

What is Barr’s path to GOP nod for Senate? Kentuckians weigh in

BY AUSTIN HORN
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Can Rep. Andy Barr win a potentially crowded primary and claim a seat in the U.S. Senate?

That’s been the discussion of Kentucky’s political class for weeks, even before the longtime Central Kentucky congressman declared his run to replace Sen. Mitch McConnell in 2026.

Barr faces well-known competition in former attorney general Daniel Cameron, who has led in the early polling of the race — one survey from Cameron’s pollster had him at 44% support compared to Barr’s 18%.

But Barr’s campaign is still fresh, and, compared to Cameron, this race will be his first statewide contest.

The congressman, currently in his seventh term, is also entering the race with a major advantage: money.

Barr raised more than \$2 million into his transferable House reelection campaign account during the most recent quarter, ending March with more than \$5.3 million on hand.

The primary is still in the early stages, too.

It’s possible — perhaps even likely — another candidate with major resources joins the race.

Nate Morris, a Lexington tech entrepreneur, is eyeing the race while disparaging Cameron and Barr on social media for their ties to McConnell.

And there’s still time for someone not currently on the radar to enter the race.

How does all that factor into Barr’s chances?

We asked 11 Kentucky politicians. Here are their answers to six questions related to Barr’s campaign.

WHAT IS ANDY BARR’S PATH TO VICTORY?

Chris Wiest, Kenton County, Northern Kentucky attorney and Republican political figure: He needs to consolidate the establishment vote — because MAGA and Liberty are aligning/splitting behind other candidates.

Tres Watson, Lexington, former Republican Party of Kentucky spokesperson: To start with, Barr needs to post strong numbers across his central Kentucky Congressional District. That is paramount. After that, he needs to perform well in the counties of the Old Fifth, where he has already been endorsed by Hal Rogers, and in Northern Kentucky. If he can



Andy Barr

is from.

Teri Carter, Anderson County, progressive journalist and activist: Barr’s advantage is that he’s both the incumbent and a blank slate. He’s known for rare appearances in his district, with the exception of speaking before Trump-friendly audiences like the Chamber of Commerce.

Chris Kirkwood, Lexington, University of Kentucky political science Ph.D. candidate & elections analyst: His KY-06 base and divisions between Daniel Cameron and other more conservative candidates.

T.J. Litafik, Lexington, Republican strategist: Barr’s path to victory goes through his home turf of Central Kentucky coupled with a strong showing in Eastern and Southern Kentucky, and he has to hold his own in Louisville.

Jazmin Smith, Louisville, attorney and co-host of Democratic podcast My Old Kentucky Podcast: Cleaning up in Central and Eastern Kentucky and avoiding getting blown out in Louisville.

Al Cross, Frankfort, longtime Kentucky political journalist: A big margin in 6th Congressional District and counties outside it that are in the Lexington TV market; a smaller margin, but a plurality, in the 5th, with help from Rep. Hal Rogers; a big campaign treasury smartly spent.

Andrew Cooperrider, Nicholasville, Republican media figure and former candidate: Normally, Barr would have a path to victory by trying to secure the 20% of Republican primary voters who are very moderate and don’t typically like Trump, while then trying to pick up another 15%-20% with targeted messaging. He has the voting record and the background of a very moderate Republican and would be a strong contender in that lane. In a three or more way race that could leave Barr the ability to get enough of a percentage to win, especially with how much he has cash on hand.

Linda Blackford, Lexington, Herald-Leader opinion editor & columnist: The first path to victory is getting a Trump endorsement, which will then make other paths

do this, he can get away with a close third place in Jefferson, where Cameron lives and Morris

moot, presumably. But he’s been given a boost by the Hal Rogers endorsement, which will help him cement support in the eastern half of the state, while saving his money to get better recognition in the western half of the state.

WHAT MESSAGE OR ISSUE WOULD YOU ADVISE ANDY BARR TO FOCUS ON?

Wiest: I think Barr will try and run on a pro-Trump, pro-conservative message. Unfortunately, his voting record is opposite that.

Smith: It would likely benefit Andy Barr to focus on his support of Donald Trump. Cameron may also try to do this, as he has been endorsed by Trump in the past; however, Congressman Barr can highlight his actual experience in Congress and his support of the president’s agenda during both of his terms. Though Congressman Barr is likely pretty close to Senator McConnell ideologically, Barr has been willing to embrace Trump as early as his first term, whereas McConnell has sparred with Trump over the years.

Michael Frazier, Richmond, Republican strategist: All candidates should look at the Cameron 2023 gubernatorial race as what not to do, including Daniel Cameron. Candidates should remember the rhetoric that may give an overwhelming majority in the republican primary may kill your chance to win a general election. Instead of talking about ‘the queers’ and sensationalizing cultural issues, candidates should take a page from President Trump by discussing how they can help families put food on the table and money in their pockets to provide for the families. If Barr plays it right, he’ll see Nate Morris and Daniel Cameron continue to veer right to appeal to Northern Kentucky, leaving rural Kentucky for the taking.

Cross: Agreement with Trump (I gag when I say that).

Litafik: Barr should run as the “consistent conservative.” He has got more than just empty promises to make and can point to a very solid conservative voting record in the House. Barr has also been a very effective and responsive congressman in terms of constituent services, especially assisting military veterans, and that means a lot to everyday Kentuckians who need help from the federal government.

Blackford: Sad to say, he should focus on being a financial services expert because people will soon start suffering the effects of global trade wars. Even worse, he needs to paint Daniel Cameron as a loser, who couldn’t beat Beshear even with a Trump endorsement. Also he is a longtime critic of China, which will probably play well.

WHAT IS BARR’S BIGGEST ADVANTAGE IN THIS CONTEST?

Smith: He is well-liked and well-connected to his district. Barr has great constituent services and has always remained approachable. If he can campaign the same way he has in the 6th district and extend that across the state, I think he will have a huge advantage in the primary. In the general election, his advantage is being a Republican.

Watson: He’s a sitting congressman thus the only one who can actually say he is actively fighting for Trump in Washington. It also makes him the only candidate either not coming off a loss or never to have run. His constituent services is also a strength. People who may not necessarily like his politics may have a relative, loved one, or they themselves may have needed help with their social security or help from the SBA for their business. Barr’s office has always paid extra attention to that part of his office and it gives him a political buffer in many circumstances.

Kim Geveden, Lexington, Democratic strategist: I think it will be Barr’s to lose. He should have adequate resources, a strong geographic base and structural, institutional advantages that his GOP opponents simply do not possess.

Frazier: Andy Barr is fundraising machine and a seasoned statesman. Although Nate Morris is well-connected and likely better connected to the Trump administration, Congressman Barr has the contacts and the fundraising machine and can hit the ground running.

Cross: Money and a base of voters comfortable with him.

WHAT IS BARR’S BIGGEST LIABILITY OR DISADVANTAGE IN THIS CONTEST?

Litafik: To a portion of the Republican electorate, experience is a negative — they want an outsider who wants to go to Washington and burn it down. It is hard to get that

swath of voters on your side if you are a seven-term congressman.

Carter: If the economy is still tanking in 2026, Barr could be toast. His biggest disadvantage is that someone like Daniel Cameron or Nate Morris will just not be the guy who was there when they lost their savings. Plus, what does Andy Barr really stand for these days? Who is Andy Barr? I’m not sure even Barr knows who Barr is anymore.

Blackford: Being a blue blood Lexington lawyer trying to win votes from Kentucky’s working class rural voters.

Cooperrider: Awful voting record you can easily hang around his neck. His history and support on wars and big spending will destroy him if he tries to run as an ultra conservative without Trump’s endorsement. He’ll lose the moderates and seem very disingenuous.

Smith: His biggest disadvantage may be a lack of name recognition across the state. Barr has represented the 6th District in Kentucky for over a decade now, but outside of his district, I am not sure how well known he is, whereas Daniel Cameron has run for statewide office twice now.

Cross: Perception that he is a privileged prick.

Frazier: Congressman Barr will need to stay out of the 6th Congressional race, either in fundraising or through whispers. Backing the wrong horse can cause a disadvantage by losing a region in state-wide race. Also, respectfully, on ‘ESG’ (an investing strategy focusing on environment, social and governance impact derided by Barr and other conservatives): no one knows what ‘ESG’ is. People understand DEI – less ESG, more ending DEI.

DO YOU THINK PRESIDENT TRUMP WILL ENDORSE IN THIS RACE? IF SO, WHO?

Cooperrider: I think he will, but right now I believe he’ll end up double endorsing if he waits to endorse until after the filing deadline. If he double endorses, Barr will be one of the two, but he has too iffy of a voting history to survive that if the other endorsement goes to a person without a voting history and is well funded.

Cross: Not unless he thinks he can pick the winner.

Wiest: I don’t think Barr has a path to the Trump endorsement. I place odds on Nate Mor-

ris getting it, but only if Nate increases his polling numbers in the next 6-10 months. Daniel Cameron has a problem with losing the governor’s race to Beshear, and Trump tends to back known winners. It’s possible the president sits this one out.

Carter: Trump hates losers. So Trump will endorse whomever he thinks will win, period.

Watson: I think the most likely scenario, barring some revelation, is that Trump endorses multiple candidates like he has in many other states. In that instance, I’m certain Barr would be one of those endorsed.

Geveden: I think he waits until the closing days to see what the polls say. Look for him to endorse whoever the polling says is most likely to win so he can take credit. If Massie doesn’t run, Trump will most likely endorse Barr as Barr’s votes on his agenda can do more for him than Cameron and others.

Litafik: President Trump should endorse Barr because Barr has proven he supports the Trump agenda in Congress. However, he could endorse Nate Morris, or he could endorse Barr and Morris as he has endorsed multiple candidates in other Republican primaries. I do think it is highly unlikely the President endorses Daniel Cameron this time around.

WHEN IT’S ALL SAID AND DONE, WHO DO YOU THINK WILL JOIN THE FIELD?

Cooperrider: Nate Morris is a clearly interested in the race and will most likely jump in. I’m sure some smaller candidates will as well. There seems to be a big desire for at least a third or fourth major choice from the online Kentucky GOP community.

Cross: Morris.

Watson: It will be Cameron, Morris, Barr, and a cast of d-list candidates.

Litafik: Running for U.S. Senator is not like running for a local office — one does not typically just jump in and have much of a chance at winning. While there may be room for other candidates, the window is quickly closing for top-tier runners to enter the field. I am not so sure the top tier will include anyone other than Barr, Cameron and Morris. It is a long slog to start raising money, hire staff, build an organization, and put in the shoe leather across Kentucky, so anyone looking to enter the race better start moving quickly.

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Lindsey Wilson College board votes to make private school a university

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Lindsey Wilson College, the private school in Columbia, Kentucky, will change its name to Lindsey Wilson University, the school’s trustees unanimously voted Thursday.

The change was brought about because of the school’s growth in recent years, both in enrollment and academic offerings, and “to reflect the mission, character and direction of this incredible school,” said board of trustees chair Denny Howell.

In the past two years,

the enrollment at Lindsey Wilson has grown by more than 1,000 students, with 4,147 students enrolled in fall 2024, according to data from the Kentucky Council on Postsecondary Education.

On Thursday, the school’s board of trustees approved the name change, which will go into effect July 1. President William Luckey, who has served as president since 1998, said the name change was needed because the school is “far more dynamic than it was even 10 years ago.”

“I’ve always been convinced that the best teaching and learning in the world happens at small,

private colleges across the United States,” Luckey said. “That is why this move does not change our mission, who we serve or what we do, but rather, it reflects the dynamic nature of who we have become.”

The school was founded in 1903 as a training school for Vanderbilt University, and became a junior college in 1923. It began offering bachelor’s degrees in 1985 and graduate degrees in 1993.

Trustee Carrie Farris said she believes the name change will help with recruiting, and especially recruiting international students.

“This move is very good



Provided by Lindsey Wilson College

Lindsey Wilson College, located in Columbia, Kentucky, voted to change its name to Lindsey Wilson University after student enrollment and academic growth.

for Lindsey Wilson’s long-term future, as this school will continue to change students’ lives because of faculty and staff who en-

courage them and provide them a solid foundation to launch successful careers,” Farris said.

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