

Race for County Clerk Including Gay Man Denied Marriage License By Kim Davis Gets Lots Of Attention

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A local political race in a northeast Kentucky town is drawing attention well beyond the Appalachian community. A gay man who was refused a marriage license by the current county clerk is running for that very position.

David Ermold hopes to win his Democratic primary race tomorrow, so he has a chance to unseat Kim Davis. Davis is the woman who wouldn't grant him and his now husband their marriage license three years ago. Media attention is affecting all four candidates in the county race.

It's a Tuesday afternoon in the town of Morehead, Kentucky. Blue and White signs with the words leadership, fairness and responsibility line the front yard of David Ermold's campaign headquarters on East Main Street. Ermold is one of four Democrats running in the May primary hoping to eventually become Rowan County's Clerk.

Ermold: "If you were refused service from one of your elected officials, I know no other way or any other reason to get into a race because that's why you replace those officials is because they literally are not serving their electorate."

A University of Pikeville English Professor, Ermold hopes ultimately to unseat Republican Kim Davis. Following the Supreme Court Decision that effectively legalized same-sex marriage Davis refused to issue any marriage licenses in Rowan County based on her religious beliefs.

David Ermold and his husband, who's name is also David, were one of the couples turned down. The story gained international attention. Ermold has received campaign support from people around the country including donations from actresses Susan Sarandon and Amy Schumer.

Ermold: "We don't stand just for Rowan County. We stand for a rural community. We are an educated caring community and we're gonna send that message out there. We're gonna change the politics in Kentucky a little bit."

But Ermold isn't the only Democrat vying for the position of County Clerk. There are 3 others, Nashia Fife, Elwood Caudill Jr. and Jamey Jessee.

In 2015 Nashia Fife was among those at the courthouse protesting Kim Davis' actions. Fife believes she's qualified to run for county clerk because of her time in the military and her work as a supervisor. She's even been asked if she planned to drop out of the race so David Ermold has a better chance to win.

Fife: "That's what I've been facing this whole time. This idea that David needs to win because he somehow deserves it because he was denied a license. And I get that people want that poetic justice but to me that's not what public service is."

Sitting outside drinking iced tea at the Fuzzy Duck Café, Morehead native Katy Caric says she's voting for Ermold. Anne Patrick says it's between David Ermold and Elwood Caudill Jr. But says there are certain things about Ermold's campaign she doesn't love.

Anne: "...like getting outside money so heavily. It seems like the focus is getting away from Morehead itself. But I'd much rather have David Ermold or one of the individuals who's running against Kim Davis in office than Kim Davis." Katy: "My thing is I think Kim, when the actual campaign gets started will get a lot of outside money so it might as well be an equal playing field."

The town of nearly 8000 people is like a family, everyone knows each other. Candidate Elwood Caudill Jr. says he's friends with Kim Davis and her husband. He ran against her in the 2014 primary and lost by 23 votes. He wants to "focus on the future". He doesn't want to bring any more negativity to the county.

Caudill: "Nobody can take a vacation and go anywhere in the United States and tell them they're from Rowan County without someone wanting to get on this topic. And it's not good for us. We're not use to this."

A little more than 9000 Democrats are registered to vote in Rowan County. Jamey Jessee hopes some of those votes will be his. He's not running because of what he calls the "Kim Davis situation". He says under his leadership he would have issued the marriage licenses. He truly thinks, as a native of Morehead, he's the best man for the job.

Jessee: "What I'm wanting to do is bring everybody together. I want both parties, everyone together. That's what I've run on this entire time. And that's what we'll continue and hopefully through November that's what we'll keep doing."

On this night a few hundred people are enjoying music at the town's Moonlight Stage. Although Ermold's campaign organized the event, a lot of people just came out for a good time.

Ermold's husband, David Moore says campaigning is exhausting and thinks his husband will win.

Moore : "I still think it's gonna be close. There are a lot of good people running in the primary. We're all gonna look back on this and we're all gonna have a great memory no matter the outcome."

The winner in this county race garnering more attention than many others across the state will take on Kim Davis in November.