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Maury County Commission asks state to fund \$3M Columbia Dam study

Jay Powell

Columbia Daily Herald
USA TODAY NETWORK - TENNESSEE

The Maury County Commission is asking the Duck River Watershed Planning Partnership to fund a \$3 million feasibility study for the potential revitalization of the Columbia Dam project.

A resolution seeking the funding passed 16-1 vote during a recent commission meeting.

While the resolution's passage does not guarantee a study will take place, it is what project supporters have advocated for as a "first major step" in determining if the project can be done, how much it could cost and if it would be the most viable option in addressing water needs across Southern Middle Tennessee.

District 5 Commissioner Scott Summers said the feasibility study, if anything, would provide a clear and up-to-date answer as to whether the project is viable or not.

"This county commission would not decide if there is a dam or not. That would be up to the federal government with TVA and the Army Corps of Engineers," Summers said.

"This county commission is only asking for answers because all we have is speculation. We have old studies, but nothing that is current. I would like to see an independent study done that would give me those answers I need ... and the government would need to say 'yes' or 'no' and how much this is going to cost."

In February, U.S. Rep. Andy Ogles, R-Tennessee, 5th Congressional District, announced he had filed legislation in Washington D.C. in pursuit of the study.

District 4 Commissioner Mike Kuzawinski, who cast the only opposing vote locally, argued the commission should not pass a resolution, partly because of Ogles' current pursuit of the feasibility study. He also argued it would encourage state spending on a federal project.

"This is a federal bill we are going to spend state dollars on," Kuzawinski said. "To take state tax dollars and state money from taxpayers to pay for a federal bill, I think, is political posturing at best. I just don't think it is a good idea."

TDEC previously denied Dam as an option

April Grippo, Director of Tennessee Department of Environment and Conservation (TDEC), who also serves on the Duck River Watershed Planning Partnership, shared a report with commissioners during a recent meeting last month.

The planning partnership previously recommended 18 options for long-term water solutions in November 2025, but impounding the Duck River to build the Columbia Dam was not among those recommendations, Grippo said.

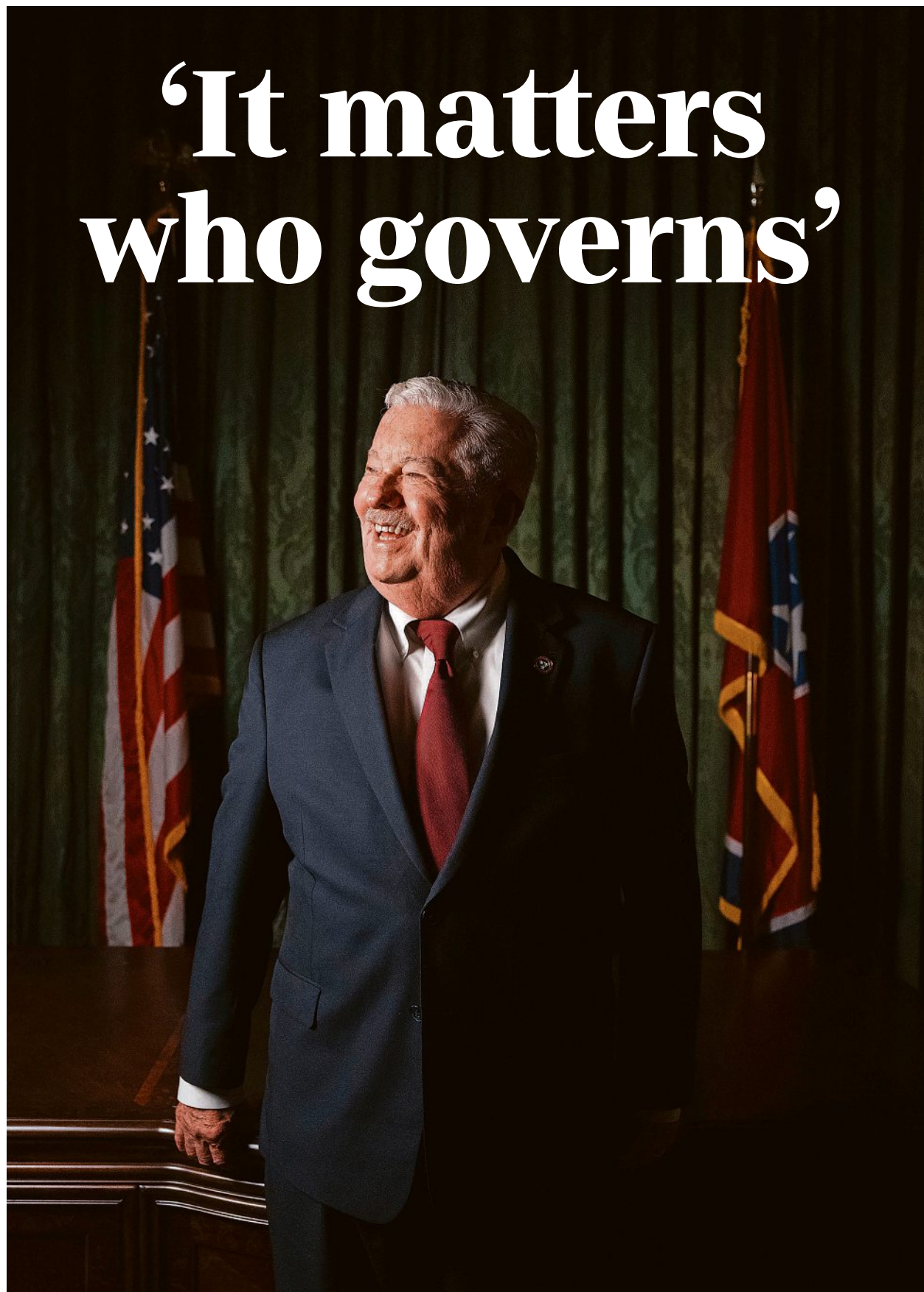
"This was not an oversight," Grippo said. "The partnership was intentionally, deliberately silent on

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The original location of where a family mill sat on the Duck River in Columbia, on Nov. 18, 2022. In 1882, farm patriarch Richard "Kettle Dick" Anderson's grandson, Richard Anderson Kennedy, built the first successful dam across the Duck River. Anderson and descendant John A. Delk built a mill and general store on the west bank of the river. The mill operated from 1882 to 1956 and was vital to the prosperity of the families in and around Hampshire.

LIAM KENNEDY/THE DAILY HERALD



Lt. Gov. Randy McNally stands in his office for a portrait at the Tennessee Capitol in Nashville on April 7.

NICOLE HESTER / THE TENNESSEAN

Retiring Lt. Gov. Randy McNally reflects on five decades in the state legislature

Vivian Jones Nashville Tennessean | USA TODAY NETWORK - TENNESSEE

It's 8:30 a.m. on a Thursday. Senators enter Tennessee's Senate Chamber through massive oak doors. They take their seats at 33 desks, nestled between columns of chocolate marble. • A buzzer calls stragglers to the chamber. Staff whisper on the sidelines. Clerks organize stacks of bill folders. • Lt. Gov. Randy McNally, 82, climbs the stairs to the speaker's rostrum and declares the Senate in session. "Mr. Sergeant at Arms, please invite the members in and close the door," the Oak Ridge Republican says, dropping the gavel. • He welcomes a minister to open the day with prayer and the Pledge of Allegiance. Then it's off to the races.

But Senate Republicans started their morning with less pomp and circumstance, in McNally's corner suite on the seventh floor of the Cordell Hull State Office Building. Caucus members filed in for McNally's bill review meeting, coffee in hand. They greeted his executive staff, Pam Jenkins and Debbie Martin, then headed down a short hallway to his conference room.

Above the door is an accolade — and a challenge: "It matters who governs."

McNally is retiring this year, after nearly five decades in state government. First elected in 1978, McNally has been a part of the state's metamorphosis from a Democratic stronghold to one of the reddest states in the nation. Elected to the Senate in 1986, Republican colleagues have chosen him to lead the upper chamber as lieutenant governor since 2017.

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