

Gordon Helsel, 91st District

2009 Virginia House of Delegates Candidate Questionnaire

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

As a candidate for the House of Delegates in the 91st District I offer the insight and experience of local government. I am currently the Mayor of the city of Poquoson, a position that I have held for the past fourteen years. Prior to being elected mayor I served as a member of the Poquoson City Council. My twenty six years of experience in local government has been a rewarding experience that has taught me the value of open and honest government. It has also provided me with insight into the importance of leadership in shaping the community in which we live, the merits of effective communications, and most importantly the remarkable trust and faith placed in all elected officials by our citizens.

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

Bob McDonald has offered a very innovative plan to resolve the Commonwealths transportation problems. While I am still reviewing his plan, I have concerns regarding several issues. The first is that it is heavily bond funded. Bonds are a way of financing projects over time just as you would a mortgage or other loan. While this may seem to be the most efficient means of expediting various transportation projects, it also increases our debt ratio and jeopardizes our bond rating. I believe that we must first evaluate every aspect of our current budget in order to identify waste. By identifying and dedicating those cost savings to transportation we will be closer to determining the actual revenue that we can dedicate to those initiatives and more clearly identify the funds that we need to borrow to move our transportation initiatives forward.

The second area of concern is jobs. While the plan offered may create jobs there are no measures recommended to ensure that the jobs created go to Virginians and Virginia based companies. If we really want to stimulate Virginia's economy we will take the necessary measures to ensure that as many of the projects, or portions of those projects, are awarded to Virginia based companies, or companies that establish long term employment for Virginians. While we don't want to jeopardize federal contributions, we should want to ensure that we are doing everything possible to reduce the unemployment rate in the commonwealth, especially in those areas where the economy is depressed substantially.

There is no simple answer to your question. All of the identified projects have merit. Simply put, I would first identify areas of our state budget where there is waste, dedicate the cost saving to transportation, ensure that the jobs created by our transportation initiatives go primarily to Virginians and Virginia based companies, and explore the possibilities of public / private partnerships.

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?

Fully funding education is a top priority. Not just Pre-K and K through 12, but secondary and higher education as well. Tying in our workforce development initiatives with local community colleges is having a tremendous impact in preparing our young people for livable wage jobs and a successful future. However, we need to take that a step further and include the Green Jobs initiatives in our workforce development efforts. Preparing future generations for employment, educating workers on Green Jobs initiatives, and protecting and improving the environment at the same time is a winning combination. Many of these initiatives are currently funded. I am interested in how we can streamline these initiatives to identify cost savings that can be dedicated to expanding these programs. I am also interested in exploring the possibilities of public / private partnerships to ensure that the educational opportunities in the Commonwealth are available, affordable and beneficial to all of our citizens.