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For immediate release

Matthew Shepherd ('98) (Pursuing people-first politics)

By Jon Merryman

November 18, 2022

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There are a few things that seem to be in Matthew Shepherd's DNA—politics, law, Arkansas and Ouachita. He is a fifth-generation Ouachitonian, a family legacy starting with his great-great-grandfather, who attended Ouachita in the 1890s. It was his father's career that exposed him to the possibilities in the legal field, and he became an elected official somewhat unexpectedly.

"Growing up with my father as an attorney and later a judge—and my mother being a U.S. history teacher—law and politics were subjects I grew up around," Shepherd said. He earned a B.A. in history and political science from Ouachita in 1998 and earned his J.D. from the University of Arkansas in 2001.

"While opening my small-town law practice, I became involved in the Union County Republican Committee and served as chairman when our local House seat came open," he said. "I tried to recruit others to run, but was ultimately encouraged by many to run for it myself."

Shepherd currently is serving his sixth term as Arkansas State Representative for District 6 and third term as Speaker of the Arkansas House of Representatives; he is believed to be the longest serving Speaker in the history of the state. He has served on a number of committees and especially noted serving as chair of the House Judiciary Committee and as lead sponsor on the legislation for the Sales Tax Holiday.

"Being from South Arkansas and seeing folks go to Texas and Louisiana to buy school supplies and clothes, we were able to pass legislation so that folks could stay right here at home," he explained. "It's kept that money in Arkansas and allows folks to save a little money right here in the state."

Shepherd said he tries to keep the people of Arkansas on his mind as he undertakes the day-to-day tasks of legislation.

"I try to remind myself every day that it doesn't matter what kind of legislation is coming up," he said. "Sometimes it seems like we're working on something no one will care about, but every piece of legislation affects the state of Arkansas, and there are probably some Arkansans out there that this is really of great importance to."

Keeping people first in what Shepherd calls a hyper-partisan time has become more and more difficult. "As an attorney, you're going to win some and lose some and you have to move on to the next case, and that's what I've tried to bring to the House," he said.

"For me, it comes down to treating people how I would like to be treated, and I try to give respect to everyone who is a part of this process," he noted. "I try to make sure in how I conduct myself and how I interact with folks that I go about it the right way."

Shepherd lives in El Dorado with his wife, Alie (Hill '98), and their three teenage children. They are members of First Baptist Church, where Matthew is a deacon and Sunday school teacher. In addition to his roles in the House, he is partner at Shepherd & Shepherd, P.A., practicing law alongside his brother, John Thomas, and fellow Ouachita alumnus Will Hegi ('15). He also is a board member of the Arkansas Baptist Foundation, the Boys and Girls Club of El Dorado and El Dorado Fifty for the Future and serves as president of the Murphy USA Classic football game.



By Jon Merryman, director of alumni relations