

Capital Region Stands Up State House and Senate Candidate Questionnaire

Please answer the following questions by midnight on Monday, March 16th. Capital Region Stands Up will post the answers from all candidates on our website and share with our members and mailing list through email and Facebook.

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1. As a member of the PA General Assembly, what would you do to lower drug prices for Pennsylvanians?

Support the Prescription Drug Affordability Act written by Representatives Frankel and Davis. It would set up a standing commission to review high-priced prescription drugs and then set limits on what companies can charge for them in the Commonwealth. If a company refuses to abide with the mandate of the commission – then the Commonwealth can import the drug from another country. This has already been enacted in many states including Florida and Maryland.

2. Do you support work requirements for Medicaid recipients? Why or why not?

I would not support this bill. There is already a job and/or training requirement for food stamps. Health care though Medicaid should not be held to such a standard - as it is much more important to the recipient and their families and they only receive it when they absolutely need it - not like weekly food stamp disbursements. In many cases, these are the folks that need health care the most and it should not be denied to them through these means.

3. As a member of the PA General Assembly, how would you balance the critical importance of meeting PA's goal for carbon reduction (26% by 2025 and 80% by 2050 as measured against 2005 levels) with the creation of good paying jobs that are claimed by the energy sector?

We must not be forced into the false choice that creating a better environment will cost energy sector jobs. It is exactly the opposite - new good paying jobs will come from the transition to cleaner energy. Thousands of jobs will be created installing solar panels, windmills and other clean energy generators - as well as having to service and maintain them for decades to come.

4. The first bill amending the State's Human Relations Act barring discrimination in housing, employment and public accommodations based on gender identity and sexual orientation was introduced in 1976. PA still does not have a law on the books that accomplishes this. What action would you support to ensure protection of our LGBTQ community?

Pennsylvania is the only state in our region of the country that does not have an anti-LGBTQ+ discrimination law. It is appalling that someone can get married on Saturday and then get fired on Monday because they married the person they love. To get this measure passed, we must elect more LGBTQ+ friendly to the Pennsylvania Legislature to pass this legislation.

We must also take steps to prevent discrimination specifically to the Trans Community and pass laws to protect their right to self-identify and prevent them from discrimination at medical facilities and in correctional facilities.

5. When you become a state legislator, what specific steps would you take to attempt to improve the ethical rules in the PA General Assembly?

We need to pass the legislative gift ban – which has had some movement in House Committees, but no votes from either chamber. We need to pass HB 39 as soon as possible. This bill comes up every session and gets nowhere – we need to elect legislators that are serious about reform. Transparency is absolutely vital in our government and we must always strive for more, not less.

6. In recent years, the General Assembly has attempted to constrict women's reproductive rights. What is your position on this important issue?

TRAP (targeting restrictions on abortion providers) laws that go to put reproductive health service clinics out of business are unfair, misleading and wrong. We must do all we can to prevent attempts to chip away at Roe v. Wade in Pennsylvania. If the U.S. Supreme Court overturns Roe v. Wade, it will be up to the states to keep abortion legal – and we need to remember, rich women will always be able to get an abortion – it is poor women and girls that we need to protect their rights.

7. What are your plans for improving basic education in this state? Should the rules for funding charter schools be changed?

Although education funding has increased under Governor Wolf, we must still do more. The Commonwealth still has meet its obligations to the fair funding system. Hand-in-hand with that increased funding comes paying our teachers more – we must pay our teachers at least \$45,000 per year. We trust these professionals with our children, we should pay them with respect to the responsibility with give them.

We must have the same requirements and standards for all public schools – brick and mor-tar, as well as charter and cyber schools. If they are getting public money, they should all be held to the same standard.

8. State government support for tuition at state-supported and state-related institutions ranks among the lowest in the nation, helping to push the cost of attending public colleges up 66% in the last 15 years, after adjusting for inflation. Indeed, PA ranks number 1 in the nation for highest student debt. High tuition costs have also resulted in a decline in attendance of low and middle income students. How would you address this conundrum?

We need to put a freeze on tuition increases at state schools for three years. Establish a educational debt payment plan for young people that become teachers or otherwise commit designated jobs that benefit the community. Establish more community colleges and make their two-year associate's degree free.

9. Should this state have stronger gun safety laws? If you agree what would you do?

Yes – we need to pass common sense gun legislation and at the same time respect those that already have guns. We need to enact stronger and more complete background checks, truly close the gun show loophole and increase mental health funding. We can look at red flag laws, but they are less likely to be a real solution than a feel-good measure that really won't do much of anything.

10. Children who grow up in high-poverty neighborhoods where 30% or more of the households have income below the poverty level live with toxic stress caused by financial hardship and fear of violence. Chronic stress in children has been linked with diabetes, heart disease and stroke later in life, as well as depression, suicide and teen pregnancy. An Annie E Casey Foundation study found that 323,000 children in PA live in high poverty neighborhoods – 12% of our children. If elected, what legislation would you promote that could begin to address these issues?

It shouldn't be hard to be a kid – but for too many it is. Their parents' stress levels affect their children and in turn, this stunts their abilities and their opportunities.

Raising the minimum wage gradually to \$15.00 would be a good start to alleviating some of this stress. Also, we must provide greater health care options in urban and rural areas – places that provide free or very-low-cost care like the Hamilton Health Center in Harrisburg.

We must also pass common-sense gun legislation in order to stop gun violence and crack down harder on illegal guns that are used to harm those in our most vulnerable communities.

11. The PA County Commissioners Association has repeatedly called for restoration of an \$84 million cut to mental health funding made in 2012-13 by then Governor Tom Corbett. Indeed, funding for mental health services has been virtually flat-lined since 2007-08. Meanwhile, more than 21% of those who need mental health services in PA can't get them. There are long waits for visits to psychiatrists and therapists. Few schools have social workers on staff that can address the significant mental health needs of children. What would you do to improve access to mental health services in the Commonwealth?

This must be made a priority. We must increase the number of social workers and nurses in our schools, to help our children before they become a harm to themselves, their families or the community.

The legislature should mandate a mental health component in every clinic or medical facility that receives funding from the Commonwealth – this should especially be the case for urban and rural areas – areas where mental health care still has a stigma attached to it. These actions can help stem this concern and make some real progress.

12. Despite boasting the highest gas tax in the country, and highways that are perpetually under construction, Pennsylvania still finishes 35th in the nation for the overall cost-effectiveness and condition of its highway system, according to a report by the Reason Foundation. Researchers found that overall, the state finished 25th for its overall fatality rate; 46th in structurally deficient bridges; 35th in traffic congestion; 32nd in urban Interstate pavement condition, and 32nd in rural Interstate pavement condition. What would you do to address these pressing infrastructure needs?

We must pass the Governor's Restore Pennsylvania legislation, which would provide \$4.5 billion dollars to fix our roads and bridges. The funding for this bill comes from a natural gas extraction tax, not a gasoline tax, which is what funded the 2013 Infrastructure Bill. I would also ensure that the money raised for infrastructure goes to infrastructure instead of being secretly funneled to other institutions like the 2013 Infrastructure Bill's money did.

13. What do you see as the 3 most important issues for your district?

Education, Healthcare, jobs/income levels

Candidate Name *

Patty Smith

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