



CANDIDATE SPOTLIGHT

GARY CLEMENS

CLERK OF THE CIRCUIT COURT

CANDIDATE: **GARY CLEMENS**

OFFICE: **LOUDOUN COUNTY CLERK OF THE CIRCUIT COURT**

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What would you like voters to know about you?

I have lived in Loudoun County my whole life, so the county is very important to me and my family. I believe I have been given certain talents, experience, and knowledge and I can use those tools to better serve citizens of Loudoun County. I am serving them faithfully, impartially, and diligently as the Clerk of the Circuit Court and I would like to continue to serve the citizens of Loudoun County. I have had a career in public service, and it's been entirely in the court system, so I have extensive experience as Clerk of the Circuit Court.

How long is the term for Clerk of the Circuit Court?

The Clerk of the Circuit Court office is a constitutional office like the Treasurer, Sheriff, Commissioner of the Revenue, and Commonwealth's Attorney's office, but unlike those offices, the Clerk of the Circuit Court has an eight-year term. Our founders of the Virginia Constitution established those terms because they believed that it was important to have consistency in the court system.

How long have you been the Clerk of the Circuit Court?

I have been the Clerk of the Circuit Court for the past 24 years. Previously I worked as Deputy Clerk in the Fairfax County Circuit Court, and I have worked in other roles in the court system, so I have well over 30 years of experience in circuit court management.

You mentioned that you have lived in Loudoun County your whole life. What are some of your favorite things about our county?

History comes to mind immediately. It is something that is significant in my role and responsibilities which is the preservation of historic court records that date back to 1757.

Loudoun County is very unique in Virginia in that we have our entire collection of circuit court records dating back to the beginning of the origin of our county, so it's vitally important that we properly preserve and protect them not only for our residents today to do research to learn about our history, but for future generations. We are digitizing them online for people to do research, as well as creating educational programs for individuals to learn more about Loudoun's history. We have also established extensive partnerships throughout Loudoun County with historical groups and societies so that we can reach more people through education about our history.

What do you enjoy about living in Loudoun County?

Loudoun County is a wonderful place to live. We have the urban setting in the east and a totally different setting in the west. It's great to experience Loudoun County with mountains to the west and more hiking and outdoor opportunities as well as breweries and wineries. If you enjoy the urban setting, we have that in the east. Loudoun is very unique and diverse, so it is very special. It's also a great place for families I've lived here my whole life; we raised our three sons here and I can't think of a better place to raise a family than Loudoun County.

That also goes back to my service and is one of the things that compel me to continue to be the best Clerk of the Circuit Court because the services we provide affect individuals and families. One thing I like to tell people is even if you don't think you'll do business with the Clerk of the Circuit Court you probably will. When you buy a house, your deed gets recorded here. When you get married, we issue marriage licenses. If you need someone to certify the legality of a document, we issue notary commissions, and the list goes on and on. I think no matter what you do in Loudoun County you are probably going to have some contact at some point with the Clerk of the Circuit Court. That is why it is so important to have someone in this role that has experience, the right temperament, a heart for true service, and integrity as well as someone who is forward thinking in terms of technology. I have demonstrated in the past 24 years that I embody these attributes and I am thankful that I have had the opportunity to serve, and I would like to serve another eight years.

Do you have a legal background?

I am not an attorney, but I have worked with attorneys my whole career. I am a certified paralegal, and that is how I got started in my career. I've worked in circuit court management for 30 years and I have certifications in circuit court management. You don't have to be an attorney to be a Clerk of the Circuit Court even though you work with judges and attorneys, because it is more circuit court management like executive management. Since my whole career has been in the courts field, I do have a lot of knowledge that attorneys don't have. If you come into this role without that type of experience it is difficult to do a good job and I have been blessed to have the background and skills to do this job and serve the citizens of Loudoun County.

Where did you go to school?

I graduated from Loudoun Valley High School and then went to James Madison University where I received a B.A. in political science and my paralegal certification. I then acquired a master's degree in public administration from George Mason University.

Has your master's degree in public administration been valuable in your career?

Yes, I started using my knowledge even before I finished my master's while working in the Fairfax Circuit Court and by taking courses with people who have been in public service for decades and who were already outstanding leaders. I was able to take their experiences and life lessons in their professions and was able to put that in place in Fairfax County Circuit Court. I have done a lot of things in terms of how I run my office based on my master's degree.

What does a Clerk of the Circuit Court do?

The list is probably too long for this interview because the Code of Virginia has over 800 statutory responsibilities for the Clerk, but I'll try to narrow it down.

First, I am a recorder of deeds so when there is a legal transaction involving real property, whether it's the deed or easement, all those transactions are recorded in my office. I am also responsible for collecting the state and local taxations associated with those transactions, and we digitize those transactions for the public to access. Under Virginia law, deeds and land records are open for public inspection.

I am also essentially the probate judge of wills and estates which do not come through the courts but to the Clerk's office.

I also do jury administration. We manage all the details as far as individuals qualified to be jurors and we make sure the judge has a sufficient number of jurors to serve in jury trials and yes, I'm the one who sends out those jury summons for people to serve. It is an important constitutional duty, and we appreciate our citizens serving.

I mentioned history and I am also responsible for the maintenance, preservation, and public access to our historic court records that date back to colonial times.

I issue marriage licenses and notary public commissions.

I assist the judges through my staff with circuit court proceedings. In criminal court cases we prepare the court orders that indicate whether someone is going to be incarcerated, what their sentence is if they are convicted and all those details.

We also take care of all the criminal and civil court records and all those are for the most part accessible to the public.

We have an internal group that handles information technology. One thing I have moved aggressively on is moving this office forward into the digital age and beyond by leading our IT team. I am very proud that I have implemented numerous technology enhancements which have not cost Loudoun County taxpayers one penny. It has been funded through state grants extensively, but I have also created a revenue stream by providing a subscription service for businesses and professionals to access records such as deeds and land records digitally without having to come to the courthouse. These are million-dollar projects and I have never had to ask taxpayers to fund it so I'm very proud of that.

I also have a financial management accounting team that oversees taxpayer's revenues, and I am pleased that over the last several years we have had clean financial audits.

That's just some of the things the Clerk does, but there are a lot more and that is why you need the right person with the right background to do this job. Not everyone can jump into the Clerk's seat and know how to run it. And having had this position for the last 24 years we are going in the right direction and no matter where you are politically, I believe most citizens are pleased with the direction of our office. And I guide myself by faithfully working for the people I serve. Public service has been a really important part of my life and most of my professional life. When I go to work, I know that I am working for you and all the people of Loudoun County. The Clerk of the Circuit Court is directly accountable to the citizens of the county.

How closely does the Clerk of the Circuit Court work with the Sheriff's Office and the Commonwealth Attorney's (CA) Office?

I work closely with every constitutional officer because a lot of things we do overlap. If the CA's office initiates an indictment, we work with them and if there is a disposition, we exchange data that the court uses in dispositions of criminal cases. We work extensively with the Sheriff's Office by virtue of court cases, and we coordinate to make sure there are enough bailiffs in the court room or if there is a disposition in a criminal case. The Sheriff's Office also does all the background checks for the concealed handgun permit which has to be done within 45 days. One year there were 800 applications that they had to process, and we were able to issue them through my office within the timeframe. The Sheriff's Office does an outstanding job helping us issue these permits.

I also work with the Treasurer and the Commissioner of the Revenue for the financial aspects of taxation and revenue for all the information for land records and deeds that are filed and the tax assessments that are generated and make sure the tax bills are accurate.

So, the constitutional officers are basically a team.

Yes, we work as a team, so cooperation is important.

What do you enjoy doing in your free time?

I enjoy spending time with family, and I am deliberate and intentional about that. My wife and I enjoy being outdoors doing things like hiking, going to live concert venues, and traveling. One of our sons is an opera performer so we try to go to his performances as much as possible. I enjoy attending sporting events and just spending time with family and friends. My wife and I also enjoy serving the community through local charities and nonprofits. We live in a prosperous county, but there are people who need help, and we like to work with organizations that provide help and resources to them.