

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?

As a veteran of our armed forces and a pastor in our local community, I have seen firsthand how medical conditions that require the use of prescription drugs can cause significant financial hardship. Recent survey data reveals that one in five Pennsylvanians have been forced not to fill a prescription due to cost, and one in six have cut pills in half or skipped doses in order to save money. I support legislation to establish an independent Prescription Drug Affordability Board with statewide oversight authority. Our system needs to empower stakeholders to negotiate lower prices, promote pricing transparency, and facilitate competition. In the wealthiest nation on earth, no one should have to choose between paying their medical bills and paying for their mortgage, rent, or utilities. No one should have to skip treatment in order to afford groceries. And no one should have to cut their pills in half in order to make ends meet.

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

No. Medicaid is a vital state-federal partnership that provides health care access to our nation's most vulnerable populations. The majority of Medicaid recipients are children, disabled, elderly, or individuals who live below 133% of the federal poverty line despite working full- or part-time jobs. While there is a small percentage of able-bodied Medicaid recipients who are unemployed adults, these individuals are honest people who are already looking for work. They do not need to be humiliated into seeking employment by an onerous set of work requirements. Furthermore, most research indicates that implementing a rigid set of Medicaid work requirements would cost more money than it would save. As a state senator, I will oppose efforts to impose onerous Medicaid work requirements because I believe that such requirements would be costly in terms of both money and lives.

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?

Many elected officials have claimed that we must choose between our economy and our environment. This is a false choice. We can have a vibrant economy and protect our environment, but we need the right policies and the right leaders to implement them. More Americans are now employed in the renewable energy sector than by the fossil fuel industry. I support investing in renewable energy and implementing an incentive-based program such as cap-and-trade or carbon-fee-and-dividend to move our economy toward clean energy. As a state senator, I will fight to strengthen our alternative energy portfolio standards and maintain the Act 129 energy efficiency and conservation programs.

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?

During my 20 years as an officer in the U.S. Army, I was privileged to serve alongside a diverse collection of individuals whose backgrounds varied according to race, ethnicity, religion, and sexual orientation. In the Pennsylvania State Senate, it will be my honor to represent ALL people who live in the 15th District. If elected, I would cosponsor and vote in favor of legislation to amend Pennsylvania's Human Relations Act to extend protections to the LGBTQ community.

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?

I am running to restore integrity to our political process and public confidence in our elected representatives. Pennsylvania's ethics standards for elected officials are among the weakest in the country. I support comprehensive campaign finance reform that limits the size of contributions and requires detailed disclosure about how campaign funds are spent. We need to make sure that our legislators are working for the people rather than doing the bidding of special interests and the select few who fund their campaigns. We can also help ensure the ethical behavior of elected officials by making them more accountable to the people they serve. That's why I support same-day voter registration, in-person early voting, and putting an end to partisan gerrymandering.

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

A woman's right to access reproductive health care, including the right to choose, must be protected. Such difficult decisions should be left to a woman in consultation with her family, faith leaders, and medical professionals, and not left in the hands of politicians. It's also critical for our elected officials to support women who choose to have children by providing affordable and accessible health care, enacting paid family and medical leave, making child care more affordable, and expanding access to early childhood education.

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

I believe our children deserve high-quality public schools, regardless of their ZIP Code. I will work with state, local, and national stakeholders to expand the availability of pre-k programming and address Pennsylvania's teacher shortage in high-need school districts. I also believe schools should be for learning, not for administering an endless barrage of standardized tests. Standardized testing has helped to enrich test development companies, but it hasn't helped students, parents, teachers, or taxpayers. Finally, I support efforts to more equitably fund our school system and make sure charter school funding more accurately represents the actual per pupil cost of educating students. Ensuring equal access to high-quality public education is the most important thing our elected leaders can do to help our children succeed and our democracy remain strong.

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?

I believe education is the gateway to opportunity, and I support the State System of Higher Education mission "to provide high quality education at the lowest possible cost to the students." Current appropriation levels have shifted too much of the cost burden onto students, making higher education increasingly inaccessible to the neediest among us. I support initiatives such as the "Pennsylvania Promise," the Nellie Bly scholarship proposal, and increasing state appropriations that would enable freezing or reducing the cost of tuition for students. Higher education ensures a more equitable future, which means that it needs to be accessible to everyone—especially those who might otherwise struggle to afford it.

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

During my 20-year military career, I witnessed firsthand the devastation that guns and other weapons are capable of inflicting. While firearms have an important role in our society for hunting, sporting, and self-defense of one's family and home, it's time the Pennsylvania General Assembly takes serious action to reduce gun violence. Current law allows firearms to be sold without background checks through online sales or at gun shows. For this reason, over 20% of all gun sales occur without a background check, and approximately 80% of firearms that are used in criminal activity were obtained without a background check. I support closing these loopholes and enacting a system of universal background checks. I also support the use of extreme risk protection orders to prevent troubled individuals from bringing harm to themselves or others. While there is broad public support for these measures, our elected officials have refused to act. There is no lack of common sense solutions on this issue—there is only a lack of courage and leadership.

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?

The first step is for our elected leaders to realize that there is a difference between waging a war of poverty and waging a war on poor people. Cutting SNAP benefits, reducing Medicaid eligibility, and repealing the state's General Assistance program will not solve the problem of poverty in Pennsylvania, rather, such steps only add to the stress faced by children living in poverty. We need to address unemployment and underemployment with a comprehensive plan for workforce development. We must raise the minimum wage to ensure that no one who works a full-time job is still forced to live in poverty. And, because medical debt is among the most widespread causes of financial insecurity, we need to enact paid family and medical leave, end surprise medical billing, and protect health care for people with pre-existing conditions.

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?

I agree with the Pennsylvania County Commissioners Association and numerous mental health organizations: we must reverse the Corbett administration's \$84 million cut to mental health funding. We also need to empower schools to make mental health services more readily available to their students. Finally, we must protect the Affordable Care Act, which requires mental health services to be covered by health insurance plans. If anti-consumer special interests succeed at overturning or repealing the ACA, I will support designating mental health services as an essential health benefit under Pennsylvania law.

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?

I support Governor Wolf's proposal to address our infrastructure needs. Restore Pennsylvania would enact a commonsense severance tax, which the Independent Fiscal Office has calculated would be paid primarily by out-of-state residents. The revenue raised would improve our roads and bridges, fund green infrastructure projects, address the blighted structures in our communities, and expand access to high-speed internet. The plan has been endorsed by urban and rural municipalities across the state. As a state senator, I would work with other members of the General Assembly to pass Restore Pennsylvania and give Governor Wolf the tools he needs.

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

(1) Making Health Care Affordable: No one should have to choose between paying their medical bills and paying for their mortgage, rent, or utilities. I will fight to reduce the cost of prescription drugs, end surprise medical billing, enact paid family and medical leave, and protect health care for people with pre-existing conditions.

(2) Strengthening Our Schools: Our children deserve high-quality public schools, regardless of their ZIP Code. I will work to expand access to pre-k programs, address Pennsylvania's teacher shortage, and reduce the cost of higher education for all Pennsylvanians.

(3) Reforming Our Government: It's time to end partisan gerrymandering, rein in special interests, and get serious about our campaign finance laws. Let's put voters back in charge of our elections! I will work with anyone in either party to return our democracy to the people.

Candidate Name *

George Scott

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