



JIM WALLACE

State Senate, District 28

Prior to running for office, Jim Wallace has worked as an art professor and university department chair and is the owner of Paradise Pottery in Eureka Springs; he previously ran for Arkansas State Senate in 2018 in District 5.

What is the biggest issue facing the state of Arkansas and how would you address this problem if elected?

The biggest issue is the kind of future we are leaving to our children and grandchildren. This should concern everyone in the many degrading forms of the environment, personal liberties, public education, criminal justice reform, public safety and the economy. I'm uncertain about the criteria one should use in evaluating the "bigness" of these issues, they all matter in a big way. Even when successful in becoming elected, then comes the matter of being assigned to the relevant committee that is tasked to work on specific issue areas and to recognize that, serving as a legislator, one does not have ample opportunity to work on every issue. As a volunteer firefighter and EMS responder, I hope to awaken our legislative bodies to the years of neglect of our public safety due to obsolete radio communication systems in rural counties and the desperate staffing need to develop recruitment programs that pay participants to acquire training. In the mountainous areas, the horizon lines are littered with towers that could easily be replaced and outperformed by a state satellite system. The cost of satellites are not anywhere near as expensive as they were in previous century, and are less than the communications towers which are incapable of sending and receiving signals around the mountainous terrain that covers a good deal of Arkansas.

What would be your top 3 priorities for utilizing the surplus budget in Arkansas, if you had full power over the surplus?

Establish a committee to make recommendations for the best use of the surplus to be used for increasing teachers' and school staff's salaries even if that requires a pay system that is separate from the local school districts. Teachers might then see two paychecks at each pay period, one from the state and one from their district. The last estimate I saw for a \$5,000 increase would amount to nearly \$250 million. The state is currently losing teachers and the shortage is having a devastating effect. Increasing pay is but one aspect of retention, a closer review of working conditions that need change to boost morale should also be conducted and actions taken accordingly.

Secondly, the criminal justice system and prisons need to be changed to bring an end to the high rate of recidivism and the overall high rate of incarceration. On the one hand, Arkansas has one of the highest rates of incarceration in the nation, but then some counties (ex. Madison) don't even have and can't afford to build a county jail which leads many to believe is a cause for an increase in crime. Better programs for rehabilitation exist and our prison officials need to embrace those that work and be funded accordingly with performance review checks. I am not clear how the federal funds will be used for infrastructure maintenance and development in terms of how much the state will benefit and if the state needs to match some of the federal funds. It has been clear for many years that the roads and bridges, water systems etc. have been neglected for too long and are now a present danger to public safety. Lastly, the state needs to retain some funds (ex. rainy day) in anticipation of a downturn in the economy with a minimum balance of funds as recommended by credible financial experts.

How do you define public safety and what changes would you make to keep all communities safe?

In my previous answers I referred to public safety in regard to infrastructure and needs of, and for, emergency responders. I'm sure many would first think of issues regarding law enforcement, I don't disagree, but I tend to see the role of law enforcement as reactive instead of proactive that can deter bad actors. As a visible presence and participating with community members, it has been shown that officers have a positive impact, but the duties of the job can often leave them with little free time to simply have friendly interactions with the communities they serve. Any changes that can create more of those opportunities such as regular visits to classrooms to discuss their work or public safety issues with students should be encouraged. Not enough can be said about the need to identify and treat mental health issues in our communities. I don't claim to have a great deal of knowledge for this area but I would be interested in working with and encouraging others to learn more for what can be done.

What (if any) changes do you believe are needed to the criminal legal system in Arkansas?

As I wrote earlier: "Better programs for rehabilitation exist and our prison officials need to embrace those that work and be funded accordingly with performance review checks." I've heard from those who teach in the universities that the prison systems throughout the U.S. have essentially all but thrown in the towel on rehabilitation. This is unfortunate as people are released from prison they often are on a slippery slope that can put them back in prison, in their attempt to rejoin society.

The Arkansas Public Defenders Commission has been underfunded for many years. Would you support increasing funding to help bring the department in line with American Bar Association recommendations which cap caseloads at 150 felony cases per attorney? Why or why not?

I've not researched this area, but my inclination would be to accept the ABA's recommendation so that defendants aren't being shortchanged in the preparation of their cases and thus violate their civil liberties.

It has become common knowledge across the state of Arkansas that those facing health conditions concerning addiction and mental health are located at an increasing rate in the state prisons and local county jails. What solutions do you feel should be explored in this area?

To put it bluntly, prisons and jails are not the places for mental health treatment. If incarceration of the mental ill because the state -funded health facilities have been shuttered then we need to consider opening mental health facilities again. The past system for mental health hospitals wasn't perfect, so research into the flaws and proposing changes are going to be needed.

Research indicates that juveniles that encounter the justice system in their youth will have a higher likelihood of entanglement with the adult criminal justice system. What strategies do you support to decrease this likelihood?

There is a shortage of young adults in our emergency services. I could see possibilities for training youth and young adults to be embedded with some of our service agencies so they can see and participate in positive behavior on the front line. Of course there are limits on participation and proximity to an incident for those who are underage, but there are often support roles that are on the periphery for juveniles. Junior Firefighter programs have been around for years but are not active in many community fire departments. If we accept that young people learn to be good citizens by following role models they are with then this makes good sense to encourage these programs in our communities.

Neuroscience research has indicated that the human brain is not fully formed until approximately age 25, meaning that impulse control and long-term thinking can be impaired. Would you consider reclassifying how Arkansas young adults are treated in the adult system? Are there specific adjustments that should/could be made?

I've heard that the human brain is not fully formed (matured) until age 30. Historically, ages 18 and 21 have been the standard for determining "adulthood" for many decades and with recent research, such as cited in the question, the time has come to reconsider how we should use this information. I would not have stated that "impulse control and long-term thinking can be impaired" because impaired can be confused with "damaged" which if the faculties were never fully developed then we are really referring to a diminished functionality. There are also situations where damaged faculties lead to mental health issues that in turn lead to criminal behavior and a third set of individuals needing a type of care not to be found in our present prison system. As I recall from my Developmental Psychology course in college, some individuals will never develop fully regardless of their age, meanwhile I'm sure of some youth who exhibit well-developed thinking skills at half the age we are considering. How many of these outliers are in our general population? Or in our prisons? I would argue for the age rule to be only a precursory guide to other evaluations.

Do you think we have a "parole problem" and how would you address it?

I hear that we do, and it is because the impact of being returned to prison is inconsistent for a minor infraction.

The Arkansas Department of Corrections identified reducing solitary confinement —a practice labeled torture under international law— as a major objective in their 2021-2022 Strategic Plan, however the number of people held in isolation continues to grow. Do you agree with the need to reduce solitary confinement in our state? Why or why not?

Solitary confinement has never made any sense to me as a means of inducing people to behave better.