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Into the Howl-Verse

Debate at A-State

Shoffner and Wadlin Square Off, Cotton Absent

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SPECIAL TO THE HERALD

ASU-TV hosted a U.S. Senate debate on Oct. 22, featuring Democratic candidate Hallie Shoffner and Libertarian candidate Jeff Wadlin. The incumbent Republican candidate Tom Cotton did not attend.

KASU Program Director Marty Scarbrough moderated the debate. The panelists included: Instructor of Mass Communication Johnathan Reaves, KASU Reporter Lexie Burns, Editor-in-Chief of The Herald Allie Carson and A-State Prelaw Club President Levi Seward. Galen Perkins' Video 2 Production class produced the debate.

At the beginning of the hour-long debate, both participating candidates pointed out Cotton's obvious absence.

Wadlin said Cotton is no longer the right choice for Arkansas conservatives.

"Well, Tom Cotton is not a fiscal conservative," Wadlin said. "He's not a constitutional conservative, and he's certainly not America first."

Shoffner said Cotton had not attended an Arkansas town hall meeting in nine years. She said that for the 14 years that Cotton has been in office, life in Arkansas has only gotten worse.

"And where is he?" Shoffner said. "Tom Cotton is either too scared or he doesn't care enough to show up for the people of Arkansas, to show up at this debate and neither one of those works for Arkansas."

What the Candidates Agreed On

Beyond agreeing that the incumbent was not Arkansas' best choice for senator, the two candidates agreed on many other issues.

Shoffner and Wadlin agreed legislators should not be paid during a government shutdown. They pointed to the unfairness for Arkansas farmers and the lack of empathy from legislators like Speaker of the House Mike Johnson.

Shoffner said that while on the campaign trail, Arkansas asked her why their current legislator isn't getting anything done.

"And the answer is this: our politicians, like Tom Cotton, are far more extreme than we are," Shoffner said. "All of us live somewhere in the middle."

Wadlin said he believes the Iranian war is pointless, and he wants Cotton to take responsibility for his actions. Further, he wants to ask Cotton what he means by 'finish the job militarily' — a phrase Cotton is quoted as using regarding the war.



Photo by Ali Lara | Special to The Herald

Hallie Shoffner and Jeff Wadlin prepare for a U.S. Senate debate. ASU-TV hosted the debate in its studio on Oct. 22. Incumbent candidate Tom Cotton was invited to the debate but did not attend.

Shoffner agreed that the war with Iran is pointless. She said Cotton is blindly supporting the trade war and other actions President Trump has taken. She pointed out that Cotton's name is on the One Big Beautiful Bill Act.

Both candidates said Arkansas should expand Medicaid postpartum coverage from 60 days to 12 months. Shoffner and Wadlin said bringing in new economic development would increase access to healthcare. Shoffner said prenatal care should cover all women in the state, not just those on Medicaid.

Wadlin proposed a medical services-to-distance ratio.

"Make sure that we have emergency services and labor and delivery services within 30 minutes of anyone in Arkansas," Wadlin said. "And then primary care services within 60 minutes, and especially care within 90 minutes."

Both candidates also agreed that healthcare is too expensive for Arkansans. Wadlin said Arkansas healthcare needs a supply-side solution with regulations on company pricing.

Shoffner said high healthcare costs stem from monopolies that control the entire system. She used the hospital in Camden, Arkansas as an example of the failing healthcare system. The hospital near the new missile plant in Camden recently filed for bankruptcy.

She said the missile plant

has not benefited Camden as Tom Cotton said it would.

"A senator should be able to negotiate with the state and cities and counties and industries to make sure that no one is extracting wealth from their community without bringing anything back in return," Shoffner said.

Both candidates agree that the U.S. should move away from Super PACs aligned with foreign governments. They also agree that Congress should pass a constitutional amendment to reverse Citizens United. Shoffner said she would like to take the amendment even further by creating term limits for members of Congress and Supreme Court Justices.

Shoffner and Wadlin agreed that the Iranian war and unnecessary tariffs, among other things, are causing food insecurity.



Photo by Ali Lara | Special to The Herald

(From left) Levi Seward, A-State Pre-Law Club President; Allie Carson, Editor-in-Chief of The Herald; Lexie Burns, KASU Reporter; Johnathan Reaves, Instructor of Mass Communication; and Marty Scarbrough, KASU Program Director prepare for a U.S. Senate debate. ASU-TV hosted the debate in its studio on Oct. 22.

What the Candidates Disagreed About

The two candidates differ on how to overcome that food insecurity.

Shoffner proposed that Arkansas farmers grow food Arkansans can eat, rather than what they do now. She said farmers should be given incentives to diversify their crops through a new farm bill.

"We have to make sure that we can pass legislation that will keep land in Arkansas in the hands of our active farmers," Shoffner said.

On the other hand, Wadlin proposed that farmers focus on low-margin commodity crops and stop subsidizing their land. He said the federal government should not be allowed to tell farmers what to grow. Wadlin said better right-to-repair laws could prevent large companies from holding farmers captive.

Both candidates said many factors are driving up the cost of living, but they proposed two different routes to fixing these issues.

"A couple of things that my opponents are not talking about are the debt and the Federal Reserve, which are two things that are sort of invisibly causing inflation and causing everything to be more expensive," Wadlin said.

He said the One Big Beautiful Bill Act's contribution to the national debt and the Federal Reserve continuing to print money are driving inflation. Wadlin proposed legislators reduce the national debt and regulate money printing more strictly.

Shoffner said she wants to prioritize affordable housing by incentivizing developers to build more infill projects, structures built on vacant or underutilized land between existing buildings or within already developed neighborhoods. She said Arkansans can keep more money in their pockets by building affordable housing in the places they work.

What the Candidates Promised

Both candidates have plans if elected.

Wadlin said that if elected, he would first seek a seat on the Finance Committee to help balance the national budget.

"Like I said at the outset, my experience, my whole career has been in business," Wadlin said. "So building things, fixing things, working with huge teams. And I think that makes me more qualified to solve problems in Washington, D.C., and solve them all on budget."

Shoffner promised personal financial transparency.

"If I am chosen as your next U.S. senator, I will put everything that I own and everything that my husband owns into a true blind trust," Shoffner said. "I will not be able to touch anything that I own in the duration of my time in office." She said this will allow her to be transparent with her money and avoid financial gain from the position.

Wadlin said this is not an issue for him because all his stocks are already in index funds.

Shoffner spoke directly to Arkansas State University students in her closing statement. She said she will have the hard conversations with Arkansans that spark change, unlike Cotton.

"I wasn't just disappointed as a candidate; I'm disappointed as a constituent," Shoffner said. "It's disrespectful not to show up for your constituents and be held accountable for your record in D.C."

In his closing statement, Wadlin expressed dissatisfaction with the two major political parties.

"In this race, you have a choice between the Republican, who is a problem maker, the Democrat, who is a problem finder, or me, who is a problem solver," Wadlin said.

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