gender, and especially education.

Trump's Republican coalition is increasingly older, whiter, more male and less likely to have a college degree. Democrats are relying more upon women, people of color, young people and college graduates.

Women voted considerably more in favor of their congressional Democratic candidate – with fewer than 4 in 10 voting for the Republican, according to VoteCast, a nationwide survey of more than 113,000 voters and about 20,000 nonvoters – conducted for The Associated Press by NORC at the University of Chicago.

In suburban areas where key House races were decided, voters skewed significantly toward Democrats by a nearly 10-point margin.

The demographic divides were coloring the political landscape in different ways.

Democrats performed well in the race for the House, a sprawling battlefield set largely in America's suburbs where more educated and affluent voters in both parties have soured on Trump.

Democrats' chances were always considered weak in the Senate, where they were almost exclusively on defense in rural states where Trump remains popular.

Democrats boasted record diversity on ballots.

Three states could elect their first African-American governors, while several others were running LGBT candidates and Muslims. A record number of women were running for Senate, House, governorships and state legislative seats.

"Tomorrow will be a new day in America," said House Minority Leader Nancy Pelosi, who's in line to become the next House speaker should Democrats take the majority.

---

# 2018 Election Central

## National and State Results

Highlights from State Election Results from 2018 as of 1:03 am local time

### U.S. Senate Class I

1,917 of 1,969 precincts – 97 percent

Marsha Blackburn, GOP 1,198,410 – 54 percent

Phil Bredesen, Dem 972,563 – 44 percent

---

# Governor

1,832 of 1,969 precincts – 93 percent

**Bill Lee, GOP 1,268,772 – 59 percent**

Karl Dean, Dem 838,237 – 39 percent

---

## U.S. House District 1 Eastern Corner of State

186 of 206 precincts – 90 percent

**Phil Roe, GOP (i) 159,224 – 77 percent**

Marty Olsen, Dem 44,307 – 21 percent

Michael Salyer, Ind 3,869 – 2 percent

---

## U.S. House District 2 East, Knoxville/Knox Co

177 of 177 precincts – 100 percent

**Tim Burchett, GOP 171,994 – 66 percent**

Renee Hoyos, Dem 86,635 – 33 percent

---

## **U.S. House District 3 SE and NE, Chattanooga**

276 of 276 precincts – 100 percent

**Chuck Fleischmann, GOP (i) 156,385 – 64 percent**

Danielle Mitchell, Dem 84,632 – 34 percent

Rick Tyler, Ind 4,514 – 2 percent

---

## **U.S. House District 4 South Central**

217 of 240 precincts – 90 percent

**Scott DesJarlais, GOP (i) 139,064 – 63 percent**

Mariah Phillips, Dem 75,801 – 34 percent

Michael Shupe, Ind 6,882 – 3 percent

---

## **U.S. House District 5 Central, Nashville**

185 of 185 precincts – 100 percent

**Jim Cooper, Dem (i) 177,661 – 68 percent**

Jody Ball, GOP 84,196 – 32 percent

---

# U.S. House District 6 North Central

254 of 263 precincts – 97 percent

**John Rose, GOP 168,828 – 70 percent**

Dawn Barlow, Dem 67,605 – 28 percent

David Ross, Ind 3,361 – 1 percent

Lloyd Dunn, Ind 2,100 – 1 percent

---

# U.S. House District 7 West Central

281 of 281 precincts – 100 percent

**Mark Green, GOP 169,769 – 67 percent**

Justin Kanew, Dem 81,574 – 32 percent

Lenny Ladner, Ind 1,583 – 1 percent

---

# U.S. House District 8 NW Corner of State

247 of 247 precincts – 100 percent

**David Kustoff, GOP (i) 166,400 – 68 percent**

Erika Pearson, Dem 74,126 – 30 percent

James Hart, Ind 5,509 – 2 percent

---

## U.S. House District 9 SW Corner, Memphis

129 of 129 precincts – 100 percent

**Steve Cohen, Dem (i) 143,690 – 80 percent**

Charlotte Bergmann, GOP 34,710 – 19 percent

Leo AwGoWhat, Ind 1,414 – 1 percent

---

## Early voting nears 350,000 ballots in Tennessee election

NASHVILLE, Tenn. (AP) – Tennesseans are voting in record numbers with close to 350,000 ballots cast in the first three days of early voting.

According to [vote totals](#) on the Secretary of State's website 346,130 early and absentee ballots had been cast in the midterm elections by the end of the day Friday. The number was continuing to update on Saturday.





Midterms, finds drivers circling parking lot looking for a spot,

The election includes a high-profile race between U.S. Rep. Marsha Blackburn and Democratic former Gov. Phil Bredesen to replace retiring Republican Sen. Bob Corker.

In the governor's race, polls show businessman Bill Lee with a lead over Democratic former Nashville Mayor Karl Dean in the race to succeed term-limited GOP Gov. Bill Haslam.

Voting was less robust than the first days of the 2016 presidential election, but not by a lot. Wednesday was the first day of early voting, and it saw 120,970 ballots cast, only about 20,000 behind the first day of the 2016 election. Voting did not drop significantly on Thursday, with 110,263 ballots, and Friday, with 114,897 ballots. The Friday numbers were continuing to update on Saturday as counties reported their totals to the state.

Election Day is Nov. 6. Voters can cast their ballots early through Nov. 1. Only those already registered to vote can participate.

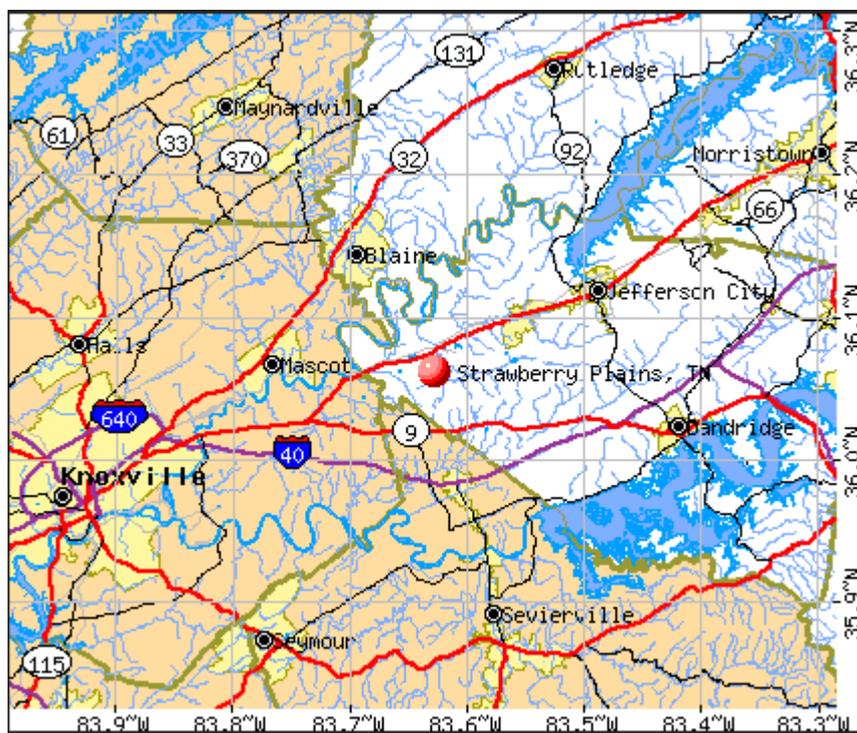
Early voting locations are available at county election commission offices, as well as satellite voting locations, and are open Monday through Saturdays. To find your local early voting site, check your county's website or download the GoVote TN mobile app.

Tennesseans must bring a valid driver's license or photo ID issued by the state of Tennessee, a U.S. passport, a military photo ID or a Tennessee handgun carry permit. Out-of-state photo ID, college student IDs or local municipal IDs are not accepted.

---

# Teen accused of threatening school shooting on social media

STRAWBERRY PLAINS, Tenn. – Tennessee authorities say a 13-year-old student has been arrested for sharing a post online that said the student intended to carry out a school shooting.



Strawberry Plains is an unincorporated community straddling the boundary between Jefferson, Knox, and Sevier counties in the U.S. state of Tennessee. Before 2010, it was treated by the United States Census Bureau as a census county division. Strawberry Plains is located on

the bank of the Holston River.

The Knox County Sheriff's Office released a local statement and WBIR-TV reports the teen was charged Monday with filing false reports and harassment.

A statement by the sheriff's office says the teen told deputies the post threatening a shooting at Carter Middle School in Strawberry Plains was a joke.

After the Parkland shooting, students across Tennessee no

longer see social media threats as a joke.

Authorities haven't released the teen's name or gender. It is the Hillsboro Globe policy not to name underage minors arrested for a crime, even if the name is released to public.

It's unclear if the teen has a lawyer to contact for comment.

Cyber bullying could've led to this threat because he might have been picked on or messed with a lot on social media which made him mad to the point he snaps.

---

# Jurors acquit ex-Tennessee football players in rape trial

Jul 27, 2018 7:53PM

KNOXVILLE, Tenn. (AP) – Two former University of Tennessee football players were acquitted Friday of the aggravated rape charges they had been indicted on nearly 3 ½ years ago.

A jury of seven women and five men deliberated for almost 1 ½ hours Friday afternoon before finding A.J. Johnson and Michael Williams not guilty on all counts. "We prayed, trusted in God," Johnson said afterward. "I just knew God was going to take care of it."

Johnson, 26, embraced friends and relatives as soon as the jury departed. The 25-year-old Williams gave a big hug to his lawyer, David Eldridge. The woman who said both men raped her left the courtroom as the not-guilty verdicts for Johnson were announced and before the jury foreman had even read the decision on Williams.



A.J. Johnson reaches to hug a family member after a jury acquitted both Johnson and Michael Williams on aggravated rape charges Friday, July 27, 2018, in Knoxville, Tenn. Johnson and Williams were indicted on February 2015 after a woman said both men raped her during a party at Johnson's apartment in the early morning hours of Nov. 16, 2014. Johnson and Williams were suspended from the Tennessee football team less than 48 hours after the party and never played for Tennessee again. (Michael Patrick/Knoxville News Sentinel via AP)

"I am so grateful to the jury for their work and their service to our community, and I'm grateful for their seeing the truth, (that) Michael Williams is not guilty and has never been guilty of this crime," Eldridge said. "He's looking forward to moving on with his life."

Johnson and Williams were indicted on February 2015 after a woman said both men raped her during a party at Johnson's apartment in the early morning hours of Nov. 16, 2014. Johnson and Williams were suspended from the team less than 48 hours after the party and never played for Tennessee again. Johnson

had been a star linebacker, while Williams was a part-time starter in the secondary.

Prosecutors made the Tennessee football program's clout and Johnson's local celebrity status major elements of their case. During her closing argument Friday afternoon, Knox County Assistant District Attorney General Leslie Nassios described the defendants as "entitled men, used to getting their way, coddled, idolized men who weren't used to hearing the word, 'No.'"

Eldridge countered that Williams and Johnson were being prosecuted despite a lack of evidence because they are former Tennessee football players. Stephen Ross Johnson, who represents Johnson but isn't related to him, said Nassios made an "emotional" argument "because they don't have evidence."

Defense lawyers argued that the woman had consensual sex with both men at the same time and then lied, claiming she had been raped. Stephen Ross Johnson said the woman was "locked into a lie" that had spun out of control.

"She regrets it," Eldridge said. "Ladies and gentlemen, regret isn't rape."

The woman said she was with a friend visiting from out of state that night and that they went up to Johnson's room with the two defendants. The woman has acknowledged having consensual sex with Johnson on two occasions prior to the night in question.

The woman said that Johnson immediately started having sex with her and that it shocked and scared her. Her friend testified that Williams was attempting to force her into sexual activity around the same time before she got away and left the room, though the friend opted against pressing charges.

But the charges against Johnson and Williams stemmed from what

the woman says happened after her friend left the room. The two defendants took turns raping her at first before both raped her at the same time, she said.



FILE – In this Aug. 24, 2015, file photo, former University of Tennessee football players Michael Williams, right, and A.J. Johnson stand in court before the start of Williams's rape trial in Knoxville, Tenn. Jurors acquitted Friday, July 27, 2018, the two former University of Tennessee football players who were indicted on aggravated rape charges nearly 3 1/2 years ago. (Michael Patrick/Knoxville News Sentinel via AP, File)

Defense lawyers cited a lack of a rape kit or other physical evidence, inconsistencies between what the woman said in court and what she'd told investigators earlier and discrepancies between the testimony of the woman and her friend. They mentioned how the woman and her friend both replaced their phones around the same time without preserving social-media communications, preventing the defense from obtaining that information.

And they noted how the woman initially told police she didn't want the defendants arrested. The woman testified she was initially reluctant to press charges because she feared she wouldn't be believed.

Nassios questioned why anyone would think the woman would lie about something like this. She noted the woman had "lost everything that mattered to her" through this situation.

"How would you think (she) was ever locked in a lie?" Nassios said. "How many steps has she had in her life since this has happened – 3 ½ years – to stop if she wanted to? Where is the motivation to perpetuate a lie?"

Johnson's star power around Knoxville resulted from his status as a four-year starter at Tennessee whose 425 career tackles rank second among any Volunteer since the school started keeping track of the statistic in 1970. Johnson was considered a pro prospect, but his invitation to the 2015 NFL scouting combine was rescinded after his indictment.

Now he appears interested in reviving his football career. Johnson referred to comments from prosecutors and witnesses this week that he'd lost weight since the night of the party.

"I've been staying ready, staying in shape," Johnson said. "They were saying... that I'm smaller now than I was back then, but actually I weigh 255 and I'm still ready to go."

---

## **Tennessee Primary Elections – A look at the state races**

The Tennessee primaries take place Aug. 2.

Voters are picking who will represent their party in races for one Senate seat, currently held by a Republican, and nine House seats, two of which are held by Democrats and seven by Republicans.

Voters are also picking candidates in the race for governor, currently held by a Republican.

### **GOVERNOR PRIMARY**



A crowded Republican primary includes U.S. House Budget Committee chairwoman Diane Black, businessman Bill Lee, former economic development head Randy Boyd and state House Speaker Beth Harwell.



Democrats who opted to run include former Nashville mayor Karl Dean and state House Minority Leader Craig Fitzhugh.

### **UNITED STATES SENATE**



Bob Corker (R), one of the Senate's ardent Trump critics, opted to retire. In contrast to Corker, conservative Rep. Marsha Blackburn (R) has embraced the president, who won the state by more than 25 points.



But popular former governor and presumptive Democratic nominee Phil Bredesen is the last Democrat to win statewide. In his 2006 gubernatorial race, he won all 95 counties.

### **DISTRICT 1:**



Republican Phil Roe of Jonesborough is seeking his sixth term in office representing the northeastern Tennessee district. He is significantly outpacing three other Republicans in campaign contributions. Re-election committees for Congressmen Paul Ryan, Kevin McCarthy and Steve Scalise have given money to Roe's campaign.



Marty Olsen, a physician from Jonesborough, is the lone Democrat running.

## **DISTRICT 2:**



Republicans: This east Tennessee seat is open because of the retirement of Republican John Duncan Jr. The large Republican field includes Knox County Mayor Tim Burchett, state Rep. Jimmy Matlock of Lenoir City, military aviator Ashley Nickloes, and businessman Jason Emert of Louisville.



Democrats: Three Democrats are vying for that party's nomination in the traditionally GOP district.

## **DISTRICT 3:**



Republicans: Incumbent Chuck Fleischmann of Ooltewah has a massive fundraising lead over the three fellow Republicans who are also running in the district that winds its way from the Kentucky state line in northeast Tennessee to Chattanooga in the south.



The only Democrat running, Danielle Mitchell of Hinson, has raised zero dollars, according to the Federal Election Commission.

## **DISTRICT 4:**



South Pittsburg Republican Scott DesJarlais, who has survived close primaries before, is seeking his fifth term in Congress in the district that includes the Nashville suburb of Smyrna, the city of Murfreesboro and several southeast Tennessee counties. A physician who now opposes abortion rights, he has faced a series of personal scandals that included affairs with patients, urging a mistress to seek an abortion and once holding a gun in his mouth for hours outside his ex-wife's room.



Mariah Phillips of Murfreesboro, who has worked at Starbucks and as a teacher at an alternative school in

Rutherford County, leads two other Democrats by a wide margin in fundraising. She has already begun targeting DesJarlais in press communications.

#### **DISTRICT 5:**



Republicans Glen Dean of Kingston Springs and Jody Ball of Nashville are vying for the Republican nomination.

Eight-term Nashville Democrat Jim Cooper is running unopposed in his bid to retain the seat.

#### **DISTRICT 6:**



Diane Black's gubernatorial run makes room for a new face in this district in the northern part of the state. Retired judge Bob Corlew of Mount Juliet and Cookeville farmer John Rose have targeted each other in media advertisements.



Dr. Dawn Barlow of Rickman, United Methodist minister Merrilee Wineinger of Hendersonville, and Peter Heffernan of Gallatin are on the Democrat side.

#### **DISTRICT 7:**



Republican state Sen. Mark Green of Ashland City is the lone GOP candidate seeking to replace Marsha Blackburn, who is running for U.S. Senate.



On the Democrat side, Justin Kanew, a film writer and producer and former "Amazing Race" contestant from College Grove, is running against Special Forces Green Beret Matt Reel of Primm Springs.

#### **DISTRICT 8:**



Incumbent Republican David Castoff of Germantown is facing perennial candidate George Flinn of Memphis in the primary in the sprawling west Tennessee district that

stretches from suburban Memphis through 14 other, mostly rural counties. Flinn, a radiologist and radio station owner, has questioned Kustoff's conservative bona fides in radio ads. At about \$3 million, Flinn has outraised the incumbent by almost double, but almost all of that money comes from personal contributions. Kustoff, a former U.S. attorney in Memphis, is seeking his second term. He has been endorsed by President Donald Trump.



Two Democrats, John Boatner of Memphis and Erika Stotts Pearson of Cordova, are vying in the primary in the solidly Republican district.

#### **DISTRICT 9:**



Charlotte Bergmann is the lone Republican in the primary.



Steve Cohen's hold on the district that includes the city of Memphis seems safe, even though he is running against two other fellow Democrats in the primary.

---

## **State's top courts begin hearing cases over open gun carry laws at school events**

ANN ARBOR, Mich. (AP) – A gun openly carried by a spectator at a high school concert in 2015 has turned into a major legal case as the Michigan Supreme Court considers whether the state's public schools can trump the Michigan Legislature and adopt their own restrictions on firearms.

## Tennessee's Most Recent Guns in Schools Legislation

July 1, 2016 Tennessee

In 2016, Tennessee enacted a law allowing full-time faculty, staff and other employees of public colleges and universities who have handgun-carry permits to carry concealed guns on campus, as long as they first notify the local law enforcement agency with responsibility for campus security, such as campus police.<sup>245</sup> The University of Tennessee estimated that about 27,000 full-time employees are now eligible to carry guns.<sup>246</sup>

Tennessee is also struggling with similar open carry laws on public school property as there is law and a “generally accepted agreement” as to what is expected of gun owners.

The case from Ann Arbor has been on the court’s docket for more than a year. But arguments set for Wednesday are getting extra attention in the wake of a Florida school shooting in February that killed 17. There’s no dispute that Michigan law bars people from possessing a gun inside a weapon-free school zone. But there’s a wrinkle: Someone with a concealed pistol permit can enter school property with a gun that’s openly holstered.

Though rare, it happened three years ago at a choir concert at Ann Arbor Pioneer High School, scaring teens, staff and spectators.

To state that any student who sees a a non-military or policing /security person carrying a weapon of any kind is

fr



The Ann Arbor school board responded by banning all guns, with exceptions for police. “If a student were to bring a gun into a school, that would be worthy of an expulsion,” said Jeanice Kerr Swift, superintendent of Ann Arbor schools. “So why would it be different for other folks? ... What this case is about is local communities having a choice.”

In Tennessee, the law states, as of November 17, 2017: Tennessee generally prohibits the carrying, whether openly or concealed and with the intent to go armed, of any firearm that is not used solely for instructional or school-sanctioned ceremonial purposes, in any public or private school building or bus, on any public or private school campus, grounds, recreation area, athletic field or any other property owned, used or operated by any board of education, school, college or university board of trustees, regents or directors for the administration of any public or private educational institution.<sup>1</sup>

Tennessee gun-rights advocates argue that local governments, including elected school boards, can't step in and augment or diminish the state law as it exists, however, LEA's (Local Education Associations) argue that the law is vague enough that that is indeed exactly what they can do and in light of the Parkland shootings it is expected that more school boards in Tennessee will tighten the gun policies as opposed to loosening them due to the lack of insurance coverage if the policy was relaxed.

Students in many states, Michigan, Tennessee, Florida, Washing and others are paying attention to the cases. Paige Tar, a junior at Northville High School in suburban Detroit, is part of a statewide student group, Engage 18, which favors giving schools authority over guns. She said she's been involved in stressful discussions over what to do during a shooting.

"My point is the school is turned into some sort of sick war game where the goal is to survive," Tar said.

In Tennessee, middle schools and high schools all over the state have participated in a number of walkouts, marches, planned sit ins and walks to congressman's offices to express their positions regarding their desire for safety and increased awareness regarding firearms.

Students would like to see a change in the policy that allows " adults who are not students [that] may possess a firearm if contained within a private vehicle operated by the adult ... while the vehicle is on school property.<sup>3</sup>

---

# 'Vote them out!': Hundreds of thousands demand gun control

WASHINGTON – In a historic groundswell of youth activism, hundreds of thousands of teenagers and their supporters rallied across the U.S. against gun violence Saturday, vowing to transform fear and grief into a “vote-them-out” movement and tougher laws against weapons and ammo.

They took to the streets of the nation's capital and such cities as Boston, New York, Chicago, Houston, Minneapolis, Phoenix, Los Angeles and Oakland, California, in the kind of



numbers seen during the Vietnam era, sweeping up activists long frustrated by stalemate in the gun debate and bringing in lots of new, young voices.

They were called to action by a brand-new corps of leaders: student survivors of the school shooting in Parkland, Florida, that left 17 people dead Feb. 14. “If you listen real close, you can hear the people in power shaking,” Parkland survivor David Hogg said to roars from the protesters packing Pennsylvania Avenue from the stage near the Capitol many blocks back toward the White House. “We’re going to take this to every election, to every state and every city. We’re going to make sure the best people get in our elections to run, not

as politicians but as



“Because this,” he said, pointing behind him to the Capitol dome, “this is not cutting it.” Some of the young voices were very young. Yolanda Renee King, the Rev. Martin Luther King Jr.’s 9-year-old granddaughter, drew from the civil rights leader’s most famous words in declaring from the stage: “I have a dream that enough is enough. That this should be a gun-free world. Period.”

By all appearances – there were no official numbers – Washington’s March for Our Lives rally rivaled the women’s march last year that drew far more than the predicted 300,000.

The National Rifle Association went silent on Twitter as the protests unfolded, in contrast to its reaction to the nationwide school walkouts against gun violence March 14, when it tweeted a photo of an assault rifle and the message “I’ll

control my own guns



President Donald Trump was in Florida for the weekend and did not weigh in on Twitter either.

White House spokesman Zach Parkinson said: "We applaud the many courageous young Americans exercising their First Amendment rights today." He pointed to Trump's efforts to ban bump stocks and his support for school-safety measures and extended background checks for gun purchases.

Since the bloodshed in Florida, students have tapped into a current of gun control sentiment that has been building for years – yet still faces a powerful foe in the NRA, its millions of supporters and lawmakers who have resisted any encroachment on gun rights.



Organizers are hoping the electricity of the crowds, their sheer numbers and the under-18 roster of speakers will create a tipping point, starting with the midterm congressional elections this fall. To that end, chants of "Vote them out!" rang through the Washington crowd.

Emma Gonzalez, one of the first students from Florida's Marjory Stonemason Douglas High School to speak out after the tragedy there, implored those of voting age to vote. In her speech, she recited the names of the Parkland dead, then held the crowd in rapt, tearful silence for more than six minutes, the time it took the gunman to kill them. "We will continue to fight for our dead friends," Delaney Tarr, another Parkland survivor, declared from the stage. The crowd roared with approval as she laid down the students' central demand: a ban on "weapons of war" for all but warriors.

Student protesters called for a ban on high-capacity magazines and assault-type weapons like the one used by the killer in Parkland, comprehensive background checks, and a higher minimum age to buy guns.



Gun violence was fresh for some who watched the speakers in Washington: Ayanne Johnson of Great Mills High School in Maryland held a sign declaring, "I March for Jaelynn," honoring Jaelynn Willey, who died Thursday two days after being shot by a classmate at the school. The gunman also died.

About 30 gun-rights supporters staged a counter-demonstration in front of FBI headquarters, standing quietly with signs such as "Armed Victims Live Longer" and "Stop Violating Civil Rights." Other gun-control protests around the country were also met with small counter-demonstrations.

The president's call to arm certain teachers fell flat at the protest, and from critics as young as Zoe Tate, 11, from Gaithersburg, Maryland.

"I think guns are dumb. It's scary enough with the security guards we have in school," she said. "We don't need teachers carrying guns now. I find it amazing that I have to explain that idea to adults."

Parkland itself was home to a rally as more than 20,000 people filled a park near the Florida school, chanting slogans such as "Enough is enough" and carrying signs that read "Why do your guns matter more than our lives?" and "Our ballots will



stop bullets.”

Around the country, protesters complained that they are scared of getting shot in school and tired of inaction by grown-ups after one mass shooting after another. “People have been dying since 1999 in Columbine and nothing has changed. People are still dying,” said Ben Stewart, a 17-year-old senior at Shiloh Hills Christian School in Kennesaw, Georgia, who took part in a march in Atlanta.

Callie Cavanaugh, a 14-year-old at a march in Omaha, Nebraska, said: “This just needs to stop. It’s been going on my entire life.”

---