

## Gary West, 94<sup>th</sup> District

### 2009 Virginia House of Delegates Candidate Questionnaire

1. Specifically, what unique qualities and/or qualifications will you bring to the office you seek?

This year also marks my 25th anniversary as lawyer in private practice, the entirety of which has been spent helping individuals with problems fight their way through private and public bureaucracies and representing those individuals in Court. Prior to that I taught a variety of American Government courses as a Lecturer of Political Science at Virginia Tech. So, I believe one of the qualities that I bring to the House of Delegates is a detailed knowledge of the administrative and legal framework that we must navigate to bring about change. When I look at the big problems in Richmond like transportation, jobs, and education, I see well entrenched lobbyist protecting cozy relationships with well funded interests that are often the barriers to change. I've dealt with these bureaucracies and special interests my entire career and it perfectly prepared me to be an effective voice for the people. Listening to the voices of the people and expressing them in Richmond is a natural extension of my professional career and consistent with my educational background and personal philosophy.

I think one of the characteristics of an effective legislator is setting an agenda based on the priorities of the district. I have been out knocking on doors in my district since March and there are two over riding concerns that I hear: 1) people do not believe their elected officials are listening to them and 2) they want results. This tells me that people in Newport News don't want their legislator preoccupied with partisan issues. When I go to Richmond I will follow the lead of Senator John Miller by focusing on practical solutions to the real challenges; jobs, transportation, education, and property tax relief. I recently completed an eight year term on the Newport News Planning Commission and that experience showed me the value of reaching practical compromises with opposing parties, an experience that has also served me well during my legal career I might add. This is not the kind of representation that we now have in Richmond, I will change that.

2. What transportation changes or improvements do you advocate and how specifically would you pay for them?

There's no path to solving our transportation problems without reform of VDOT. I will draft legislation creating a citizen oversight panel charged with cutting the waste and corruption from the VDOT contract and bidding process. It's time to stop talking about Virginia's transportation problems as regional and pull together an inclusive plan that addresses transportation issues around the entire commonwealth. This will allow the legislature to identify needs, prioritize projects, and dedicate funding accordingly. I noted that when the first round of federal highway infrastructure funding became available earlier this year, Virginia had very few miles of roadway "shovel ready". The reason for that is that Virginia lacks a realistic long range transportation plan that addresses transportation on a statewide basis. The reason we don't have a realistic statewide plan is because we don't have a reliable, stable funding plan for the entire state. Once we have such a plan, it will decrease the regional bickering that now occurs because all regions will have a stake in the successful implementation of that plan. One of the reasons that we have the transportation mess that we face every day in Hampton Roads is because as we limp along from one two year budget to the next, Newport News fights with Norfolk about priorities, Hampton Roads fights with Northern Virginia over funding, and the Eastern part of the State fights with the Western part of the state. A long range plan with a stable funding source that is statewide in scope will allow a shift in focus from this regional bickering and allow more projects to proceed all over the state

for the day when they are “shovel ready”.

Regional plans have been tried and have failed, stalling any action while the problem has grown for almost a decade. My opponent just can't stop coming up with regional plans that are doomed to fail. Just last week he called for just what I have been talking about in over 10,000 pieces of literature that I have delivered to the voters in Newport News; he now recognizes that it is a good idea to prioritize road projects locally. Well, this is a good step, one that should have been taken 8 years ago, not just last week. But I must point out that he still is talking about a plan that the Virginia Senate killed because, once again, it's not a comprehensive or a stable plan and it would raid the funding of core governmental services. Including education. My opponent's plan is based on assumed revenue from offshore oil revenues that actually belong to the federal government, face substantial opposition from the U.S. Navy and pose significant environmental hazards for the Virginia coastline and economic hazard for Virginia's tourism industry. When I get to Richmond there won't be any room for playing games with regional schemes funded by funny money and I will never take funding away from education and other core governmental programs to fund roads.

3. Aside from transportation, what do you believe are two other important challenges facing the Commonwealth? Specifically, what responses do you propose and how will you pay for them?

When I'm out knocking on doors and talking to folks in the community they tell me that they want me to focus on jobs and economic growth. People are scared that in this economy there is little job security and wages just aren't keeping up with the cost of living. I hear this from professionals, union workers, teachers, and especially low wage hourly workers. Many people have been laid off from good jobs and forced to accept jobs below their skill level and income needs. If I had been in Richmond earlier this year, I wouldn't have rejected the 125 Million in Federal money for displaced workers like my opponent did. In an economic downturn it's time to put aside the partisan politics and do what's right for workers in need of unemployment assistance and retraining. I will work to make sure that my constituents have access to Federal aid programs designed to get our workforce and economy moving. Again, my opponent chooses to focus on the narrow social agenda that we have recently seen exposed in the governor's race, and I would instead focus on the problems that I hear the people of this district expressing; job security, education and transportation.

Another issue I hear about in Newport News is education. People with kids in the local public schools just don't feel like we're getting what we pay for here in Newport News. This may be because for every dollar we send to Richmond in taxes our current budget only returns eighty-four cents back to Newport News. There's no reason why our tax dollars should be subsidizing projects elsewhere in the commonwealth when our education system is suffering from lack of funding from Richmond. I am a former teacher, my youngest daughter is in her first year of student teaching right now in Charlottesville, my daughter in law is a teacher in Fairfax County, and of all the investments that I have made in my life, every dollar that I have spent on education is by far the best investment I have made. I will fight to bring more money back to Newport News for infrastructure improvements, increased teacher pay, and crucially needed youth intervention programs aimed at keeping at risk kids in school learning, instead of on the streets creating problems. I will work closely with Congressman Bobby Scott and Sheriff Gabe Morgan to identify needs and fund programs that work. These are approaches that are not now being tried in Virginia, they should be.