

QUESTIONS FOR MARCH 1 CONGRESSIONAL FORUM

- 1) Criminal Justice: Since Congress created mandatory minimum sentences for drug crimes in the 1980s, the federal prison population has grown from 24,000 prisoners to over 214,000 prisoners. Should the US abolish minimum mandatory sentences for non-violent drug offenses? What criminal justice reform measures would you work to achieve?

As a law clerk on the Third Circuit Court of Appeals, I saw firsthand that mandatory minimums don't work. Indeed, thirty years of empirical evidence makes clear that mandatory minimums do not carry a deterrent effect and instead exacerbate the structural racism of our criminal justice system. Fifty-four percent of white defendants facing drug offenses receive a mandatory minimum, while 67 percent of black defendants facing drug offenses receive one.

Beyond removing this racially disparate impact from our system, I would also advocate for eliminating private prisons and ending the prison-industrial complex, eliminating the cash bail, and legalizing marijuana. By taking these steps, we can begin to restore the meaning of "justice" in our criminal justice system.

- 2) Gun Violence: Please discuss the measures you would support to address gun violence. What is your position on the following policies:
 - Universal background checks
 - A national permit to purchase policy
 - Banning firearms for individuals with domestic violence restraining orders
 - Banning ghost guns and 3D printing of weapons?

Several months ago, I visited a group of students at a local high school in Central Pennsylvania. When I asked them which issues concerned them the most, a young girl raised her hand and said, with icy impartiality, "being shot."

With more than 365 mass shootings in 2019 alone, with roughly 11,000 people in the U.S. killed in firearm assaults each year, with our children living in fear of being murdered at school, the time has come, at long last, to adopt meaningful, commonsense gun safety legislation. That includes the measures listed above as well as bans on high-capacity magazines and assault-style weapons.

My suggestions do not restrict a law-abiding person's right to buy a firearm, nor do they authorize the government to knock on your door and confiscate your guns. Instead, they are designed solely to limit one's ability to commit mass murder.

- 3) Education: Secretary of Education DeVos proposes a 100% tax credit for donations from businesses and individuals to scholarship-sponsoring groups in order to fund tuition for private school pupils. Should the federal government provide tax credits or other forms of subsidy to non-public schools?

No. This type of federal subsidy creates 3 significant issues.

- i. It funnels money that could otherwise go to improving public schools to private schools that are not as accountable to state and local education achievement standards.
- ii. It further harms public schools because they cannot reduce their fixed facilities and transportation costs in proportion to the number of students who leave the district. As a result, public schools are left paying for the same facilities upkeep with a smaller amount of funding due to their decreased size.
- iii. It violates the separation of church and state for federal money to cover tuition at private religious schools. Some of these scholarships are even restricted to only allow recipients to attend specified religious schools. Our government should not be in the business of supporting one religion over another.

- 4) Health Care: How would you address the current problems in our health care system, including
- Policies to weaken Obamacare
 - Access to health care for those who cannot afford insurance or face unaffordable premiums, deductibles and copays
 - Escalating outrageous pharmaceutical costs

I would oppose any law designed to weaken Obamacare and would advocate for the repeal of recently passed legislation that hampered the ACA, such as the removal of the individual mandate and the decision to allow junk-healthcare plans to be sold on the ACA exchanges.

I would also support a strong public option that is priced to make sure everyone can afford their healthcare premiums, deductibles, and copays. When we remove the profit incentive from our healthcare system, I believe we can create a series of plans that actually help people get the healthcare they need.

Finally, I would take a two-pronged approach to tackling pharmaceutical costs. First, I believe that if the government is providing federal grants to a drug company to develop a drug, the government should be able to reap a percentage of the profits. We cannot allow drug companies to privatize their gains while socializing their losses. Second, I support allowing the HHS secretary to directly negotiate with pharmaceutical companies. Current federal law prohibits HHS from doing this and instead outsources the negotiations to insurance companies. The reason this hasn't happened already is because of the enormous financial influence the drug industry has in Washington. Too many politicians in Washington have taken money from the pharmaceutical companies and are willing to stand by while those companies reap billions of dollars in profit at the expense of the American people.

- 5) National Security: Please explain strategies and actions that would you support to insure our national security, including the problems of
- rogue nations, including Iran and North Korea, developing nuclear arms
 - continued spread of terrorist ideologies in Iraq, Afghanistan and Syria and the rest of the world

We need to repair our relations across the globe and launch a coordinated effort with our allies to curb and ultimately eradicate the proliferation of nuclear weapons. This begins with restoring the Iran Nuclear Deal and joining the Paris Climate Accords. Doing so will restore the long-held view that when America signs an agreement, it stays true to its word.

While we must certainly work to address the spread of terrorist ideologies in the Middle East and beyond – an effort that begins with increasing our humanitarian aid and developing stronger international alliances – there is a strong argument to be made that we should be more concerned about the terrorist ideologies spreading in our own backyard than those of the Middle East. Indeed, white nationalist violence has far outpaced foreign terrorism in the amount of terror and damage it has inflicted on U.S. citizens in the last decade. In June 2015, a gunman shot and killed 9 black worshippers at Mother Emanuel church in Charleston after publishing a racist manifesto. In October 2018, a shooter killed 11 worshippers at the Tree of Life synagogue after sharing anti-Semitic threats and conspiracy theories online. Last year, a gunman killed 22 people at an El Paso Wal-Mart because he viewed immigrants as a threat to American safety. These crimes happened all over the country but the perpetrators shared the same violent, white-nationalist ideology. To solve this issue, we must collect better data from our law enforcement agencies, prosecute white nationalist crime at the federal level, standardize those prosecutions, and have our leaders directly address this growing scourge.

6) Immigration: What would be the components of a comprehensive immigration policy that you would support? Please include your positions on the following in your response:

- DACA
- Amnesty
- Asylum
- Border Wall
- Family Separation

I believe we need a comprehensive immigration policy grounded in compassion and future-oriented thinking.

- DACA – the DACA recipients represent the very best of American society. They came here as very young children, made successful lives for themselves, and seek nothing more than to be proud, productive Americans. They represent the heart and spirit of the American dream.
- Amnesty – Any comprehensive immigration plan will require a clearly defined path to citizenship for the millions of undocumented people living in the U.S. today.
- Asylum – To borrow from Dr. King, if America really wants to stay true to what it says on paper, then we cannot turn our backs on refugees fleeing death and destruction. We need to do more for refugees by ending their pre-trial detention and embracing broader definitions of what it means to be a refugee, particularly for those fleeing gang violence in their homelands. We must also look beyond our

borders and issue humanitarian aid to countries like Honduras or El Salvador, as doing so will provide much-needed relief to their citizens and thereby slow the rate of emigration to the U.S.

- Border Wall – America is at its best when we build bridges to the rest of the world. The border wall is nothing more than a symbolic gesture of hate. It offers minimal practical use but costs an exorbitant amount of taxpayer dollars that could instead go to our veterans, our children, and our own domestic infrastructure.
- Family Separation – Using children as political leverage is horrific. Children should never be subject to cruel and inhumane treatment. Family separation has not only damaged America’s longstanding reputation with the world, but it has damaged the soul of our country. Reestablishing our moral standing will not occur unless and until we end the family separation policy and work to help the thousands of children and families who have suffered under its implementation.

7) Good Government: What type of “good government” and “anti–corruption” measures would you support to address the rampant corrupting influence of money in politics?

Just like Theodore Roosevelt, I absolutely believe that the corruption of our electorate is the most dangerous enemy to a free government. That is why I am the only candidate in this race refusing to accept a dime of corporate money. Going forward, there are a host of steps we must take to free our government from the pernicious expansion of wealth’s influence, including:

- Requiring dark money groups to disclose their major donors when engaging in political activity;
- Creating a federally managed corporate registry that requires all companies doing business in the US to disclose their real and beneficial owners;
- Requiring digital advertisers to make the same disclosures that TV, mail, and radio advertisers do;
- Banning former members of Congress from lobbying their former colleagues;
- Passing a constitutional amendment to overturn *Citizens United*, *Buckley v Valeo*, and *McCutcheon v. FEC*.

8) Environment: What is your strategy for addressing global warming, including:

- Fracking
- Carbon Tax
- Assistance to victims and differential treatment of low-income Americans

I support the Green New Deal. Through the Green New Deal, we can provide restorative economic justice to citizens whose homes and wellbeing have been hijacked by dumpsites, oil refineries, and fracking. Across the country, low-income communities have been turned into cancer alleys; poor health, premature deaths, and deep despair have become a norm. Such areas should be on the front-end of federal relief under any climate change plan.

I also believe we need a moratorium on all future fracking. One cracker plant, which relies on fracking, in Western PA has the potential to eliminate almost overnight all of the progress that the city of Pittsburgh has made over the past few decades toward reducing air pollution. We should not be subsidizing or supporting fracking in any way. Moreover, I believe a carbon tax does not go far enough to curb the harmful effects of pollution; in my view, we should impose a tax on all pollutants, not just carbon.

- 9) Income Inequality: How would you address income inequality, including
- Creation of living wage jobs and jobs of the future
 - The tax structure
 - Job training
 - Guaranteed annual income

The political and moral health of America rests on the promise of equal access to economic opportunity. As your representative in Congress, I will promote common good capitalism that offers Americans the ability to pursue their own form of happiness. That includes raising the minimum wage to \$15 an hour and creating new job training and apprenticeship programs to help us transition into a green energy economy. More specifically, I will advocate for investments in our country's roads, bridges, and waterways to create good jobs for American workers. I will also promote the implementation of a fair and equitable tax system that doesn't allow billionaires to pay lower effective tax rates than the working class or permit the wealthiest corporations to avoid paying taxes altogether. If we do these things, we can create an America that works for all of us, not just the top one percent.

- 10) LGBTQ Rights: The Trump administration has initiated changes in federal policy toward transgender individuals across both federal agencies and the military that decrease protections for this population. This occurs at a time when crimes directed toward transgender people increased 34% from 2017 to 2018. What will you do to protect the rights and safety of all Americans and reverse the changes in federal policy that discriminate against the transgender community in particular?

I believe we must strive to be a more compassionate America. That's why we must pass legislation like the Equality Act, which creates a nationwide standard for non-discrimination. Creating strong federal protections for the LGBTQ+ community is the only way we can effectively combat prejudice and discrimination. We must take up the legacy of Dale Jennings, the rioters at Stonewall, Nancy Wechsler, and so many others to make sure that the voices of LGBTQ+ Americans are heard in the halls of government so that policy can respond to the unique difficulties faced by LGBTQ+ people. From healthcare, to housing, to sexual violence, the LGBTQ+ community has been ignored and marginalized by our society for far too long.

- 11) Voting Rights: Given the Supreme Court's decision regarding the Voting Rights Act, what can be done to ensure that all American citizens are able to easily vote?

Voting in the United States should be as easy as possible, which is why I support making Election Day a national holiday as well as automatic voter registration for all U.S. citizens when they turn 18.

We must also put an end to gerrymandering, which is perhaps the most insidious form of voter suppression as rigged district lines allow politicians to sit comfortably in office without fear of losing reelection. Voter ID laws, by the same token, are designed to disenfranchise voters and drive down turnout. Going forward, we need leaders who will do everything in their power to make sure the voices of the people are heard.

12) Women/Family Issues: Please address these issues affecting women voters

- Equal pay for equal work
- Paid family leave for parents and caregivers
- Reproductive rights
- Affordable child care
- Sexual harassment in the workplace

I will always defend a woman's right to choose. I also believe that we must do more for the healthcare of women, particularly minority women, during pregnancy and childbirth. The CDC reports that African American women in the U.S. have a maternal mortality rate that is 3.5 times higher than the rate for white women. That is shameful. The maternal mortality rate for black women in the U.S. on its own would rank worse than countries like Vietnam, Egypt, Thailand, and Mexico. We must do better.

Our country has systemic issues in the way we pay men and women. And this problem is only exacerbated more with the addition of race. While women on average make around 80 cents on the dollar compared to men, African American women were paid 61 cents for every dollar white men made; Native American women made 58 cents to a white man's dollar; and Latina women earned just 53 cents to a white man's dollar. Unfortunately, this problem is only getting worse. The gap in weekly earnings between white and black women is higher today than it was forty years ago. We must push the EEOC to confront these issues head on and require anyone taking federal money to provide fair pay and benefits to all workers.

Going forward, we must also pass laws guaranteeing paid parental leave and affordable access to childcare. Among the 41 developed countries, the U.S. is the only one that does not mandate any paid parental leave. We ask our young parents to choose between spending time with their newborns and putting food on the table. That is wrong. If countries like Italy, Poland, Germany, and Japan can all mandate more than 20 weeks of paid leave, we can too. In more than half of states in this country, a year of childcare costs more than a year of in-state college tuition. We are burdening young families and also missing an opportunity to provide quality education from a young age to promote cognitive skills, sociability, and self-control. The federal government should be partnering with local providers to create a network of childcare options available to every family, free of charge to any family making less than 200% of the poverty line and for limited costs for families above that so no family must spend more than 10% of its income on childcare expenses.

Finally, the MeToo movement has done a wonderful job shedding light on the dark practices of sexual harassment in the workplace. We need to encourage victims to come forward and hold perpetrators accountable. No one should ever be made to feel physically uncomfortable in their workplace environment.

13) Who inspires you and why?

My family is a constant source of inspiration for me. My mom could do anything she wants, yet she chooses to work as a reading specialist at a local public school because she loves making a difference in the lives of young children. My dad is the type of person who picks up trash when no one is looking. A public servant himself, he always looks out for others and always has the perfect insight, or comment, or joke for every moment. My brothers, Jim and Matt, are my best friends and push me to be the best version of myself. Each and every day, my family provides me with inspiration.

CLOSING STATEMENT: For Democrats - Why are you the best candidate to defeat Scott Perry?

This election presents us with existential questions. Climate change threatens our planet, authoritarianism threatens our civilization, and fear threatens our democracy itself. The beauty of our situation is that we have an opportunity, with this election, to make a real difference in what our future will look like. To do so, we need to elect someone who practices what they preach; someone who runs a value-oriented campaign that reflect the will of the people, not the will of corporations or special interests.

I am proud to be the only candidate in this race who refuses to accept corporate PAC money. I am proud to be the only candidate in this race who endorsed the Green New Deal. I am proud to be the only candidate in this race who has put forth detailed policy proposals on healthcare, retirement security, foreign affairs, and technology.

We need public servants who put the common good over personal ambition and public service over self-interest. If you want a candidate who you can count on in the big moments to hold true to their values, then join our campaign and work with us to build a new era of Democratic politics in Central Pennsylvania.