

Progressive Neighbors

Questions for General Assembly Candidates

2014

Better government

1. What steps do you support for improving the democratic process in Annapolis?

Progress has been made in improving transparency in the General Assembly over the past four years, with greater access to online tools for the public, the posting online of committee votes, and increased audio and video coverage of legislative deliberations. Much still remains to be done, however, including posting of subcommittee votes, committee amendments and votes, and the institution of a system to allow constituents to sign up to testify online the day before a committee hearing so they don't have to spend all day in Annapolis waiting to testify. **Do you support these improvements, and do you have others you'd like to offer? Are you willing to support special elections to fill legislative vacancies? Do you support stripping the party central committees of the power of appointment, which ultimately lies with the Governor?**

Recently, Maryland was ranked as one of the most corrupt States in the U.S. Ensuring transparency and sunshine laws will help Maryland get back on track and give the public clarity into how legislation is considered and voted on. *First*, I would support operational changes in the Maryland General Assembly, such as reporting subcommittee votes online, webcasting floor and all committee proceedings, and allowing online sign up to testify. *Second*, Maryland would benefit from a Public Information Inspector General's office that would work to safeguard and encourage access for residents of Maryland to ensure government performance and demand accountability. Such an office would also help ensure the state is responding quickly and appropriately to Public Information Act requests.

I support switching to a special election process to fill legislative vacancies. I have served on the Montgomery County Democratic Central Committee since 2007 and have been a part of five appointment processes. I think a special election would better serve the people and our democracy. I could support allowing an interim appointment being made to represent the district until the special election is held. For example, if a seat becomes vacant during the General Assembly session it might be appropriate to appoint a caretaker to represent the district pending the special election.

2. Do you support combined reporting for corporations doing business in Maryland? Do you support a luxury tax to increase revenue?

Maryland is one of the wealthiest states in the US. Unfortunately, some of our state's wealthiest residents and most successful corporations avoid paying their fair share of taxes. Assessing luxury taxes and requiring that businesses file combined tax reports would generate revenues and help small and local businesses compete. Please explain briefly.

Twenty-four states from across the political spectrum have already adopted combined reporting, which accounts for the fact that we live in a cross-border country and minimizes the ability of corporations to play shell games to avoid taxes. I support it in Maryland. I am less familiar with the luxury tax

proposals but in general support closing tax loopholes that exist for much of what would come under a “luxury tax,” such as boats. If elected, I would be willing to look at the luxury tax more closely and decide whether or not I could support it as proposed. Moreover, I believe tax increases are best accepted by the public when tied to a particular purpose, such as expanding pre-K to more children.

3.What measures will you propose to improve the criminal justice system?

The juvenile justice scandal in Baltimore raises immediate concerns, and Maryland’s prison population has nearly tripled to over 22,000 since 1980. People of color are disproportionately arrested, convicted, and incarcerated. This is a civil rights issue. **Would you advocate for legislation and policies establishing creative approaches to crime and rehabilitation -- alternatives to incarceration?** Please explain briefly.

Yes, I support shifting to rehabilitation alternatives because such approaches have proven to reduce recidivism, meaning we can spend less money on criminal justice and more on other important programs. I support a holistic approach that emphasizes at risk intervention (similar to Baltimore’s proposed “Ceasefire” program), rehabilitation, and re-entry. In concert, this can reduce incarceration rates. But I also support examining how we treat certain crimes. Some crimes do not require pre-trial incarceration and others, such as marijuana possession, do not belong within the criminal justice system at all.

4.Do you support expanding same day voter registration to Election Day?

In 2013, the General Assembly passed a law providing for same day voter registration, but only during the early voting period. The State Administrator of the Board of Elections objected to providing same day registration on Election Day itself, when the vast majority of votes are cast, claiming that it was not feasible. **Do you support expanding same day voter registration to Election Day, and if so, what steps would you take to see it become law?**

I support same day voter registration. Ten states, and our neighbors in DC, have same day voter registration so it is obviously feasible. In general, I support expanding access to the polls. In 2008 I began working on an effort to make the deadline to change parties the same as the voter registration deadline. Up to that point, the party change deadline was three months before the primary, but the registration deadline for new voters was just 13 weeks before the primary. Current voters who wanted to switch parties (or switch from “decline to state” to a party) had a disadvantage. People who do not read questionnaires like this one are often not aware a primary is going to occur several months before it happens. The law was eventually changed as part of a broader election reform package that included early voting.

5.Do you support enacting state campaign finance reforms?

Currently, there is too much corporate influence on elections. **Do you support voluntary public financing of campaigns for state office in a manner that would allow candidates to receive funding after demonstrating significant community support?**

I support public financing of elections and signed up to testify in support of the Montgomery County proposed public financing plan on March 4th. Two related points. *First*, although the Constitution currently requires such a system to be optional, I hope public financing becomes a cultural requirement of the Democratic Party such as using union printing. *Second*, provisions must be included to take care of the self-funder issue. If a candidate is in the public financing system and they run against a self-funding candidate, provisions should be made to bolster the public financed candidate. The Supreme Court has disallowed additional infusions of funds for such candidates, but may allow those non-self funding candidates to have access to slightly higher donation amounts.

Human Rights

6 Do you support a comprehensive gender identity law for Maryland, including public accommodations protections?

The transgender community has been fighting to be included in statewide civil rights protections since 2007. While there are ordinances in Montgomery, Howard and Baltimore counties, as well as Baltimore city, there is no statewide law (as there is in 17 states, DC and Puerto Rico) to go along with the sexual orientation anti-discrimination law passed here in 2001. **Will you actively lobby the legislative leadership to make it happen?**

Yes, for all of Maryland's success protecting a woman's right to choose and promoting gay rights, the failure of the legislature to pass a law banning discrimination in employment, housing, and other sectors for the transgender community is unacceptable. I will fight for legislation to expand transgender protections. When this issue was briefly on the ballot in Montgomery County, I advocated for the legislation on a blog I was writing for at the time:

<http://maryland-politics.blogspot.com/2008/07/supporting-transgender-non.html>

http://maryland-politics.blogspot.com/2008/07/supporting-transgender-non_18.html

7. Would you support legislation and policies to begin a transition to a publicly-financed health care system for Maryland?

After the passage of federal legislation (ACA aka Obamacare), it falls to the Maryland State government to establish "exchanges" to provide healthcare to people in our state. **Do you agree that Healthcare is a Human Right? How would you lead efforts to improve healthcare in Maryland?** Please explain briefly.

Healthcare is a human right that impacts the well-being of every person in our State and plays a significant role in our economy and budget. I believe we must do everything possible to provide access to affordable, high-quality care while finding innovative solutions to control costs. My six-part health care plan for Maryland includes:

1. Providing every resident with access to comprehensive, affordable, and high quality health care. While private insurance, Medicare, and Medicaid support the health care needs of many in our State, others are left uninsured. I believe that outreach and effective operation of the Maryland Health Benefits Exchange will reduce Maryland's uninsured population. I will work with underserved communities and providers to help improve access to health care.
2. Fostering innovation in the delivery of medical services to reduce health care costs. Identifying cost-savings measures such as lowering administrative costs, increasing the use of technology, using check lists to maintain proper care, more effectively tracking a patient's health care services, and encouraging wellness programs will make for a stronger economy and reduced health care costs. These efforts will also help patients get better care and spur

innovation in the private sector because providers will be incentivized to develop more efficient means of care. Montgomery County is home to government agencies and businesses at the forefront of many of these innovations.

3. Continuing to lead the Nation in the implementation of the Affordable Care Act (aka Obamacare) through the operation of the Maryland Health Benefit Exchange, which will allow small businesses and individuals to access affordable but comprehensive healthcare options. The Exchange is critical to Maryland's healthcare future and continued oversight and maintenance will be required to make sure it is delivering on its potential. The roll out has not been smooth and Maryland must look to states with more success as models for its own program.

4. Maintaining Maryland's special status by continuing the state's unique Medicare waiver which allows the state's Health Services Cost Review Commission to set hospital reimbursement rates for Medicare, Medicaid, and all private insurance (called an "all payer" system). This program has kept hospital cost growth in Maryland well below national trends according to independent studies and must be supported.

5. I will work to ensure that Maryland's children have access to the quality health care that they need and establish family leave programs for new parents. A healthy start greatly increases a child's chances for a productive, healthy life, so I will work to improve coverage for children in Maryland through education and other public awareness campaigns. As a young parent, I am fully aware of the demands of caring for a young child. I will work with his colleagues to tailor programs that improve family leave policies for new parents and those caring for sick and elderly relatives. I believe that such policies will not only create stronger families, but will also result in more productive workers who know their place of employment is supportive of them and their loved ones.

6. I believe we must keep Medicaid strong so that our most vulnerable state residents have health coverage. I will work to improve access to quality care for all Medicaid enrollees, particularly those with special needs so that they can fully maximize their potential.

I am not opposed to further experimentation. But in the short-run, Maryland must focus on implementing the ACA and the new Medicare waiver.

8. Will you support the decriminalization of possession of small amounts of marijuana?

In 2013, a bill to decriminalize the possession of small amounts of marijuana passed the State Senate with 30 votes. The chair of the House Judiciary Committee did not allow the bill to be voted on either in committee or on the floor of the House of Delegates. **Will you support decriminalization, and, if so, what specific actions will you take to ensure the bill's passage in the General Assembly?**

Yes, as stated above I support this effort (and would go further to tax and regulate it). If elected in 2014, the current chair of the Judiciary Committee may not be there. But if he is, I will strongly advocate that the bill be allowed to proceed. Many important pieces of legislation have faced similar resistance before proceeding including the death penalty repeal and marriage equality.

9. Do you support an increase in the minimum wage, and if so, what is the hourly wage that you would recommend that the General Assembly adopt?

Maryland's minimum wage, currently tied to the federal minimum wage, is \$7.25/hour. Economic analysts across the political spectrum agree that, it is extremely difficult for a family to survive on this level of income. In 2013, a bill to raise the minimum wage failed to pass a House committee vote. **Additionally, will you support indexing that wage level to obviate the need to keep returning to this fight in the future?**

I support increasing the minimum wage. The optimal outcome would be for the General Assembly to apply to the entire state what Montgomery County has already adopted, a minimum wage increase to \$11.50/hour over several years. Moreover, the state should go further than Montgomery County and link the wage to inflation so that it rises with the cost of living. Such a link should be carefully drafted to avoid the situation in Colorado several years ago, where deflation caused the minimum wage to decline. No worker making the minimum wage deserves a pay cut.

10. Will you support legislation to require employers to provide at least seven days of sick leave per year?

A bill requiring employers to provide at least seven days of sick leave per year received an unfavorable report in the House Economic Matters Committee in 2013. Do you support this bill? Will you support legislation to extend employees' rights to unpaid leave to all Maryland workers? Federal law currently requires that employees be given as much as 13 weeks of unpaid leave in case of illness or other conditions of the employee or a close family member. Federal law, however, only applies to employers with more than 50 employees. Half of Maryland businesses meet this requirement, so the other half of Maryland workers get no family leave protection at all. In 2013, a bill to provide six weeks of unpaid family leave to employees of Maryland businesses with at least 15 employees did not pass. **Do you support this legislation?**

Yes, I would support legislation similar to HB 735 from the 2013 legislative session which requires an employer to have a leave policy where employees earn hours of paid sick leave on the basis of their hours of work. Such earned leave would allow workers the opportunity to take care of themselves and family members at difficult times. There are other leave proposals and I would support any well-crafted bill that provides this protection in a meaningful way

The Environment and Transportation

11. Do you believe we should prioritize fracking or spend our resources on developing green energy sources?

There is a nationwide boom in hydraulic fracking in America today, giving us a greater degree of energy independence than we've seen in years. However, there are serious environmental consequences to such drilling, and there has been a moratorium on fracking in Maryland to give the

government time to study the current state of the art. **What are your thoughts about fracking in Maryland, in anticipation of the government study? How serious must the environmental degradation be for you to ban fracking? Are you concerned about the future of western Maryland's tourist and farming industries if fracking is permitted?**

Without question, Maryland's priority should be on increasing and reaching its renewable energy goals. Maryland has a 20% by 2022 renewable energy goal and I support efforts to increase this goal to 25% by 2020. But Maryland currently only generates approximately 8% of its energy from renewable

sources so there is significant work to be done. In addition to major projects, such as the recently authorized off-shore wind farm, Maryland must promote tax credits and zoning policies that allow for more homeowners and businesses to do smaller scale renewable projects. The state can also use the power of the Public Service Commission to demand that utilities are more accommodating to these projects. Currently, utilities allow such projects to feed into the power grid but make it a difficult process to navigate. I would also support an energy storage requirement, something California has recently done, to mandate that utilities purchase a fixed amount of power from stored sources which will reduce the need for power plants that only provide intermittent energy. I have been endorsed by the Sierra Club, partly due to this emphasis on actual environmental solutions.

Maryland is currently doing the right thing on fracking, disallowing it until such time as the appropriate environmental, health, and safety policies can be addressed. The Marcellus Shale Advisory Commission has been undertaking important studies in this regard. Its work should continue and then be reviewed to determine what policy is appropriate. In general, there is much to be concerned about in terms of air and water pollution, as well as the geological effects.

12. What is your vision for an efficient, environmentally friendly, regional transportation plan for the 21st century?

A recent editorial in The New York Times related to their mayoral campaign, and focused on public transportation, said, “Few things more directly affect the quality of a day, the stability and prosperity of a life, than the ability to get to work. And few are more vital to the larger economy — of the city and region — than the transportation system that makes it possible. Veins and arteries: everybody needs them.” Clearly this statement applies to Maryland as well, primarily to both Baltimore and the DC suburbs. **What are your plans, now that the gas tax has been raised, to prioritize public transportation projects such as the Purple Line, CCT and Baltimore Red Line? Do you support plans to extend Metro to BWI as it is being extended to Dulles? Do you have any thoughts on the institution of high-speed or next-generation maglev rail in the northeast corridor?**

I am an active member of the Action Committee for Transit, and Metro is a major plank of my platform. When it comes to new projects, I support all of the initiatives described in the question but would prioritize the Purple Line for several reasons. *First*, the Purple Line is far along in the federal approval process. *Second*, a majority of county commuters do not commute in and out of DC, but the Maryland suburban transit system is oriented entirely for those commuters. The Purple Line would break out of the feeder system mentality and provide more point to point travel, connecting four metro stations and linking Montgomery County (and District 16) to College Park. But I also believe we need a renewed focus on maintaining and improving our current transit options. Metro is an important state issue that is often ignored, to the detriment of this vision of greener growth. The state is a major funder of Metro and, if elected, I plan to push to increase that funding through a dedicated funding source and to improve oversight to assure the effectiveness of dollars already being spent. If Metro does not improve, it will decrease the desirability of living in smart growth communities. White Flint’s goal is to have 50% non-auto mode share, but that ambitious goal is not possible if Metro’s reputation as high cost and unreliable continues to grow.

13. Will you be supportive of legislation requiring labeling all genetically modified products (GMO’s) so that consumers know what they are eating?

Several states are considering passage of a GMO labeling bill which would mandate the labeling of products containing genetically modified ingredients.

I would support passage of legislation providing consumers this information.

14. Will you actively support legislation to save the Chesapeake Bay?

Recently, after a series of public hearings, Takoma Park, MD's City Council (as well as the Washington Adventist Hospital in Takoma Park) passed regulations prohibiting cosmetic use of pesticides on lawns and landscapes. Since the use of pesticides is directly linked to several forms of cancer, as well as endocrine disruption, and is detrimental to the fish and wildlife in the Chesapeake Bay Watershed, **will you support and advocate for:**

a. the elimination of cosmetic use of pesticides on state public land, schools, highways, parks and other government facilities?

b. Encourage Maryland county and municipal governments to follow the example of Takoma Park and ban its use?

Begin a public education campaign to discourage the routine cosmetic use of pesticides around homes and gardens.

I support legislation to protect and clean the Chesapeake Bay and will vigorously defend the stormwater management fees grossly mischaracterized by opponents. I could support all three provisions discussed above, but would want to see the details of how such a ban could be put in place statewide. For example, Maryland has banned phosphates from dish soap in such a way that consumers hardly noticed. To the extent similar solutions can be found for other polluting chemicals, that should be pursued first. I also support the Pesticide Reporting and Information proposal and would like to see this move from the task force stage to law as soon as possible.

15. Do you favor extending the Montgomery County “bag tax” statewide and implementing a 5 cent deposit on bottles?

Montgomery County enacted legislation in 2011 that placed a five-cent charge on each paper or plastic carryout bag provided by retail establishments to customers at the point of sale, pickup or delivery. Retailers retain 1 cent of each five-cent for the bags they sell. The revenues from this charge are deposited into the County's Water Quality Protection Charge fund. This effectively shifts the burden of litter clean up costs from taxpayers to consumers, who have a choice to avoid the 5-cent charge by bringing reusable bags. An industry consortium led by Owens-Illinois (glass) and Alcoa (aluminum) and major state environmental organizations e.g. the Chesapeake Bay Foundation, Maryland League of Conservation Voters, strongly favors a Maryland “bottle bill,” legislation which generally requires a 5 cent deposit on sealed metal, glass or plastic containers. Enactment of this legislation would reduce litter, create recycling jobs and supplement ongoing recycling programs. **Do you favor enactment of a 5 cent per container “bottle bill” in Maryland?**

I support expanding the bag fee statewide. This has proven remarkably successful at lowering wasteful bag usage. I support a bottle bill. Such programs have been successful throughout the United States. It should be crafted to work with the existing recycling programs, as other states have successfully done.

Education and the Economy

16 What approaches would you support to maintain education excellence in Maryland and address the education achievement gap?

To address crushing higher education costs for students, the Oregon legislature recently unanimously enacted “Pay it Forward, Pay it Back” higher education funding legislation. The Oregon legislation directs the state's education commission to develop a plan for consideration by the legislature in 2015 under which students would pay nothing for tuition while attending college,

paying instead 3% of their income each year for the next two decades or so to cover the costs of future students. Education loans from big banks would no longer be necessary. **Do you favor similar legislation Maryland? If not, what other approaches to reducing higher education costs for Maryland students do you favor? Despite an award-winning public education system, Maryland faces an achievement gap. Please explain your ideas to overcome this problem.**

First, I would support a “pay it forward, pay it back” proposal in Maryland and am pleased to see legislators like Sandy Rosenberg working on such a law. Second, Montgomery County and the state do have an overall excellent school system but there is much work to be done. Major demographic changes are also creating new challenges and opportunities. There is no single solution, but continuing to provide extra funding to the most difficult schools, ensuring wraparound services are available to students with less support at home, and continuing to work with teachers to push the students to perform rigorously are all part of what is necessary. Maryland must also continue to treat its schools, which really represent its brand and key to economic success, as its first priority. That includes increasing funding in some areas such as school construction where Montgomery County, in particular, does not have the resources it needs for its fast growing schools.

17. Do you support the concept of a state bank in Maryland? Inspired by the Bank of North Dakota, legislators in several states, including Maryland, have proposed the creation of a state bank. In North Dakota, the nine-decade old bank serves as a depository for all state tax collection and fees, and deposits are reinvested in North Dakota in the form of loans, thereby enhancing the availability of credit in the state.

I support the concept of a state bank, with the caveat that I would not necessarily put all state funds in it as a starting point, but just a certain percentage. Further, I support increasing the percentage of state funds put in local banks (instead of national banks) until such time as there is a state bank. I am also supportive of credit unions, another community-based form of banking, as well as other efforts to expand community development financial institutions. There are currently many so-called CDFIs in Baltimore, but they need to be expanded to other parts of the state included parts of Montgomery County where access to credit is difficult.