

PA PAC Questionnaire for Congress - 2018

Please return this completed form along with your resume or a brief biographical statement describing your education, work history, community service, and prior political experience as soon as possible, but by **March 9**, at the latest.

You may e-mail your responses to Tom Miller at tom-miller1@nc.rr.com or you may send a printed copy of your responses to Durham PA-PAC c/o Tom Miller, 1110 Virginia Avenue, Durham, NC 27705

Please note that following the March 9 deadline, the Durham People's Alliance PAC may publish your responses to this questionnaire and your resume.

Thank you for completing this questionnaire and your willingness to serve the people of Durham.

Candidate's name: Richard L. Watkins District: NC US 4th Congressional

Address: Richard L. Watkins for United States Congress P.O. Box 1146 Chapel Hill, NC 27514

E-mail Address: richardwatkins@richardlwatkins.com

Phone: 919-408-6435

When responding to this questionnaire, type your answers in italics, bold, or a different font to distinguish your answers from the questions. Please do not use colors. You may explain your answer to every question, but please be concise. If possible, limit your answer to each question to no more than 350 words. If you use words or ideas from another person, please attribute your source.

Why You Are Running

1. What are the three most important issues facing North Carolina and the nation? What are your top priorities in addressing those issues?

Healthcare, economic equity, and climate change are the most important issues of our time. In healthcare we must guarantee the right to healthcare to every Americans, no matter their economic situation.

With economic equity, we need to focus on leveling the playing field after generations of discrimination. Compared to white men, black and Latino men and all women are underpaid. We need to pass stronger pay equity laws and ban employers from using credit scores when hiring employees and from seeing the name, race, and gender of people when deciding whether or not to grant an interview. We need to increase the minimum wage and index it for inflation to that every wage is a livable wage.

We need to ensure affordable housing and end chronic homelessness by vastly increasing subsidized and public housing. And finally, and most importantly, billionaires must pay considerably more in taxes, for it is impossible for a nation to remain civil if so few people control the vast majority of the wealth of a nation.

However, the number one issue facing all of humanity is climate change. Climate change is already claiming the lives of thousands, and the number will only rise as the severity and frequency of weather related disasters increases. We must move immediately towards a clean and renewable economy.

The Economy and Federal Spending

1. What do you see as the primary sources of our current economic problems? What measures should Congress use to address them? What are some of the possible negative consequences of your proposed solutions?

The evisceration of unions and signing onto free trade deals with no substantive environmental or labor protections has devastated the American working class, not that our crumbling infrastructure has helped. We need a complete remodeling of the American economy, beginning with raising the minimum wage to \$15 per hour and indexing it for inflation. By increasing taxes on the rich and ending oil subsidies, we can help fuel the growth of the emerging clean energy industry and support the \$4.6 trillion ten-year infrastructure package this country needs. Ending subsidies to fossil fuels will unfortunately devastate communities in North Dakota, Montana, West Virginia and Ohio, among others. However, with an increased safety net and the infrastructure package creating thousands of new jobs, we can hopefully mitigate this damage.

1. Are you in favor of reducing government spending in any specific areas? If so, please list your top three specific areas and explain your reasons. Are you in favor of increasing government spending in any specific areas? If so, please list your top three specific areas and explain your reasons.

We should cut spending on the military. We have a lot of unnecessary expenditures there; beginning with the \$1.45 trillion dollar F-35 program that even John McCain agrees is ludicrous. As for increasing, we need to spend more on healthcare, education, and infrastructure. Healthcare is a human right, and access to education is guaranteed by the UN Declaration of Human Rights and the North Carolina Constitution. Therefore, education at all levels must be free to all who are qualified and healthcare must be available for all through a single-payer system. Our crumbling infrastructure desperately needs to be repaired, with no better an example than the Brent Spence Bridge, which carries 4% of our GDP across it and is in danger of collapsing. I am committed to creating an infrastructure, which would fix these programs while creating thousands of jobs.

1. What changes, if any, do you support with safety net programs (Social Security, Affordable Care Act, Medicare, Medicaid, Veterans programs, etc.)?

I support a Medicare For All program. We also need to treat our veterans better, first and foremost by funding the

VA enough to ensure waits no longer than a few days and that psychologists and psychiatrists who are specially trained in military service issues be a part of the permanent staff. On that note, mental health needs to be taken far more seriously than it currently is. As of right now, mental illness only comes up when a mass shooting makes the news, despite the fact that the mentally ill are far more likely to be the victims of a shooting than the perpetrator. Given that one in five millennials has a mental illness and over forty thousand Americans commit suicide each year (and twenty-five times that attempt) we need to include funding for mental health and a legal obligation that all insurance plans include mental healthcare coverage in any comprehensive set of legislation on this issue.

1. Are you concerned about the affordability of a college education in the U.S.? If so, what role can the federal government play in addressing your concerns?

I am absolutely concerned about the overwhelming college debt and the ever-increasing tuition costs. This is why the cornerstone of my policy on education policy is that public education be free at every level to those who are qualified. The government can and must fully fund this program.

1. Do you support an increase to national minimum wage? What additional measures would you support, if any, to address income inequality in the U.S.?

I support a \$15 per hour minimum wage, indexed for inflation so we don't have to keep fighting battles to make the minimum wage a livable one every few years. In addition, my plans to help the renewable energy industry kick into high gear and create an infrastructure project to revitalize and improve our roads and develop high-speed rail routes will create thousands of high-paying jobs. Furthermore, tuition-free college and technical institutions will allow increased mobility and alleviate generational poverty.

7. What is your position concerning the future of the federal Consumer Financial Protection Bureau?

The Consumer Financial Protection Bureau needs to be protected. The CFPB has helped millions of Americans receive fair treatment from financial organizations dead-set on making money by exploiting their chaotic and busy lives. Despite, or perhaps because of this success, Republicans seem determined to destroy the CFPB and eliminate the only real oversight that has been created in the wake of the 2008 financial collapse. We need to increase the budget for the Consumer Financial Protection Bureau so it can process complaints and petitions quicker as well as defeat any Republican attempts to eliminate it.

The Congress

8. Public approval of Congress is at an historic low. In what ways has your party contributed to this problem? What measures or reforms, procedural or otherwise, do you believe would promote a more functional legislative branch?

Intransigence and a lack of public conviction along with the absence of primaries against incumbents have helped stall congress into total inactions. Democrats have unfortunately made every step of this walk as equal partners with the Republicans. To increase efficiency, we need to celebrate primaries as the complete actualization of democracy. While many congress members will unfortunately rail against this, it is a necessary tool to allow the voter more power. Without primaries terms like far-right, conservative, liberal, and progressive have no actual meaning.

Foreign Policy, Immigration, and Refugees

9. What are the top priorities for U.S. foreign policy?

Maintaining peace through foreign aid. When we withdraw aid from the poorest and most vulnerable places in the world, radicalism and anti-American sentiment grow stronger. Fully funding

programs to build hospitals, plant food rather than profit crops, and create modern schools would go a long way towards improving our standing in the world and reducing the growing trend of radicalism.

10. How would you reform U.S. immigration policy? Since agreement on immigration reform has proved difficult to obtain, what measures should be taken in the meantime that would improve the lives of undocumented immigrants? Is the Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE) agency performing as it should?

ICE is performing like a vigilante mob, arresting and deporting people who have lived in the US for years without committing a single crime. We desperately need to rein them in and revitalize the principles upon which our country was founded. Everyone is here because someone, either several millennia or a few centuries ago, decided to leave their homeland in pursuit of better fortunes and increased liberty. To deny this right to those who flee civil war, gang violence, economic collapse, and a crackdown on civil liberties flies in the face of what our country stands for. As Emma Lazarus wrote,

*"Give me your tired, your poor,
Your huddled masses yearning to breathe free,
The wretched refuse of your teeming shore.
Send these, the homeless, tempest-tost to me,
I lift my lamp beside the golden door!"*

Our shores hold the promises of the world, the ability to take the huddled masses of foreign shore and through our freedom allow them to fully realize their potential. At the very least, we need a bill that gives citizenship to everyone brought into this country as a child. We need to create a pathway to citizenship for the millions who have worked in the shadows, contributing to our society while receiving only demonization and the threat of persecution in exchange. The President has the ability to fire the entire ICE department, and until congress can agree upon a solution, should do so immediately. Not only will this force congress towards a solution, but end the growing number of human rights violations that ICE is perpetrating, such as incarcerating people without bathrooms or protection from the elements in Florida.

11. What if any effect should person's country of national origin have on their ability to enter and remain in the United States.

Those in nations with continued human rights violations should be given special ability to enter and stay in the US. Those in nations with chronic and systemic violence should be given extra consideration, along with those who come from areas of extreme economic deprivation.

Public Security and Criminal Justice

12. What measures, if any, do you support for reducing the number of incarcerated Americans? We need to end the war on drugs and both legalize marijuana and commute the sentences of those in jail for marijuana possession or use.

We need to completely switch focus on drug use from incarceration to treatment, especially when it comes to opiates, cocaine, and meth. Eliminating private prisons will also help reduce our staggering incarcerated population by ending the perverse profit incentive for jailing people.

13. What action, if any, should the federal government take to decrease gun violence in the U.S.? Would you support a federal ban on assault rifles?

I support an assault weapons ban, limiting the amount of ammunition one can purchase and possess, increasing background checks, creating a five-day waiting period, and banning people convicted of domestic abuse from purchasing and owning weapons, closing loopholes, prohibiting the ownership of gun silencers, and protecting regulations that restrict guns in public places.

Elections, Civil Rights, and the Supreme Court

14. What are your concerns, if any, with the state of campaign finance in U.S. elections? What measures should Congress take to address your concerns?

The wealthy have far too much influence on American politics. We need a system of publicly financed elections, either through direct funding or multiplying small donations. We also need to overturn Citizens United and McConnell v FEC, two decisions that have allowed corporations too many liberties when it comes to political spending.

15. What can be done to protect U.S. elections from interference?

Switching away from the current system of electronic ballots would prevent the possibility of hacking our elections--something that is quite possible to do. We also need Facebook, Twitter, and other social media platforms to ban the usage of bots and sockpuppets, both of which were used with disturbing efficiency to influence the 2016 elections.

16. What action should Congress take with regard to the Voting Rights Act following the Supreme Court's *Shelby v. Holder* decision?

Congress should overturn this decision through a constitutional amendment. The right to vote is the most sacred principle in any democracy, and ours is not any different.

17. How would you characterize the Black Lives Matter movement? What policy solutions would you support, if any, to address concerns raised by the Black Lives Matter movement?

The Black Lives Matter movement has brought much-needed attention to a long history of police abuses. We need to demilitarize the police and fully separate the prosecutor's and solicitor's offices from their police departments. We also need to end the so-called War on Drugs, which has proven to be a war on the African-American community and commute the sentences of those who have been jailed as a part of this effort. Finally, we must end the system of private prisons and end the perverse incentive to incarcerate more people than necessary.

18. What policies, if any, do you think are important for protecting the rights of the LGBTQ community?

We need to pass a comprehensive Civil Rights act, this one designed to extend the same protection guaranteed to racial and ethnic minorities to members of the LGBTQ+ community, including prohibitions on discrimination for employment, housing, and economic activity. We must also force the US Passport Office to accept agender, gender-fluid, and transgender identities along with they/them, ze/zem, and other gender-neutral pronouns.

19. What are the two worst and two best decisions made by the U.S. Supreme Court since 2010?
The two best are easily Hodges v. Obergefell, making same-sex marriage legal throughout the US, and King v. Burwell, which allowed the Affordable Care Act to remain on the books, allowing the millions of Americans who gained healthcare under the law to keep it. As for the worst, those are Citizens United, which fully opened the floodgates breached by McConnell v. FEC, and Shelby County v. Holder, which dismantled key elements of our network to protect voting rights.

Health and the Environment

20. Do you support universal healthcare for Americans?
Absolutely. Healthcare is a basic human right, not a privilege to be reserved for the rich.
21. Do you believe that Planned Parenthood should receive federal support?
Yes. Planned Parenthood has helped hundreds of thousands catch cancer at early stages, have abortions, and plan their families alongside their careers. It is an important American institution that deserves the full backing of our government.
22. Do you believe that global warming is real and caused by humans? Is it a problem for human life on earth? If so, what actions should Congress take to mitigate the effects of global warming?
Whether global warming is real and caused by humans is not a matter of belief, it is a matter of fact. The fact is that humans are causing global warming, and we need action now to mitigate and manage the effects. We need to create and fully fund programs to purchase the homes of those in high-risk areas and help them move to areas not endangered by rising sea levels. We also need to move towards a 100% renewable energy grid by eliminating the \$444 billion in fossil fuel subsidies and demanding that all federal projects be powered by renewable energy immediately. We do not have any time to spare in dealing with climate change.

Concerning You

23. For whom did you vote in the 2012 and 2016 presidential general elections?
Barack Obama and Hillary Clinton, respectively.

Thank you and please remember to provide us with your resume or biographical statement.