

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?

Yes, I support these improvements, and I will take any and all steps to increase transparency and openness in government, as well as increase voter participation. An informed, participating electorate is central to the success of our state and our nation. It is unconscionable that a state that is supposedly as progressive as Maryland lags behind even the US Congress in terms of legislative transparency; we need searchable, online, public access to committee voting records and lobby and ethics disclosure.

I believe we need to enact legislation to remove the lobby disclosure exemption for the Maryland Associations of Counties (MACo).

I will support legislation give our state's open meetings laws real teeth.

Are you willing to support special elections to fill legislative vacancies?

Yes, I strongly support holding special elections to fill legislative vacancies. It is unfair to voters to usurp their power by allowing the Central Committee and then the Governor, to fill vacant terms up to nearly four years. While it would be preferable to have an appointee serve no more than 4-6 months before a special election can be held, such a system could prove expensive in years where multiple vacancies occur. At a minimum, I believe that appointments should only last until a special election can be scheduled to coincide with the next election date, either federal or state, which would effectively limit appointments to less than two years in all cases.

Do you support stripping the party central committees of the power of appointment, which ultimately lies with the Governor?

I believe that special elections are the best way to fill legislative seats, but if a seat becomes vacant within a year of an election it might be necessary to appoint someone to fill the seat in the interim. In this case I believe that the Central Committee should formally advise the Governor on the selection to ensure the interests of the district are taken into account. While allowing local parties to choose candidates for the Governor to appoint to a particular seat certainly has its pitfalls, removing party

input opens the door to allowing a Governor of one party to fill all vacancies with someone from his own party rather than a candidate of the party that held the seat. The best way to deal with this situation is to institute special elections as quickly as reasonably possible after an appointment is made.

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.

Yes, I support combined reporting. All companies that do business in Maryland should pay their fair share of corporate taxes and not use the Delaware incorporation loophole to escape that obligation. Wal-Mart and other large box stores continue to focus legislators' attention on collecting taxes for sales into Maryland from out of state sellers with no physical presence in our state, not only to help themselves compete against remote sellers, but also to distract attention from their own failure to pay their fair share of corporate taxes in our state. Combined reporting will create a level playing field for small business while ensuring that chain stores and other large corporations pay what they owe our state and citizens.

While I could support a luxury tax or taxes, I am concerned that the term "luxury" can be too subjective; any such tax would have to be based upon objective criteria that take into account more than the price of an item. For instance, a Tesla Model S costs the same amount of money as a Cadillac Escalade –approximately \$70,000—which could easily be considered a luxury tax worthy price. Yet, while the Escalade averages 14 MPG in city driving and has a 26 gallon gas tank –clearly a luxury—the Tesla consumes 0 gallons of gasoline and emits 0 pollutants (particularly if charged using solar, wind, etc.); should both have a luxury tax assessed on them? A gas-guzzler type tax would be more appropriate in this case than a luxury tax and I would certainly support taxing products that waste resources and impose costs on society through pollution. I also support reexamining the tax code to ensure it is truly progressive and move away from regressive taxes that disproportionately affect the most vulnerable among us, including phasing out taxes on clothing, which is a necessity that should be placed along side medicine and groceries as tax-free products. There is no justification for a poor, single parent to have to pay tax on his or her children's clothing and undergarments while the wealthiest among us can choose to download music or video tax-free on the Internet. We should collect the revenue we need, but there are better ways to get those funds than off the clothing on the backs of the poorest in our communities.

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 will advocate for legislation and policies establishing creative approaches to crime and rehabilitation --alternatives to incarceration. While public safety must be paramount in any discussion of reform, it is clear that much of our current approach doesn't serve the public good in terms of safety, economic growth, or civil rights. We need to replace mandatory minimums for

most transgressions with guidelines that ensure justice is carried out and society is served beyond the period of incarceration. Far more of our judicial system should be oriented toward reform rather than retain the current, severe imbalance toward punishment and incarceration. This is particularly true with regard to those whose transgressions solely involve their own possession and abuse of a controlled substance or clearly in need of mental health care. For those who are incarcerated, we must have in place robust, effective reentry programs designed to help those rejoining society to succeed in becoming productive community members, rather than merely release former convicts with minimal support or chance to turn around their lives.

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?**

Yes, I support same day voter registration and the required funding and training that will be necessary to ensure fair and open elections.

I also will work to move Maryland to a vote-by-mail system, similar to Oregon's electoral system that saw 82 percent of registered voters participate in the 2012 elections.

Our democracy succeeds when more people participate in the electoral process. I will support any reasonable measure to increase voter registration and participation, including restoring voting rights to convicted felons who have served their time and fully paid their debt to society.

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?**

Yes, we should work to diminish the impact that corporations have on our elections by limiting corporate contributions and, ultimately, move toward a system of public financing for elections. I will support legislation similar to last session's Campaign Finance Reform Act or Montgomery County's groundbreaking public financing legislation.

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. I oppose all discrimination based on sexual orientation, gender identity or gender expression. I will support and, as Delegate, will actively work to enact any measure that will protect Marylanders

from any discrimination in any venue based upon gender identity or expression.

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. It is wrong both for employees and employers to saddle our businesses with the burden of assuring healthcare coverage for our citizens; that responsibility should be spread across society and administered in the most economically efficient way by our government. That is why have supported and continue to support a national, single payer system for healthcare delivery as in the best interest of our citizens and our businesses.

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?**

I believe that the legalization, taxation and tight regulation of marijuana are vastly preferable to decriminalization. Decriminalization of small amounts of marijuana would clearly relieve pressure on our judicial system and if that were the only option before me, I would support it. However, I believe decriminalization would do nothing to ensure the safety of those using marijuana by securing the supply chain and regulating it for potency and keeping it free of dangerous chemicals intentionally (e.g. PCP) or unintentionally (pesticide residue) added to the product. Similarly, decriminalization would bless keeping in place an illegal system of production and distribution that would have no parallel for any other commodity. Legalization would allow for regulation that could aid in keeping marijuana out of the hands of those too young to use it responsibly and help keep those who use it irresponsibly from harming others through intoxicated driving. Finally, legalization would allow the government to tax various aspects of a regulated industry so that, at a minimum, the costs of enforcement and regulation could be recouped.

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 firmly believe that the minimum wage must be a livable wage that, at the very least, ensures that a worker earning such a wage makes enough money to keep a family above the poverty line, as adjusted upward for higher cost localities like Montgomery County. The legislation that recently passed the House of Delegates is a great improvement over our state’s deplorable minimum wage, raising the wage to \$10.10 per hour. However, I am concerned that failure of the House to enact language

indexing the wage level was a step in the wrong direction because it puts the minimum wage back into the realm of politics for an increase. I believe that indexing is an incredibly valuable tool in the fight for fair wages and setting the precedent of indexing the minimum wage should be considered a crucial component of any new minimum wage law.

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?**

I support enacting legislation that requires employers to provide paid sick leave and unpaid family leave to full-time employees of Maryland businesses. In addition to supporting such legislation with my vote, I would, at a minimum, cosponsor such legislation and work for its enactment. If legislation requiring 7 days paid sick leave for businesses with 15 or more full time employees was put before me for a vote, I would support it and the same would be true of legislation requiring similar businesses to provide 6 weeks of unpaid leave. However, I would also be open to variations, such as supporting legislation that provided not less than 5 paid leave days that expanded the scope of the bill by applying its mandate to more businesses with fewer than 15 employees. The details matter in this kind of legislation and the bottom line is that we must establish humane, reasonable floors for workers' guaranteed paid and unpaid leave for those who currently have no guarantees; achieving a precedent in state law and delivering on the promise of mandatory paid and unpaid leave for those who have no such benefits must be the priority.

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?**

I would not prioritize hydraulic fracturing over developing truly green sources of energy and I want to see Maryland become the national leader in developing, installing and manufacturing the technologies for off and onshore wind, solar, ocean current and other non-emitting power technologies. The Offshore Wind legislation enacted last year—which I helped enact and was present for its signing—was a step in the right direction. With regard to fracking, I have seen firsthand what unwise and essentially unregulated gas fracking has done to destroy rural Pennsylvania and, as Delegate, I will fight to maintain Maryland's moratorium on fracking. Oil and gas producers long ago succeeded in getting

themselves and their waste products exempted from key provisions of our federal environmental laws and are now fighting state regulation. In Pennsylvania, drillers have been given free reign to operate unfettered at the expense of landowners, roads, clean air and safe drinking water. Worse still, producers managed to push through policies that essentially robbed local decision makers of power and resulted in Pennsylvanians realizing relatively little revenue from all the disruptive and potentially harmful drilling activity. So while fracking and abundant supplies of natural gas have helped shut down many old, dirty coal plants, if our state is going to go down that road, we should enact the strongest, most protective laws and policies in the nation to ensure that we don't trade away our environment and quality of life for a quick gas hit. At a minimum the State must complete a full risk assessment study and incorporate the findings into its final decision about whether fracking will occur in Maryland and ensure that a fiscal mechanism is put in place to guarantee that there truly are the inspectors and regulatory resources necessary to protect our air, land, water and health. I will also actively work to enact a policy that requires drilling companies to disclose in advance and in a publicly available database all chemicals added to fracking liquids. We should also consider requiring utilities using or selling natural gas to purchase natural gas only from those suppliers who disclose such information and adhere to the strongest environmental practices. Finally, even with all the right rules and protections, some places just should not be open to energy development, particularly when such development potentially threatens our state's tourism, recreation, or fisheries industries. That's why I've always opposed drilling in the mid-Atlantic region and why I would oppose efforts to open up other ecologically dependent economic areas to fossil energy development.

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?**

Transportation and traffic is a huge problem in my district. The most important thing we can do is ensure that more gas tax money goes to fund light rail, bus rapid transit and other mass transit as well as improvements that promote greater bike use. Ensuring the swift, smooth and economically efficient construction of the Purple Line is a priority for me. I support extending the Metro to BWI. I also believe that the MD-DC-VA Metro is run in a manner that is completely at odds with environmental protection and sustainability because it charges more to those who we most want off the roads and charges them even more at the times when we most need to get cars off the road. Additionally, Metro cars and stations, while improving, are relatively bicycle unfriendly and this must change. I will use whatever legislative leverage and lobbying ability I have to make Metro more environmentally friendly and expand construction and use of mass transit.

As a member of Montgomery County's Wheaton Urban District Advisory Committee (WUDAC), I'm

already working constantly on making Wheaton more walkable and helping realize its full potential as a community where transit-oriented development thrives. I believe strongly in transportation oriented development, particularly as an alternative to greenfield development and the creeping suburban sprawl that threatens our environmental resources, such as in Clarksburg. In the General Assembly, I will push for legislation that gives communities with transit oriented development favored status for financial assistance, including grants and tax incentives for infrastructure linked to such development.

Finally, I had the great honor of working for one of the nation's greatest proponents of high speed rail and mag-lev, the late Senator Frank Lautenberg (D-NJ). Senator Lautenberg was working to make mag-lev and advanced high speed rail a commercial reality since the 1980s and I will do my best to follow in his footsteps. Perhaps the best way to move forward on such projects is to work with our federal legislators, particularly Senate Appropriations Chair Mikulski, to ensure that more of the revenue derived from the northeast corridor is invested back into northeast corridor infrastructure upgrades to make possible advanced rail transit.

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 believe in setting relatively broad, but strong rules for sales of produce and food products to ensure health and safety and then allowing consumers to make informed choices in purchasing. However, such a system cannot work absent sufficient, consistent and accurate information; the government must set standards for information that ensure these goals are met fully. Whether it's clear definitions for what qualifies as "organic," "natural," "cage-free," "non-fat," "sustainably harvested" or "contains GMOs", we need labeling regulations that ensure voters are informed, not misled, about the products they are purchasing and ingesting.

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 policies and laws that discourage the unnecessary use of all toxics including pesticides, herbicides and similar chemicals that can persist in the environment and pose a threat to sensitive subpopulations and our environment. While non-persistent, biodegradable, and natural solutions proven to be safe for the environment and sensitive subpopulations (e.g. children, pregnant women, etc.) should be considered first for use when such measures are necessary, using public funds for truly cosmetic application of toxics should be eliminated. And, I agree that a public education campaign is a vital part of any effort to minimize the unnecessary use of toxic

pesticides around the home, in gardens or any place else.

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 a statewide fee for carry-out bags, similar to the one enacted in Montgomery County which has been very successful in reducing waste, particularly reducing the amount of plastic bags flowing into the Potomac and Anacostia Rivers that can harm fish and wildlife.

In general, I do support a \$.05 per container “bottle bill”. Bottle bills can be an extremely effective tool for preventing the landfilling or incineration of containers and for keeping them from polluting our land and waterways. I am concerned that a bottle bill take into account Montgomery County’s extensive recycling program. Nonetheless Maryland’s recycling rate overall is nowhere near where it should be and should have been improved long ago. A bottle bill is one way to move forward effectively.

Another strategy we should examine is enacting measures to legally ban the landfilling or incineration of cans, bottles, oil, yard waste or other easily recyclable or compostable common waste stream components.

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.**

I would certainly consider such legislation, but I believe the best way to address the debt facing our higher education students is to first address the escalating costs of education. While there is no easily apparent solution to tackling higher education’s increasing costs, it’s clear that students

(and parents) are being asked to pay greater and greater sums of money for education that is losing its value in the marketplace. As the graduate of a liberal arts institution, I greatly appreciate the intrinsic value of education; however, even accounting for that, students are getting less education value for more money paid. This is not intended as an indictment or assessment of blame, but rather as a call for unity and action to address a problem that all of us—students, parents, educators, higher education administrators and society generally—have a major stake in solving. Legislation should focus on ensuring that students are provided the best education for the dollar spent as the first step in lowering costs and thereby their overall debt, and then focus on making that debt burden more manageable over a reasonable period of time. As part of addressing the debt burden, I agree that we should minimize interest rates and fee burdens wherever possible whether they are the result of unnecessary or undue bank profit motives or any waste or abuse by lenders of any kind.

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 agree that enhancing the availability of credit in the state is important. However, while I am open to the concept of creating a state bank, I am not certain it is the only or best way to achieve that goal. I would certainly examine carefully any bill before me that established a state bank, but I would not make the establishment of such a bank a priority for me.