

**BlueWaveNJ Congressional Candidate Questionnaire  
General 2018**

**Mikie Sherrill  
New Jersey's 11th Congressional District**

**1. Why are you the best candidate to win the election in the fall?**

Since I entered the Naval Academy when I was 18 years old, I have taken multiple oaths to protect and defend the Constitution of the United States. After 10 years of active duty service as a helicopter pilot and Russian policy officer in the Middle East and Europe, I went to law school and went on to become a federal prosecutor. While at the U.S. Attorney's Office, I helped to start the district's first federal prisoner reentry court and left the U.S. Attorney's Office to pursue criminal justice reform efforts. I decided to run for Congress due to the attacks on people and institutions I have supported my entire life: women, minorities, gold star families, POWs, our federal court system and the Constitution. I am committed to this country and have served this country my entire adult life. This legacy of service, combined with my training in the U.S. Navy and in the U.S. judicial system, has prepared me to step up once again to serve in the U.S. House of Representatives. We need new leadership in Washington, and I want to go to Congress to stand up for our values and fight for New Jersey.

**2. What are the three biggest issues you would stress in a general election?**

My top priorities are fighting for quality and affordable healthcare for every American, working towards a tax system that supports middle class families in New Jersey, and passing an infrastructure package that improves New Jersey's crumbling infrastructure and secures funding for critical projects like the Gateway tunnel.

We need quality and affordable healthcare for every person in this country. Had it passed, the Republican healthcare bill would have stripped coverage from nearly 27,000 people in New Jersey's 11th Congressional District, and would have increased premiums for almost everyone. Even though their bill did not pass, this administration continues to attack our healthcare system and the marketplace, destabilizing care in our country while premiums continue to increase.

Americans also deserve a tax code that works for them, and not a select few. The Republican tax bill is extremely harmful to our district and to New Jersey's middle-class families. New Jersey has the highest property taxes in the country, and our residents depend on the state and local tax deductions (SALT). The elimination of the SALT deductions amounts to a double taxation on the people of New Jersey. By increasing our federal taxes to pay for extreme corporate tax cuts and tax cuts on unearned income, the Republican tax bill harms our ability to invest in state programs such as our great public school system.

And finally, we need a comprehensive infrastructure plan that will grow New Jersey's economy and fund critical infrastructure projects. President Trump's new infrastructure proposal is a major set back to New Jersey and our district, and his administration refuses to meet the federal government's commitments to funding the Gateway Project. This proposal will leave New

Jersey footing the bill on our key infrastructure projects, resulting in job losses and increased taxes on our residents.

**3. Your district is a historically red district. How will you address the specific concerns of right leaning independents to flip them blue?**

Every single piece of legislation coming out of Congress hurts New Jersey. Whether it is the tax bill that stripped our ability to deduct our state and local tax deductions, or the budget bill that failed to secure the promised funding for the Gateway project, the Republican party no longer represents people here in New Jersey. The GOP's track record combined with a genuine desire for new leadership in Washington creates a clear path for right-leaning independents to support this campaign. Furthermore, as a veteran, I have a long history of working with people from different backgrounds to address the mission at hand. I promise to work with members of both parties to come up with common-sense solutions to our nation's - and New Jersey's - most pressing problems.

**4. When did you move into the district and, if the answer is recently, how will you deal with that question?**

I am moving into the district before the primary.

**5. Turnout is key. What steps are you taking to build grassroots support and energy?**

Since I announced in May, we have been building a grassroots campaign capable of flipping this district from red to blue. Already we have a strong volunteer program, with volunteers working out of our Fairfield office each week for phone banking or office help, and volunteers who come out on the weekends to help canvass throughout the district for our petition signature drive. More than 200 people attended our volunteer rally at the beginning of February in Fairfield. We will continue to harness this enthusiasm by expanding our field program. The field team, including a field director and field organizers, will build a robust field program that drives Democratic turnout for the primary and the general election in November.

**Economy & Finance**

**1. The GOP tax plan will add \$1.5 trillion to the national debt through substantial tax cuts to corporations and the wealthy. Moreover by virtually eliminating SALT deductions, many NJ residents will face tax increases. What measures will you propose to make our tax system fairer? Conservatives say the budget imbalance could be offset by cuts to social programs like Medicare, Social Security, and Medicaid. Would you agree to cuts in entitlement programs in order to reduce the deficit?**

I want to go to Congress and work on a tax plan that invests in New Jersey and our families. The Republican tax bill is extremely harmful to our district and to our middle-class families. New Jersey has the highest property taxes in the country, and our residents depend on the state and local tax deductions (SALT). The elimination of the SALT deductions amounts to a double taxation on the people of New Jersey who already pay more than their fair share to the federal

government. So the very first thing I would do to make our system fairer is end double taxation by getting back our SALT deductions.

Then, I would push for a real tax reform package. We need a system that invests in growth, simplifies our tax code, treats wealth the same as work, and doesn't explode our deficit.

The Republicans plan to pay for their tax plan by gutting Social Security and Medicare. Which means we will have traded away \$22 million in estate exemptions against the commitments we made to our seniors. This deficit has been created by Republicans and I will vote against any proposal that cuts Social Security, Medicare, or Medicaid.

**2. New Jersey's unemployment rate is 4.9 percent, which is 20 percent higher than the national average of 4.1 percent. What federal measures would you propose to improve New Jersey's economy and provide more jobs for people in your district?**

New Jersey's recovery from the recession has not kept pace with the rest of the country. We are losing middle-class jobs, and wages are not keeping up with our high cost of living. In order to create more good-paying jobs and maintain the quality of life we have worked so hard for, Congress needs to start working for us.

Working across party lines, we need to build on our economic strengths. We are leaders in healthcare, biotechnology, and medical research, with the most talented workforce in the world. We need to leverage our highly-educated workforce to attract the next generation of technology and clean energy jobs to New Jersey.

We also need to cut wasteful spending and special interest giveaways in Washington that cost New Jersey taxpayers billions. That's the only way we will be able to provide meaningful tax reform and tax relief for New Jersey's middle-class families.

Congress needs to help our state rebuild our crumbling infrastructure. This past summer, a McKinsey study revealed that traffic congestion is a top reason companies cite for not locating or expanding in New Jersey. For more than two decades, we've waited for the construction of a new rail tunnel to New York. While the federal government reached a bipartisan agreement with NJ and NY lawmakers in 2015 to pay for half of the project, that promise is no longer guaranteed.

Invest in education and job training. A good job comes from a good education, and good schools attract new businesses. I want to work with parents and our local schools to invest in science, technology, engineering, math and civics. I want to help our great universities like Montclair State, Fairleigh Dickinson, and Drew University, as well as our community colleges, partner with local employers to provide a direct path to high-skill jobs for recent graduates so we don't lose our talent to other states. For those who do not plan to go to college, we should provide apprenticeships and job training opportunities that lead directly to a job. Finally, we need to do much more to make college affordable to everyone who has the talent and work ethic to thrive.

**3. Student loan debt is crippling many young Americans. How will you address this ever growing issue.**

Every child should be able to attend college regardless of how much money their families has. The federal government can take actions to make college more attainable to every American. Students should be able to borrow from the federal government at the same rate as big banks do, and we should allow students to refinance their debt when interest rates go down. Students who dedicate their careers to public service should continue to have access to the student loan forgiveness program. We also need to make it easier for students who want to complete their courses faster, so they can save on tuition and enter the workforce quicker. Finally, we need to acknowledge that not everyone wants to go to a four-year college. Some students want to join the workforce with a skill-set that will lead to a good-paying job and the federal government can do much more to support two-year programs and vocational programs that lead directly to a job on graduation.

**4. Infrastructure investment is desperately needed in the state, but after the tax cut there is limited funding available. How would you propose to fund projects such as the tunnel and other urgent projects for our state? Trump has suggested privatization of much of the infrastructure, would you support his proposals?**

The federal government needs to fund a substantial infrastructure bill, plain and simple. The administration's plan to depend on state and local governments for four times the amount of funding as provided by Congress is not a realistic proposal. It puts an even greater burden on states like New Jersey. It is incumbent upon the federal government to pay for 50 percent of the Gateway project, one of the largest infrastructure projects in the country, and a vital commuter byway for our region.

**5. Would you vote for any infrastructure bill that did not guarantee full funding for the Gateway project?**

The Gateway project is one of the most critical infrastructure projects in the country and I will fight against any infrastructure bill that does not include the funding promised by the federal government and agreed to by the governors of New Jersey and New York. The Northeast produces 20 percent of GDP in our country, and we need the Gateway tunnel if our region is going to continue providing jobs and services for the people of New Jersey. We have waited for decades for the new tunnel, and every year we go without funding this project, the closer the existing tunnels come to obsolescence. I am frustrated that the Trump administration would politicize this project. The federal government must honor its commitment to Gateway and fund 50 percent of the project.

**6. Since 2011, the Consumer Finance Protection Bureau (CFPB) has returned nearly \$12 billion to consumers harmed by financial institutions. The GOP and the Trump administration are doing everything they can to dismantle the CFPB. Will you defend the structure and independent authority of the CFPB as mandated in Dodd Frank, and reject any attempts in Congress to undermine its mandate including: its single directorship; its funding from the Federal Reserve rather than Congress, its rule making and regulatory**

**authority, its enforcement authority with respect to abusive, unfair or illegal activity, its accessible consumer complaint database, and its ability to implement fines to be used to provide restitution to consumers, fund prevention and education activities and its overall work?**

Congress did not create the CFPB in a vacuum. It's existence is a direct response to the financial crisis and the meltdown of our markets. Consumers have a mechanism to take up complaints about all types of consumer products -- washing machines, cars, or even coffee makers. There is no reason that financial products should be treated any differently. I support the independent authority of the CFPB and want to make sure our citizens continue to have an enforcement agency that protects consumers harmed by financial institutions.

Health Care

**1. What do you see as the most attainable and effective means to attain universal access to affordable health care? What steps would you take to strengthen, build on or move beyond the Affordable Care Act?**

I strongly believe that every American deserves access to quality and affordable healthcare. That said, I think there are many ways to get there and don't subscribe to one particular path. I would like to see a proposal that expands coverage, without placing the burden on the backs of New Jersey's taxpayers.

Our healthcare system and the marketplace is still under attack and being destabilized by this administration. The first step I would take to fix our healthcare system is to make sure we guard the protections for pre-existing conditions, the ten essential health benefits, and allowing children can stay on their parent's insurance until 26.

After that, I have advocated for various proposals to help fix our system. I support empowering Medicare to leverage its buying power to negotiate lower drug prices. This works for the Veterans Administration and it will help bring down costs for our seniors. I would also like Congress to explore a fiscally responsible way to allow certain individuals older than 55 the option of buying into Medicare.

**2. Will you use your office to push for Medicare for all—or a similar single payer system**

The ultimate goal should be universal healthcare. But I have not seen a plan yet under Medicare for All or a different single payer proposal that is fiscally responsible and does not place even more federal tax burden on New Jersey. One of the Medicare for All plans would cost \$32 trillion over ten years, and require new taxes to pay for it. With the passage of the Republican tax bill that increases taxes on the middle-class here in New Jersey, I am not ready to commit to that proposal. However, I am absolutely ready to hear proposals on how to make this plan solvent and look forward to this challenge.

**3. What will you do for your constituents who do not qualify for a subsidy under the Affordable Care Act and are seeing their premiums and deductibles increase substantially year over year?**

We need to address skyrocketing premiums. One major reason premiums have gone up is due to the instability in the marketplace. Insurance companies are unsure as to how the federal government is going to move on healthcare. First thing we need to do is stop the Administration's attack on the marketplace. Then I would like to consider proposals that would expand pools like allowing those who are 55 or older to buy into Medicare.

**4. Republicans have been trying to defund Planned Parenthood since 2011. What is your position on a women's right to choose and how big an issue should this be in your race? Please state your specific opinions about restrictions being introduced in Congress and other states.**

I am pro-choice. A woman's health decisions should be between her and her doctor. The federal government should have no say on when, how, and with whom women decide to start or grow a family. President Donald Trump and the Republican leadership see things differently. They are leading an all-out assault on women's healthcare, working to restrict access to abortion and contraception. This is dangerous and wrong. In New Jersey, we know first-hand the devastating impact of Governor Christie's cuts to women's healthcare. From 2009 to 2012 there was a 31 percent drop in clinical breast exams provided at Title X health centers and rates of STD infection increased 27 percent. We can't allow President Trump and congressional Republicans to jeopardize women's health. In Congress, I will be a forceful voice against efforts to defund Planned Parenthood, restrict access to birth control, and limit a woman's access to safe family planning services.

**Social Justice**

**1. What steps would you propose to reform our criminal justice system and reduce racial Injustice?**

As a former federal prosecutor here in New Jersey, I know how pressing we need criminal justice reform. At the U.S. Attorney's Office in Newark, I worked as the Outreach and Reentry Coordinator. I helped to start New Jersey's first federal reentry court and worked on reentry programs throughout the state with advocates like Governor Jim McGreevey. These programs helped people leaving prison to gain employment, housing, and education in order to successfully reenter their communities.

There are many aspects of criminal justice reform that need to be addressed, including: the school to prison pipeline, the United States Sentencing Guidelines, bail reform, discrepancies in drug prosecutions, treating crimes related to substance abuse in the criminal system versus the medical system, and many, many others.

I originally left the U.S. Attorney's Office to pursue criminal justice reform efforts full time. But with the election of Donald Trump, we now have a Justice Department moving away from the consensus on criminal justice reform. A bill, broadly backed in Congress and supported by both the Koch Brothers and the ACLU, is unlikely to pass or even reach the floor for debate. The inability to move forward on criminal justice reform is indicative of the larger problems that plague our legislative system.

This is why I believe the best way to reform our criminal justice system is to work to get new leaders in Congress who realize that this is one of the preeminent civil rights issues of our day and to work with all stakeholders to reform our system.

## **2. What is your plan to strengthen enforcement of anti-discrimination laws protecting New Jersey's LGBTQ residents?**

I am a staunch supporter of LGBTQ rights. I believe in marriage equality and protection from discrimination in the workplace based on sexual orientation or gender. The federal government should be leading the way on combating discrimination. The efforts of this administration to roll back protections for federal workers, dismantle LGBTQ health initiatives, and appoint judges to the bench who openly hold discriminatory views are regressive. In Congress I will work to make sure the federal government reinstates the anti-discrimination measures stripped by this administration.

### Education

#### **1. What federal policies would you support to improve our education system?**

Access to quality education and supporting our educators need to be top priorities, period. A good job in today's economy comes from a good education. Good employers are attracted to strong schools and a talented workforce, and every child deserves the opportunity to reach their full potential. The administration's cuts to the Department of Education threaten the quality of our schools, the education of our children, the development of our workforce, and could force our communities to raise property taxes. I support and will fight for public education. Our public schools are the backbone of our education system and our communities.

#### **2. The GOP higher-ed plan would end student loan forgiveness. What specific policies would you advocate to ensure that every family in America can afford to send their kids to college?**

Every child should be able to attend college regardless of how much money their families have. The federal government can take actions to make college more attainable to every American. Students should be able to borrow from the federal government at the same rate as big banks do, and we should allow students to refinance their debt when interest rates go down. Students who dedicate their careers to public service should continue to have access to the student loan forgiveness program. We also need to make it easier for students who want to complete their courses faster, so they can save on tuition and enter the workforce quicker. Finally, we need to acknowledge that not everyone wants to go to a four-year college, but want to join the workforce with a skill-set that will lead to a good-paying job. The federal government can do much more to support two-year programs and vocational programs that lead directly to a job on graduation.

#### **3. What is your position on funding for school vouchers and school testing? What do you believe is the future role of charter schools in our country?**

While I do not believe charter schools are necessary in the 11th district due to our strong public school system, I am open to learning about proposals that detail the opportunities available. We need to ensure that teachers in New Jersey are able to teach our kids and not just "teach to the

test,” as far too many teachers have felt pressured to do. I have been encouraged by recent proposals to come up with a more balanced system. I am extremely opposed to both vouchers that take away money from our public schools and to tax credits for private schooling.

## **Environment**

### **1. In NJ there are multiple underfunded or completely ignored Superfund sites. How will you deal with this issue as your district’s representative?**

New Jersey has more Superfund sites than any other state. And there are several sites in New Jersey’s 11th district where no remediation has yet taken place. In Congress I will fight to make sure the federal government fully funds the Superfund program. Under this administration, the EPA budget has been gutted. Those cuts flow down to the DEP, and our ability to clean up these sites are inhibited. We need to make sure the EPA is fully funded and that Superfund clean-up is a top priority.

### **2. Numerically, how would you rank climate change as an important issue facing our nation? What issues do you believe are more important? What will you do in Congress to address the impact of climate change?**

Climate change is of the utmost importance because, whether national security, healthcare, or infrastructure, climate change touches nearly every aspect of our policies. I believe climate change is real and addressing it shouldn’t be a partisan issue -- it’s an economic and national security issue that affects all of us. With 130 miles of coastline, New Jersey will pay a terrible price if we don’t take meaningful action to end our reliance on foreign fuels and transition to a clean energy economy.

New Jersey can lead the country in transitioning our economy to clean energy and ending our reliance on fossil fuels. I fully support Governor Murphy’s goal of 100% renewable by 2050, and Congress can be a meaningful partner in achieving that goal. First, Congress can pass an infrastructure bill that prioritizes the clean economy. This includes funding for the Gateway project, training workers for clean energy sector jobs, and tax credits to create clean energy manufacturing operations here in the United States. Congress should also increase its investments in research and development, including energy storage and other new technologies.

### **3. What if anything do you believe we should be doing to promote environmental justice?**

The federal government needs to consider environmental justice as it shapes and prioritizes environmental spending and protections. For instance, the federal government can take a much more proactive role in the issue of clean drinking water in our country. Right now, communities in our own district are facing crises of lead in water. It is incumbent upon leaders in New Jersey to protect our disadvantaged communities who have not always had sufficient resources to protect themselves and their children from environmental hazards.

Congress can also do more to support improving water infrastructure nationwide. Congress should pass legislation that would increase investments in water infrastructure through grant



programs, create tax credits for homeowners to remove lead, and develop new water technologies.

**4. What is your position on fracking? Should the regulation of fracking be solely at a state level?**

I do not support fracking. As a state without a native fossil fuel industry, I am going to focus on building the clean energy economy here in New Jersey. We already have 600 solar jobs in the district and in Congress I will continue to push legislation that moves our economy into the future.

Immigration

**1. Between 700,000 and 800,000 DACA recipients wait in limbo as legislation is tied to billions of dollars for the border wall. How would you protect them and address the border security issues being tied to the proposed legislation in Congress? Would you support a broader Dream Act that includes a path to citizenship for all the undocumented that entered the US as children?**

I support the Dreamers. There are 22,000 Dreamers in NJ alone. They are American in every way. The Dreamers should not be punished for their parents' mistakes, but given the ability to contribute to the only home most of them have ever known.

**2. In his State of the Union Address, Trump outlined the ways he wants to roll back legal immigration, including ending the visa lottery system and limiting family reunification policies to spouses and children, as a compromise for providing a path to citizenship for up to an estimated 1.8 million undocumented immigrants brought here as children. What would your response be to Trump's proposal? Do you think we need immigration reform and, if so, what would you propose?**

In 2013 we had a bipartisan immigration bill pass the Senate, but it has stalled because hardliners in the House of Representatives would not come to the table to negotiate. It is time for Congress to take up real, bipartisan immigration reform. We need a plan that secures our borders, protects our workers, but affords those who work hard, play by the rules, and contribute to our society a path to legalization in this great country.

**3. There has been a recent severe increase in attacks on immigration advocates by ICE. What would you do to help protect their right to defend immigrants?**

Congress must find a way to pass comprehensive immigration reform. The uncertainty around the law and status is creating un-sustainable circumstances for immigrant communities, advocates and the American people. Advocates should be allowed to defend immigrants and we need to have common sense rules to ensure due process.

**Additional**

**1. Do you believe that the Second Amendment only applies to state militias or does it restrict the right to regulate guns? What specific federal legislation should be passed to reduce gun violence?**

As a former federal prosecutor, I've seen first-hand the devastating impact illegal guns are having in our communities. We need to do much more to keep deadly weapons out of the hands of violent criminals, domestic abusers, and terrorists. We can do this while protecting the Second Amendment and the rights of responsible gun owners. Weapons of war designed to kill as many people as possible as quickly as possible do not belong on our streets. I support universal criminal background checks to cover all firearm sales. We need to stop criminals and dangerously mentally ill people from buying firearms. While New Jersey has led the way in the past with an assault weapons ban and large capacity magazine limits, it is still possible for a criminal to purchase these deadly weapons across state lines. For this reason, I support a federal assault weapons ban and limits on large capacity magazines. And Congress also needs to ban bump stocks, which allow individuals to convert firearms into fully automatic weapons.

Finally, I support two common-sense measures to make our communities safer: suspected terrorists on the No-Fly list should not be allowed to purchase a firearm, and domestic abusers with temporary restraining orders filed against them must not be able to purchase a gun. In Congress, I will work to save lives and help find responsible solutions to America's gun violence crisis.

**2. Please share your thoughts on marijuana legalization.**

Although Chris Christie has undermined it, the State of New Jersey has already legalized medical marijuana. Right now, Congress should take marijuana off of the schedule I controlled substance list.

**3. What is your position on clean elections and getting money out of politics?**

Money in politics has a corrupting effect on our democracy and I am proud that I have been endorsed by End Citizens United. We need to find a path forward that ensures we can end the influence of money on our political system. I think the best way to attack this problem is twofold: (1) working on legislation to limit money in politics, and (2) ensuring we have judges on the bench who will uphold that legislation.

**4. What specific legislation, if any, would you support with regard to clean elections and getting money out of politics?**

The special interest money that floods our politics is wrong and Congress must act to reverse the ramifications of the *Citizens United* decision. I intend to work toward improving disclosure of political contributions and getting special interest and foreign money out of our politics. I support the DISCLOSE Act, the KOCH Act, and the Get Foreign Money out of US Elections Act. I would also oppose repealing the Johnson Amendment.

**5. Do you believe that Congressional Democrats have been too cooperative or not cooperative enough with the administration and Congressional Republicans?**

Washington is deeply and fundamentally broken and we need leadership. This is why I am running for Congress.

**6. There is a substantial possibility that impeachment will be the most dominant issue for the next Congress. Do you currently support the impeachment of President Trump?**

I am deeply concerned about the health of our democracy. As I mentioned, this is a fundamental reason I decided to serve again after being in the Navy and serving as a federal prosecutor. Judging from the indictments and the information available to the public, I have been encouraged by the thoroughness as well as the rapid pace of Special Counsel Robert Mueller's investigation. I look forward to seeing the full breadth of the case he has built.

**7. Under what circumstances would you support his impeachment? What evidence would you need to see to support his impeachment?**

If there is solid evidence that can be proven that the President committed treason, bribery or other high crimes and misdemeanors - as understood by the framers of the Constitution - then I would support impeachment.

**8. Would you support any change in Democratic leadership in the House? Do you believe that younger members of Congress should have a greater role?**

I do think it is important that we have new leadership in Washington, and my number one priority right now is winning this congressional seat so I can be a strong advocate for New Jersey.

**9. Would you support a federal law (as proposed by Senator Markey) to overturn the recent FCC repeal of net neutrality rules?**

Yes. Unequivocally.