

Audio file

[Mayoral Debate 2023-09-25.mp3](#)

Transcript

Speaker 1

Welcome to the mayoral debate. I'm Luann Stevens. I'm with Kmu W and we'd like to welcome you to the debate between Brandon Whipple and Lily Wu. And thank you again so much for coming here tonight. Civic and civil discussions are important, and so is being an informed voter. And we are proud of being part of tonight's event. I'd like to thank our partners in tonight's event at The Wichita Eagle, the Community Voice and the Wichita Journalism Collaborative. And thank you to Roxies, always a great host and a supporter of the community. Thanks for providing this wonderful venue. Tonight's debate is being aired live on kmu. It's being streamed on the Eagles web page kansas.com and also at kw.org, and the audio will be posted later this week on kww.org. So thank you once again and let me introduce tonight's. Moderator Kwa's, director of news and public affairs, Tom Shine.

Speaker 2

Thank you. And and thank you for joining us tonight. I think it's a, could be it could be a great night and and a good discussion to be had tonight. So thank you. Let me start by introducing the people who are going to help us with the night's debate. Our media panel asking questions includes Kylie Cameron, who's the City Hall reporter for KMW, Diane. Leffler opinion, editor of The Wichita Eagle and Bonita Gooch, editor in chief of the Community Voice. The event is also being sponsored by the Wichita Journalism Collaborative, which is a group of 11 community partners working to build a more engaged and informed community. All of the Members here on the media panel are members of the Wichita Journalism Collaborative, helping us keep time tonight are Jill Cassado and Sharon else Slager. The Wichita Metro chapter of the League of Women Voters. Also, with us tonight from the League of Women Voters are Carol Neal, Sandra Rankin and Joan Warren. If you are interested in registering to vote or need to check on your registration, they can help you with that tonight as well. A breakdown of tonight's debate format. It's pretty simple. Each candidate will have one minute to respond to a question. Each candidate will then have 30 seconds of rebuttal or to add more insight or context to their answer, we will alternate who answers each question first. Here's the most important thing I will ask you to hold your applause until the debate is finished. This is a form. It is not a sporting event, so please hold your applause if you must cheer. Cheer internally, please. Any cheering limits the number of questions we can ask the candidates. That's what we're all here for, is to hear from the candidates not to hear people cheer. When we get finished, I will let you cheer as loud as you want, but Please wait until we're done with the debate. So we're going to begin with three minute opening statements from each candidate. The order was determined by coin flip prior to the debate, Brandon won the coin cost toin coss coin toss and will go first. He also received the first question and Lily will go first. When we do closing statements. Again, let's hold our applause. We finish and we'll do with opening statements. 3 minutes of Brandon Whipple.

Speaker 3 (Whipple)

We on. All right. Hey. Thank you. Witchcraft for being here tonight for listening. Welcome, everybody. My name is Brandon Whipple, and for the past four years, it's been an honor to serve as your mayor. When I took office back in 2020, the city was in crisis. We were facing the worst combined economic budget and public health.

Speaker 2

You're on.

Speaker 3 (Whipple)

Challenges that we face in over a lifetime, the Max was grounded and COVID disrupted every aspect of our lives. And today we're battling the fentanyl and the mental health epidemic that has left so many families in distress. But what separates Wichita from other cities is that we don't run from the problems we face. We don't hide our heads in the sand, but instead we roll up our sleeves and we face these issues head on together as a community. Today, Wichita is once again leading the state in economic growth and development. With the most diverse pipeline of industry and the lowest sustained unemployment rate we've ever had in the last four years, we've created thousands of new jobs and we have seen \$1.8 billion of raw economic capital invested in our city and our. When I first came to Wichita over 20 years ago as an AmeriCorps member to teach at risk, kids at South High School, I got to tell you guys, I felt like I hit the jackpot. Growing up, my parents taught me that the values of hard work and that hard work was the way to get things done. My mom was a waitress and my dad is a Carpenter. My parents are some of the hardest working people I know. But because of high property taxes and lack of affordable housing in the Northeast, they will never own a home on their own. But thanks to Wichita, I was able to not only be the first in my family to graduate college, but also to purchase and own a home. And that's why I serve to continue those kinds of opportunities for now and the next generation. That's why our focus on cutting taxes and fees and keeping costs low in Wichita to make it easier for families to make ends meet. Now this election presents a clear choice. Either we continue on the current path to prosperity, powered by the voices of wichitas people, or return City Hall into a toxic far right dark money politics of Americans for Prosperity before serving as mayor, I'm proud to say that I served seven years in the Kansas legislature fighting for the people of South Wichita. Against Americans for prosperity's deceptive tactics and the failed Brownback tax experiment that they. Imported my experience gives me the tools I needed to balance the city budget, grow the economy, cut taxes, and invest in record amounts in both fire police and infrastructure. And we put a stop to backroom deals. I'm the only candidate running with a plan to keep our economic momentum going while also addressing homelessness, mental health and finally fixing. Public transportation and tonight I am excited to take your questions and to share our vision for the next four years of here in Wichita. And I know that we can achieve this together together. Again, I'm your mayor, Brenda Whipple, and I hope to earn your vote tonight.

Speaker 2

Lily, 3 minutes.

Speaker 4 (Wu)

Thank you again to our hosts, including Roxy's downtown. The last time I was here was at gridiron, but the last time I was here as a reporter was to share and memorialize wichitan and award-winning

performer Carla Burns. At that time, I asked Rick a question about his best friend and what he would say. He told me Carla would want people to believe in themselves, keep going despite setbacks and Nos. I'm Lily Wu, your former local television journalist. I love Wichita, and I'm grateful for the opportunities this Community has shown me and my family. I stand here today of political outsider and a first time candidate running for office to become the next mayor of Wichita because I understand our community. And believe Wichita deserves better. And the proud daughter of working class parents. My mom, a hair stylist and a cook right here in Wichita, a city I have called home for 30 years. My family and I immigrated from my birth country of Guatemala to Wichita in 1993, and the proud product of Wichita. Public schools having attended Lawrence Ray Woodman, Truesdale Middle School, Wichita East High and the International Baccalaureate program, I was the 1st in my family to graduate from college. Because I was fortunate to win a Gore scholarship in 2003, which allowed me the opportunity to attend WSU and earn 2 degrees in international business and integrated marketing communication. I then went on to win a Rotary ambassadorial scholarship to pursue my masters in journalism. From the University of Hong Kong. I've served as a community volunteer for more than 20 years and for the past 12 years I've been your local journalist, both at cake and KWCH. I've been able to, fortunately, tell your good and sad stories, and I'm listening to you. You're tired of increasing crime. You're tired of rising taxes and costs, and you're tired of partisan bickering and unethical behavior. So on the 30th anniversary of coming to America, I launched A mayoral campaign that is all for Wichita. My vision is rooted in ensuring public safety, strengthening our economy, restoring trust in City Hall, and building a united community. It's time we come together, focus on the core services of local government and make Wichita a better place to live, work and raise a family. Thank you.

Speaker 2

We'll go to questions now. As we said earlier, one minute each from each candidate and then 30 seconds from each candidate on each quest. Brandon, you have the first question from Kylie Cameron of KMW.

Speaker 3 (Whipple)

What you got for me, Kelly?

Speaker 5

In 2022. Sedgwick County recorded more than 300 overdose deaths, with most of those being fentanyl related. That's double the amount of people who died from an overdose in 2019. What will you do as mayor to address substance use in the comma?

Speaker 3 (Whipple)

It's a really good question and thank you for for asking it. You're right. We're in the middle of an epidemic with opioids and folks who know me know that I take this personally because my sister's recovering addict and I'm from New Hampshire and our state just got hit so hard with the opioid crisis a couple of decades ago. So some of the things are doing at the city level is making sure we're partnering with our community. Nonprofits are already doing some of this work. As you might know, we were able to not only decriminalize fentanyl test strips, but also get Narcan out to a nonprofit called Safe Streets. It was one vote that cost us maybe about \$20,000 in money that came in that was directed for opioid. Reasons and we know for the data that we have saved over 400 lives, people who would have been

dead if it wasn't for that one vote. And as we continue, we know that fentanyl and overdoses, we have to arm our first responders with Narcan so they can bring people back to life. But once we see this rollout, we got to make sure we also have those social services. Necessary so that people can get the help that they need, particularly when it comes to such an addictive substance as fentanyl.

Speaker 4 (Wu)

That number is staggering. 300 individuals, those are someones mother. Daughter. Son. I had the opportunity to share those stories as a local reporter and I know the effects that it has not just on the individuals who overdose, but those who've been affected by those who've died from. Fentanyl overdose. I've had the opportunity to have conversations with our partners in Sedgwick County, both the day's office and the Sedgwick County Sheriff's deputies, and I know how critical it is that as a Community, we need to have a conversation about one pill can kill. It needs to be not only at the. School level but. It also needs to be across our community. We need to be concerned citizens and we can all be part of the solution. I'm proud to say that I've always said that public safety needs to be the number one concern in our community, and when we have a drug crisis in our Community, it's a public safety issue and over the last four years, public safety has continued to be the number one problem that people want to see solved and something that has not been addressed.

Speaker 2

30 seconds, Mr. whip.

Speaker 3 (Whipple)

So the education campaign is part of it. The one pill can kill that's only the first step, next step being harm reduction strategies that have been tested and proven to work in other areas. And you also need treatment facilities so that folks who are recovering can actually get the treatment that they need. And that's why you need a mayor who understands public policy and understands where to look for the best policies as we move forward. Cuz I won't let Wichita turn into some of those towns in New Hampshire where some of my friends are. Currently addicted and many of them have died from.

Speaker 2

30 seconds, miss.

Speaker 4 (Wu)

Wu and again those numbers are just during the same leadership period as as our current mayor. I want to reiterate that there are local resources available in our community. And we need to have greater awareness of those that provide services for those who are struggling with not just substance use issues, but also mental health. That is another critical issue in our community. And I believe that local government has a role to play, but our Community also has a greater role to play and I believe that. Each and every one of us has an opportunity to be part of the solution.

Speaker 2

Next question from Diane Leffler of The Wichita Eagle. Miss, will you up first?

Speaker 6

The state government has outlawed transgender people from using public restrooms corresponding to their gender identity and is requiring them to use facilities corresponding to the sex they were. Signed at birth. This creates a known risk that transgender individuals could be singled out for verbal and even physical abuse from individuals opposed to their identity. What can and should the city do to protect people's right to use public restrooms without fear of harassment and or violence?

Speaker 4 (Wu)

I had an opportunity to speak with both the city manager and. Was assistant city managers last week. Asking them what have they seen as issues and they tell me whether a non discrimination ordinance that we currently have, they have not seen those issues. And again I want to reiterate that I am someone who respects all individuals. My mother who's right there would never let me be someone. Other than someone who respects and loves others, so I want to make sure that everyone understands that I. Come from a point of view that respects all, but we also need to have accessible bathrooms for all. When I have elderly individuals that tell me there there are no bathrooms for them to take their elderly parents who cannot get into a bathroom, that's a problem too. So we need to think more outside of traditional methods. And think about family bathrooms and I'm glad to hear that the city of Wichita now is seeing development in city properties that always have family bathrooms.

Speaker 2

Mr. Whipple one.

Speaker 3 (Whipple)

Minute. Sorry. Can you repeat the question?

Speaker 6

Yes, I can. The state government has outlawed transgender people from using public restrooms corresponding to their gender identity and is requiring them to use facilities corresponding to the sex they were assigned at birth. This creates a known risk that transgender individuals could be singled out for verbal and even physical abuse. From individuals opposed to their.

Speaker 3 (Whipple)

Alright, thanks.

Speaker 6

What can and should the city do to protect?

Speaker 3 (Whipple)

I just want to make sure we're talking about the rights of the LGBTQ community and not just bathrooms on my watch. We've been able to pass the strongest non discrimination ordinance in the entire city or entire state of Kansas. We've also scored for the first time, and now the second time this year in Wichita's history, a perfect score of 100 from the Human Rights Campaign when it comes to equality.

Speaker 6

People's rights.

Speaker 3 (Whipple)

To make sure that Wichita isn't just a place. For folks who consider themselves in the majority but also a place for everyone because it can't truly be for all of which, Atta, if you're not for all of Wichita, so as we move forward, we need to continue to push back and challenge the legislature when they decide to take discriminatory policies to a new level where it threatens the lives of which itens, who I represent. It doesn't matter who you are. I'm your mayor, and I'm gonna defend you, and I'm gonna defend your rights. My second.

Speaker 2

Miss Blue 30 seconds.

Speaker 4 (Wu)

Non Discrimination ordinance is important, but the way that it was brought forth was divisive and that is what which agents have told me. They're tired of divisiveness, not just in local politics but at the national level here in Wichita, we can make a difference because we as wichitans. Don't want to see ourselves as one or the other. We want to see ourselves as wichitans, and reminding ourselves that the track record of this current mayor regarding the LGBTQ community, the way you brought forth that ordinance, created division. And that's not what.

Speaker 2

Mr. Whipple 30 seconds.

Speaker 3 (Whipple)

My non discrimination ordinance had more support from members of the faith community than members against had the support of the Wichita Chamber of Commerce add support of our largest employers? Ohh, and it's the right thing to do. Fighting for civil rights might not be the nice thing to do, but it is the right thing to do and I'd rather be the good guy and on the right side of history, even if it's divisive. If it's protecting the rights of the people I represent and I'm never going to apologize for that.

Speaker 2

Next question please, from Bonita Gooch of the Community Voice. Mr. Whipple, your first.

Speaker 7

OK, I never heard it either. Your opening statements address environmental concerns in Northeast Wichita, there's a truck stop that was recently approved that will emit that diesel fuel. Over the concerns of a nearby community, a historic but only recently revealed toxic spill, we have ponds and rivers. We can't eat the fish from. We have a diminishing tree canopy, lots of illegal dumping and St. trash and uncontrolled use of plastic bags. If elected, what would you prioritize to address to address local environmental issues?

Speaker 3 (Whipple)

That question since elected, we're able to create a board that's dedicated for environmental issues, the sustainability and environment aboard, and we also funded them with \$100,000. The startup fund so that they can help us bring not only policy, but also issues and start making those changes. I think it's incredibly important, particularly when we're dealing with state level and federal level environmental. Issues that we get that information out on a local level, that still you're talking about is something that happened I think decades ago and Kathe just wound up sitting on it. The state just sat on it. The last mayor to even talk about this or know about it was Mayor Brewer. So we got to have better relationships when it comes to the state departments so we can get that information out to the community. The other thing we have to do is be smart. While we look ahead when it comes to environmental issues. Right now, the city of Wichita, our public buildings with 98%. Wind energy. We are trading our gas guzzling buses for good battery powered buses, electric buses and we put over \$10 million in charging station infrastructure over the last year thanks to a federal grant. So we're on the right path. I just need a. Second, turn to finish the job.

Speaker 2

Miss will one minute.

Speaker 4 (Wu)

Benita environmental issues, especially in our North End, I've been Privy to attend those community meetings and I've been listening. I hear the pain that people are suffering from not having the communication from government. That is a lack that not only we need to work on as a local government, but also at all levels. The lack of communication to our residents has created not only division but distrust in local government. And so first and foremost, we need a a mayor that is not just. Informed about the issues of what's happening in the North End, but also making sure that they continue to listen and be at the table listening to our residents, asking them what their concerns. These are the problem though is when I knock on the doors of our neighbors on the North End, what they tell me they're most tired about is rising crime, and that is the issue that we need to focus our energy back on. It's the priorities of local government. Environmental issues have a place, but priorities need to come first.

Speaker 2

Mr. Whipple third.

Speaker 3 (Whipple)

2nd so I mean, as a news reporter, Lily, you could have also done a story about this if we were not on top of getting the information now we lean our media partners to correct us at the city level. We're missing something as we move forward though, one of the things I've been able to do is bring more people to the table by creating boards or creating a task force. Including the the Board on Diversity, Inclusion and civil rights. So we are appointing people who used to be left out of the room now to run these meetings to make sure that we're not only forward thinking as a community, but we're inclusive in that forward thinking and plan.

Speaker 4 (Wu)

The individual missing from those listening sessions on our North End is an individual who's also on the stage with me. I'm listening to this community attending meetings, listening to our residents, really getting a pulse of what you all want. And as I've knocked on your doors and I've attended community meetings. What you tell me is you want local government to focus back their energy on public safety and growing this economy.

Speaker 2

Next question, coming back to Kylie Cameron from KMW, Lily Wu you. Are up first.

Speaker 5

As the city works towards functional 0 for homelessness in the city, it also continues to sweep homeless encampments and push people who live there to other parts of the city. Is this a policy you support?

Speaker 4 (Wu)

I had the opportunity to go on police ride alongs, including with the homeless outreach team, and I can tell you. It's a problem that not only requires compassion, but it also requires us to become more collaborative. We cannot just push residents out of our downtown core to other communities like South End, where I grew up, residents tell me that they are tired of seeing people not being treated with compassion. But it's also because the reason why we are in this position is because we have. Nearly 300 bed shortage in the shelters, so we need to get back to the core reason why we are seeing our homeless or houseless population out there. And we have a current mayor who could be doing something about this, but the problem has simply increased over the last four years, the number of homeless four years ago was just under 600. With that point in time, it was 702 this year. So we need new leadership in City Hall.

Speaker 2

Mr. Whipple one minute.

Speaker 3 (Whipple)

Hey, I'm gonna start off the same time. I never do you like that? I would never say someone on this stage is something wrong. So I'm sorry that happened to. But as we get to functional 0, we gotta actually look at the causes of homelessness and not just work on just managing the problem. However, I will say on my watch we have put more into homelessness and homelessness prevention than the last 20 years combined 20 years combined. Millions upon millions of dollars, thanks to federal federal resources that we're able to get in. Also, I'm the only mayor in recent memory that puts a quarter \$1,000,000 into our shelters every single. People winter to make sure that wichitans aren't freezing on the streets and we've got to continue to work with our partners over United Way. I'm working with them. I'm making sure that we get the function of 0 and I'm the only one who's running for office, not just on the stage. Who actually has a \$9.5 million plan to address functional 0 by leveraging our federal funds and changing our paradigm. We gotta solve the problem, not just manage the problem. It's not about how many meals did you give out. It's about how many people did you get house. I need my second term so I can get that done.

Speaker 2

30 seconds. Miss blue.

Speaker 4 (Wu)

Collaboration, not competition, and one of the things that I have not seen at these homeless task force meetings. Is you, mayor? So I would like to say that it's important to have a leader that wants to collaborate and bring more of our community together. The nonprofit sector, local government, as well as state government to find funding to come down to Wichita, but also our business community because we all can play a role in helping. With those of our neighbors who are facing a houseless situation.

Speaker 2

Mr. Whipple 30 seconds.

Speaker 3 (Whipple)

So I apologize to my opponent, but more than four members of the Council can't actually be in on a meeting or else would be a violation of our ethics ordinance. So I don't attend those meetings. I do one-on-one, updates with leaders throughout our city, including the leaders over United Way, including my council members who attend those meetings. Including with leaders who have a stake in the game. And again, my goal is to get to functional 0 instead of insulting me, come up with a plan. Tell me, what is your \$9.5 million plan to actually get people off the streets and house cuz all I'm hearing is insults and I'm here to trade ideas.

Speaker 2

Next question please, Diane Leffler of The Wichita Eagle. Mr. Whipple, you're up first.

Speaker 6

City Hall talks constantly about the need to attract and retain young people in Wichita, but the rising price of housing has made it increasingly difficult for them to stay and put down roots here. Meanwhile, the city spends millions subsidizing development of expensive luxury apartments. To put upward pressure on the housing market. Do you believe city policy is meeting its stated goal of attracting and retaining young adult? Or does it need to be changed and if so?

Speaker 3 (Whipple)

How so? We are attracting more young adults than we have at any point in our city's history because we now have a medical school downtown and we also are developing a Medical Center with WSU and with KU, which is gonna bring in even more people from around the country into our core. So we have to continue the progress when it comes to building apartments and building. Housing, but also that housing has to be affordable. We're about 20 to 40,000 units shy right now and because developers have run City Hall for so long, the majority of the incentives actually go to only 30% of the market, which are single family homes. So instead we have to emphasize. And incentivize infill and we have to incentivize multi unit homes in our core, so long as they match the character of the neighborhood and by throwing supply at it, simple supply and demand economics by throwing supply at it, we're going to be able to actually get the cost down. It's been done in other cities. It's gonna be done in. Wichita in my second term.

Speaker 2

Miss one minute.

Speaker 4 (Wu)

That's actually something I agree with you, mayor. This is a supply issue. In order to have more affordable housing, we must have more housing. In general, we need to have housing that is affordable at all levels and accessible. Unfortunately, though, right now we face about a 19,000 unit shortage of rental properties so that folks can have accessible and rentable. Properties. So in order to attract young people to stay in Wichita, we do need to focus on. But we need to focus it more responsibly. And you're right, developers have a role to play. Developers build, they build restaurants, they build homes. So we need them at the table. But we need to hold them accountable if we are going to be in partnership with them. Developers and anyone who. Receives incentives from the city of Wichita must be able to be transparent in the process of getting that bid. Must hold the developer accountable and must be able to show a great return on investment on taxpayer dollars.

Speaker 2

Mr. Whipple 30 seconds.

Speaker 3 (Whipple)

Yeah, we got the more supply at it. We're able to shift our baseball stadium deal to make sure that it has apartments and not just office spaces. I agree. When it comes to transparency, I'm the one who actually holds developers accountable. We're actually suing people to get our taxpayer money back. Who thought they could rip off the city with impunity? That doesn't happen on my watch, and we're gonna make sure we continue that practice.

Speaker 2

Miss Whipple, 30, Miss Wu. 30 seconds. Excuse me.

Speaker 4 (Wu)

Mayor again, as a young person myself who chose to stay in Wichita, I chose this community because I believe that there are opportunities in economic ones for all, but we need to share those opportunities with more of our Community. They need to be aware of those. Opportunities not just in jobs but also in housing. And we need as a mayor be the ambassador of this community to share and connect the dots for people because we need to retain our young people, but we also need to grow our economy.

Speaker 2

Real quickly, someone seems to be keeping time on their phone. Here we have time keepers here, so if you can turn your phones off, that would be great. And another question now from Bonita Gooch of the Community Voice. Miss Wu, you're up first.

Speaker 7

Now, Miss Woo, you've told me that public safety is your #1 issue. And while some people support flooding, law enforcement with more and more funding, there's another theory that looks at funding

prevention programs as a way to reduce crime, with the result less need for enforcing. Do you support funding prevention programs as a way to reduce crime in Wichita? And if you do, what ideas do you have on how this type of programming could be funded and implemented?

Speaker 4 (Wu)

Prevention programs are critical. We need our officers also be to be part of that solution in terms of prevention prevention programs like the juvenile. Intervention unit over at USD259, the future ready advocates who are helping with reduction in crime in young people getting into crime. These are aspects that we need to focus our energy on. But the current Police Department is facing 100 police officer shortage and 100 more officers who are eligible for retirement when we can't have police officers working focused on community policing, what they're doing is just entering emergency calls and that does not breed. Proactive preventative measures, so we need to fix public safety and that begins at the Police Department level. And I will say that there is one way to help with reduction of crime in general and that is we all together must work towards making sure that Wichita is a place that we all hold ourselves accountable and our young people accountable for.

Speaker 2

Mr. Whipple one minute.

Speaker 3 (Whipple)

All right. Thank you for the question. We've actually invested more in public safety than in at any point in our city's history, but that's not just going to more officers, although we are trying to transfer in the best and the brightest and we're trying to create more policy to get more officers. Again, however, we have to make investments in our youth programs and also our mental health programs. One of the things that we just saw about a week ago is a mental health crisis with a person with a gun who was threatening self harm and what happened was our officers were able to make a tactical retreat and bring in our mental health professionals to negotiate with this person and actually. Help them, and in doing that the situation was able to close without. Bloodshed. Now we don't have to parachute into communities or even get our cops to do it. There are people doing incredible work in our communities and that's why we put aside money in our violence interrupter programs to identify those people who is working with our youth right now. Who's actually out there? Have the experience in what we call the social equity to make a positive change. And how can a city come alongside them? And be helpful to them. Is it money? Is it resources? Is it an office at one of our neighbors associations? What can we do to partner with them? And that's something.

Speaker 2

We're exploring Miss Wu 30 seconds.

Speaker 4 (Wu)

Funny you mentioned relational capital, because that is the very first thing that the Wichita Police Department will. Need they need a new leader? Who actually will help bridge not just the mayor's office, but the Police Department and our community. When you lack the respect and the resources from the mayor's office, you will not be able to retain and attract more officers. And we need trained

officers. We also need officers that focus on prevention, but when we have a shortage in officers, they can't focus on those efforts and that's what we need to.

Speaker 2

Mr. Whipple 30 seconds.

Speaker 3 (Whipple)

Look, I'm in constant contact with our police chief. I'm a constant contact with leadership team. I'm the mayor that provided them over \$30 million. I voted every single way that the FOP has asked us to vote when it comes to modernization and their contracts. And I'll tell you, our officers are tough. No one goes to work wondering if I like them. OK, officers go to work because they have a calling, a calling to keep our cities safe. And the idea that, oh, it's about relationships. No, it's about resources. It's about. What is it that I could do to help you be a better officer and help you be a best police force and right now. We're on a path to that.

Speaker 2

Next question, another round of questions, starting again with Kylie Cameron of KMW. Mr. Whipple, you are up first.

Speaker 5

The city of Wichita recently resold land near the ballpark for a dollar an acre. It's also engaged in several public private partnerships in that area and downtown. What can be done to ensure that taxpayers don't have to bear the burden if these deals don't meet their benchmarks?

Speaker 3 (Whipple)

Yeah, I'll tell you part of my job is to utilize my legislative experience and my formal education to go back and fix the problems of the past. Sadly, the previous mayor and administration didn't tie those development parcels to the actual owner of the baseball team. If that baseball team was to be sold and instead tied it to the owner of the team, even after that team was sold. Which means we had a guy living out of state sitting on those parcels in that development. Holding them hostage. Luckily, the team was able to navigate, so we got those back onto the table so that we can get that developed because if we don't, that goes bankrupt and it's not about where I believe, you know, if I'm in support or non support, if something when I get into office, my job is to fix it and there is nothing that would have been worse. Through our economy, when it comes that \$80 million stadium then not having to pay its own bills to the STAR Bond project, we had to get that moving again. Glad we're able to get that moving again. But again, it's because the contract is pretty shoddy and likely I was able to utilize my legislative experience, go in and cut a deal that saved that ballpark.

Speaker 4 (Wu)

It's it's that same legislative experience that you've had for four years that you did not work on until we were pushed up against the wall. I always say that it's important to engage our community at a point when before you're pushed against the wall, you should ask our community. What should have happened with that parcel being sold at a dollar an acre? We should have asked our Community what are. Other individuals, organizations or just entities that might want to help with fixing the problem.

You've had those four years and knew that this problem was lingering, yet did nothing until you were pushed against the wall, and then you made a decision with the Council. So it is important that we. Remind ourselves that over the last four years, the focus has been on public safety and that has not been your priority.

Speaker 2

Mr. Whipple 30 seconds.

Speaker 3 (Whipple)

Alright, gotta try to explain star bonds in 30 seconds. You have to get approval at the state level. You gotta get approval at the local level. You have to get at least two to three different economic studies to validate it, and then you have to actually get it moving. Your suggestion you can't legally do. You can't go back to the drawing board unless you have state approval and you start the process. All over again, and the fact that you think that, I think means that you need to learn a little more about this before one thing. You become mayor or two things. You you, you start discrediting the entirety of the City Council who works so hard to save baseball. We can't afford an \$80 million. Deficit, especially when we can save it and I'm not going to be lectured about public safety by someone who wants to crash our economic development project down there costs an \$80 million that could go into our.

Speaker 2

Police Miss Wu 30 seconds.

Speaker 4 (Wu)

There are needs in there once in our community wants to feel safe and that is why. I refocus our efforts on what is important and that is what local governments should be doing. They should be prioritizing what the local government should be focusing on, and those are public safety issues. A baseball stadium is great. I love attending and seeing the community activated, but we need to prioritize the things that really move our community forward with economic development and safety, and that is making sure that we can truly ensure public safety for all around Wichita.

Speaker 2

Next question, Diane Leffler of the Eagle's Miss Wu, you're up first.

Speaker 6

City Hall has dedicated itself in recent years to what is called a road diet, essentially reducing 4 lane streets to two lane streets with a center turn lane, including major thoroughfares like McLean and North Broadway. Do you support continuing this policy of reducing traffic lanes for cars? Why or why?

Speaker 4 (Wu)

I'm really glad you said that because over the weekend I had the opportunity to travel across especially our downtown core and making sure that it is not just safe to walk across the street when we push the crosswalk sign, but making sure that people are also active in our community when we have things like Park run. The exploration place when we have things that really activate the downtown core, we need to be mindful that traffic needs to be something that we need to reduce in those areas where we do see

increases in traffic. Another thing that I was really excited about was just two weeks ago when Open Streets ICT was around, seeing more people activated and being part of a community are important. So we need to continue thinking smart from reducing those lanes from 4:00 to 2:00 and making sure that we activate the community though and asking them is this the best decision moving forward? So I believe that it's important to really engage you all, making sure that we're listening to you and then moving forward with the decisions that City Hall makes.

Speaker 2

Mr. Whipple one minute.

Speaker 3 (Whipple)

Did you say one minute? One minute. All right. So when it makes sense. So if we're going to do a road diet to increase safety for pedestrians and also for bike lanes, it makes sense in areas that we know we're gonna have more growth, such as our downtown knowing that we're gonna bring more students there. 80% of the folks who are attending the Med school. Usually live downtown, so in areas like that it makes sense. In other areas like West Street where we're widening those streets, that's because in the industrial areas we're learning by talking to those businesses by bringing people to the. Table that they need large turning lanes for their trucks, so you'll see us widen it in certain areas and then skinning them down in other areas. Again, we don't just randomly do this. We work with our team to make sure that if we're gonna make any changes, it has to make sense, cuz no one wants to be on the receiving end of a die on Lefler. Opinion piece. If we don't cross our T's and dot our eyes. So trust me, Diane, we're trying to make it make sense and. We can explain it.

Speaker 2

Miss Wu, 30 seconds.

Speaker 4 (Wu)

I think that one of the things that we don't share enough about is how do we attract young people and young people want to see a walkable city. They want to see a city that makes sense. And when we communicate with our community while we're doing certain things that breeds better communication with young people and just residents in general. And that's not something that this current leadership has done. We need to continue, really engaging the community, but not just engage. You all communicating why certain processes happen if there are community engagement processes. Most of our community needs to know that they exist when they only happen in One Direction. Just communication being thrown at you versus coming in. Also with two way communication then then the. Community believes that there's no trust and we need to get back to that. We need to get back to trusting local government so communication has to be the key.

Speaker 2

Mr. Whipple 30 seconds.

Speaker 3 (Whipple)

I mean, it's not just communication, it's relationships. Frankly, it's the benefit of the doubt. If you're doing this job well and you're not just there when you're campaigning, but you're actually there to listen

and to build relationships. If someone is concerned about something, they'll come to you and they look to the other side of it and that's the gold standard when it comes to elections. It's not just being likable, it's actually. Getting that benefit of the doubt where folks can say, well, what are you doing over here and why? And give us an opportunity to say, well, This is why and this is what we're doing and that's how I do policy right now. Our budget, for example, it had more public input this year than any time in our city's history to make sure we're hitting on those priorities. And the last time we broke a record was last year, next year gonna break the record again.

Speaker 2

The next question from Bonita Gooch of the Community Voice. Mr. Whipple, you're up.

Speaker 7

First, let's do it. OK, there are a lot of boarded and abandoned houses in Wichita. That are attracting criminals, drug addicts and the houseless. Do you have any idea of how to address this problem with abandoned and boarded up houses? But what happens? Also, considering that I know you're tearing a lot of them down, which creates another problem. Empty lots, weeds and dumping. Considering we have an affordable housing shortage, just want to throw that in there, do you have any creative ideas to address our problem with boarded up and abandoned housing?

Speaker 3 (Whipple)

You're hitting on the head. It's a complex issue. One of the things that the Council does is we do everything we can to save a House. We bring people in and we ask them what you need. And at some point, even Maggie Ballard, Council member, was able to get folks connected with donated lumber and to get those houses. Back in shape, the ones that can't be saved when you got, as you mentioned, they become a public safety issue once if they have to get demolished. If we can't turn them over a nonprofit, the city now has a land bank where if we were to get that parcel or if we're gonna get that house, we can turn it over to Habitat for Humanity or to our nonprofit sector. I think that's gonna be a key in. This as well and also we don't want the houses to get that way. I have a plan to work with our neighbor associations and to utilize grant funds so that they can help us target neighbors, particularly elderly folks who actually can't do the work on their own. But we want to keep them in the neighborhood. Can we get some money to the neighbor associations so they can get the volunteers and actually get those houses worked on and keep those? House is up to par so mom and Dad can stay where they live. I think that's gonna. Be important too. As we move forward, Miss will one minute.

Speaker 4 (Wu)

Benita, one of the things that I have been really grateful for these last few months is listening to more community members, including those that are Realtors that are auctioneers that are also facing homelessness and also just not accessible to the housing that they need. And what they're telling me is that we need to see it more broadly. And as I mentioned earlier, we said that housing is a supply issue. We don't have enough housing. And when you have housing that could be repaired or another developer can think about how to reimagine the space. You still need the community. Engagement. And so someone who wants to engage more of the community would want to have Habitat for Humanity at the table asking them what are your proposed solutions? Because local government may not have all the answers and they shouldn't. That's why we rely on others who are experts. And I ask whenever

there are. Issues in our Community, not just talk about the problem, but also ask where those solutions are and places like Habitat for Humanity are one of those places to ask.

Speaker 2

So Whipple 30 seconds.

Speaker 3 (Whipple)

So the job of the mayor is also to support our City Council members when it comes to collecting that information from the public. Our district advisory boards usually do that at the Council level. My job is to support the Council member and to work with them through these issues. So I don't think we need to recreate anything that's already created. But I think that when it comes to inflation and it comes to property. Work with the nonprofits and actually attacking the supply side of. It's gonna get that inflation and that costs low and also even building some of the more luxury apartments that actually frees up some of the lower end stuff. For example, my wife and I, we had a little two-bedroom house. Now we have a basically a blouse for our kid. But that two-bedroom house is still there, and now it's being used by family members. So I think it's very important that we add supply and we don't give up on these houses. And if we do, we get another house.

Speaker 2

Back on that lot, this will 30 seconds.

Speaker 4 (Wu)

Since you're bringing up inflation, that is something that our communities are all facing working class families are facing. Increasing and increases of costs, whether it's increasing. Taxes that they have seen over the last four. Years or just? Increasing utility prices and that is something that can be corrected. I have run on a campaign that opposes tax increases because I know from working class families that that is not something that they want to see. And so we need to fix the housing issue. But in order to do that also we need to be mindful that working class families, what they're asking for is stop increasing our prices.

Speaker 2

Next question from coming back to Kylie Cameron of KMW. Lily Wu, you're up first on this question.

Speaker 5

Wichita Transit continues to operate on limited hours and limited routes. Should the city look at revamping its transit services to make them more accommodating for residents.

Speaker 4 (Wu)

Absolutely, Kylie. I had the opportunity to speak with leadership across the street at Cedric County and I believe that this is not just the Cedric County, but it's an issue that is more regional and we need to think of transit in a regional way. We need to engage the workforce, the industry, asking them how can we better serve you in getting workers to your companies when we have a transit bus that only stops at the city limit and people can't get to places like Textron Aviation, we have an issue. So we need to engage our employers. As well, to be part of this solution, but I believe that it requires a regional approach and

also a collaborative approach, and that requires someone that can work well. Between City of Wichita, Sedgwick County and our partners, I've had the opportunity to be at the Sedgwick County Association of Cities, where, as just a Community member, I attend because it's important that we all see ourselves as part of the region, not just Wichita.

Speaker 2

Mr. Whipple one minute.

Speaker 3 (Whipple)

So the city of Wichita is the only entity that actually runs the Wichita public transportation. But you're right, there is a way when it comes to a regional strategy moving forward. Right now our issue is really bus drivers is we don't have enough bus drive. And I think that there's a play if we're smart, where we could actually tap into folks who are driving for Wichita public schools, folks who are driving for WSU. Is there a way in which we can pull in some of these resources and have a more regional transit plan so that you might be driving a school bus in a day, but then a night you're driving? One of our buses, and if we could bring more and also. A lot of people don't know this. We actually train our own CDL license our own bus drivers. So if folks are interested in getting a CDL for free, you can do so by signing up to be a part of our team at the City of Wichita and get that credential. I think also part of that is putting that credentialing process into some of our neighbors. Neighborhood buildings, so people who are looking to pivot in this economy could earn that credential and actually pivot into working for the city or working somewhere else with their commercial driver's license.

Speaker 2

Miss Wu, 30 seconds.

Speaker 4 (Wu)

We have a talent shortage, whether it's in our Police Department or other areas around our Community. That's why we need a mayor who can serve as an ambassador to attract not only talent into our community, but also investment. You need someone who you're proud of, making sure that that person is a collaborator working with Sedgwick County with our lawmakers, working with nonprofits and our community, we need someone that really. Advocates for the city of Wichita as someone who you cannot be proud of by being someone that can be at the table and collaborate instead of compete.

Speaker 2

Mr. Whipple 30 seconds.

Speaker 3 (Whipple)

Alright, so back to the question. The other thing that which doesn't have the other cities do is we don't have a designated tax source that goes right into our public transportation system. It's actually a general fund allocation. So every other city that's doing this better, they've been able to pretty much mark a percentage. Of gas tax or street tax into their public transit systems so they can make these revisions and keep that, that process moving forward. And I think there's a great opportunity for us to get there if we have someone in the office who actually knows how to navigate tax policy.

Speaker 2

Next question, Mr. Leffler from The Wichita Eagle. Brandon, you are first.

Speaker 3 (Whipple)

Give it to me down.

Speaker

OK.

Speaker 6

The city has replaced parking meters around our downtown attractions with a privatized smartphone based system, that is. More expensive and for many people far more difficult to use. Do you support this system and why or why?

Speaker 3 (Whipple)

Not man, we're just getting nailed by downs. Diane's top issues, so there's no right answer for this. For me, the actually the right answer is we need a blended approach. We have to modernize our public parking because frankly our meters people don't have coins anymore. They're not carrying A roll of quarters around with them. And most of the time people will park, take the risk. The big ticket. And then they're mad at me because the city ticketed them. I think as we move forward, though, we can embrace technology with the app services while also having a kiosk where people can pay using cash or credit and also utilizing still some of the older techno. There's nothing wrong with it, so I think as we move forward, we can see some more strategic turnover with the new technology. But also I get it. That's what I get chewed on for folks who have been doing it the same way for years and now they're doing it some other way and I'll just fix it. All right. So if I get my second term, I'll make sure you guys get the. Meters you need as we also transition over to some of the more technical modern approaches.

Speaker 2

Miss one minute.

Speaker 4 (Wu)

As a Community member who attended the ICT Summit just last week and we talked about the issue of parking, we do have to think smart, but we also have to remind ourselves that in our Community, just as I mentioned earlier, we have to think a little bit differently and walking in our Community needs to be something that we need to start getting used to it. It's good to walk and when we think about parking in the downtown core, there are places to park. Maybe not as convenient as others would like, but when you think of a big city and a growing city like ours. Parking lots make up real estate that could be used for those grocery stores that people keep talking about, so we need to think about parking in a smart and effective way, but also think about different ways to approach parking and walking because I believe that wichitans want to be part of a growing. City and that requires us to think like a bigger city, and that is sometimes parking that might be just a little bit further away.

Speaker 2

Mr. Whipple 30 seconds.

Speaker 3 (Whipple)

Well, The thing is, not everyone has the luxury of walking. The people who I hear the most push back from when it comes to changing these plans or older folks, folks who like to go to the shows at century too, and they are hesitant to put their information into credit card into a cell phone cuz they're the targets of scams. So I think just telling people, hey, we gotta walk more. I wanna walk more. I wanna look better. I wanna get my steps in. Don't get me wrong, but not everyone I talk to in Wichita has that luxury. So what can we do to also accommodate them? And I think it's not too much to ask to keep a lot with the older technology going as we transition over. And also in Wichita, if you mess with people's parking to get pretty upset, so you gotta make sure you gotta make sure. That you got a plan for that.

Speaker 2

Miss move 30 seconds.

Speaker 4 (Wu)

Accommodating those who cannot walk, who have wheelchair that need wheelchair access is important, and I believe that when when we had this new parking option in downtown Wichita, it needed to be communicated to our, to our Community. Be better, and that is something that I always say as the city government, we need to communicate with our community, not just passively, but really out there. So you understand not only how the process works and how your information will be protected with these programs. And so I believe that it requires someone in elected office. That also communicates the benefits and the costs of these new technologies.

Speaker 2

We will now move to closing statements here 2 minutes for each candidate. Lily Wu will go first.

Speaker 4 (Wu)

Well, thank you again, Tom and Kylie, Benita and Diane. Four years ago, we were promised change and leadership did not deliver. Wichita deserves better. A better leader and a better ambassador for our community. A leader you can be proud of. I've been traveling across Wichita asking are you satisfied with local government and I don't get many hands raised. Crime is rising, costs are increasing, career politicians continue to deteriorate. Our trust in local government. People are disappointed. They also feel less safe. They're tired of partisan bickering and unethical behavior. Career politicians who got us into this mess are not the ones who will get us out of it. I've been listening to you and I hear you. We want change, new leadership. And a fresh perspective. My vision is rooted in ensuring public safety, growing our economy, restoring trust in City Hall and building a united community. I will work with anyone who wants to improve our city, make our community better, find common ground and make Wichita proud. I'm a political outsider who wants to serve the city she has called home for 30 years. I want. This city to be a better place to live, work and raise a family. I'm Lily Wu and I hope to earn your vote on November 7th.

Speaker 2

Mr. Mr. Mr. Whipple. 2 minutes please.

Speaker 3 (Whipple)

Alright, over the last hour I've really enjoyed answering your questions and sharing our ideas for the next four years here in Wichita, but these are not just our ideas. These are our values and our values are that no one in Wichita who gives their time and talents to build our city and economy should live in poverty. Should live paycheck to paycheck or should have to worry if they can afford school supplies or new sneakers for their kids at the start of the school year. And I'm proud to call Wichita home to 1st class Apprenticeships and educational opportunities. Brave entrepreneurs, strong unions and hard working folks who have elevated our city to its current status as again leading the state of Kansas and economic opportunity and growth. Because of you, Wichita remains the best place to live. Work and raise a family, and while I'm encouraged by our accomplishments over the last four years, our work is not finish. In our own city, the city you built, the power of the working class is being threatened by my opponent. She is the handpicked candidate of the same insiders who want to use City Hall as a slush fund to expand profits at the cost of services and investments that we all benefit from. Never before in our city's history of these political insiders. And dark money machines came together and throw so much against the sitting mayor. And while I'm flattered to those insiders and to all who want to claw back the progress that we've achieved for the working families, I simply say bring it. On because what we do today, what we do today and the decisions we make over the next four years will determine the directory of our city over the next three decades. And when my kids are my age or our age 30 years from now, I want them to look back on this moment and say that we delivered for them. That we actually made the decisions and we made the hard calls to make sure that they had a life here in Wichita that is worthy of them to inherit, that they can get a piece of the American dream right here in our city and don't have to climb an airplane and ride off to some coast. With that, I want to thank the Eagle. I want to thank the boys. I want to thank UW. Tom Shine, thank you. And also can we give up for Chelsea, my wife, I want to thank her for putting up with me. While I do this stuff. Thank you, Chelsea. A round of applause for the candidates, please.

Speaker 1

So thank you once again to our partners, Wichita Eagle Community Boys, Wichita Journalism Collaborative. Thank you to Roxies for providing this great videos. So and here are some upcoming dates to remember October 17th. That is the last day to register to vote. October 23rd. That's when in person. Advanced voting begins November 2nd. That's when in person, satellite voting begins and November 7th Election Day. Again, tonight's debate will be posted later this week on kmw.org, and thank you so much for coming.