

## Phil Hamilton, 93<sup>rd</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?

I have been a strong voice in Richmond for the citizens of the 93<sup>rd</sup> district and citizens across the Commonwealth. My professional experience with public education and my legislative experience with healthcare provide me unique insights to the challenges of both of these core service areas.

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

The HRBT is my number one transportation priority. Other critical Hampton Roads projects include a "new" Route 460; improvements to the Midtown Tunnel, widening I-64 on the Peninsula; a new High Rise Bridge; increased rail projects to move more trucks to rail and off of the congested highways in Hampton Roads; and additional mass transit capabilities as economically feasible. Over the years, I have advocated numerous strategies for increasing transportation funding across Virginia. I believe transportation is a core service of state government and as such should receive funding like public education, higher education, health care, public safety, etc... through all available resources of state government. Funding is about establishing priorities, I believe transportation should be in the mix in establishing such funding priorities. I support dedicating a portion of the future growth in tax revenues from economic development to transportation. I support tolls and congestion pricing as long as collected toll revenue is dedicated to the maintenance and improvements at the facility being tolled. I support imposing tolls at the borders where interstate highways enter Virginia. I also support transportation concessions, public-private partnerships, and the commercialization of rest areas. Because the state gas tax is a fixed per gallon amount regardless of the cost of a gallon of gasoline, I do not support increasing the gas tax. Repealing the sales tax exemption on gasoline purchases at the distributor level could be examined.

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?

Health care is an ever growing challenge for state government. The shortage of health care providers, low Medicaid reimbursement rates, and indigent care costs are making access to health care more difficult particularly for those on Medicaid or without health insurance. I believe Medicaid reimbursements should at least equal the rates paid for Medicare recipients. Emergency rooms should not be the only primary care facility available for those on Medicaid

and Medicare or without insurance. Health care costs also are increasing as providers are facing increasing medical malpractice insurance costs. As a result, many health care providers order an over-abundance of tests and procedures in practicing “defensive” medicine as a protection against malpractice claims. We must return health care to health care professionals and reduce the influence of insurance companies and lawyers in the practice of medical care. A system of accessible, affordable, quality health care also requires that the consumer accept more personal responsibility for their health care. Incentives for healthy living should reward individuals for the lifestyle decisions they make. Individual, tax-free health opportunity accounts and consumer-owned health insurance policies offer an opportunity for more consumer-directed health care decisions. A focus on health care policies that cover prevention as well as treatment services must be included in any long-term health care solution. Basic health care policies, without every mandated service, should be available for those who just want or need basic care. As stated earlier, funding for any government service must be based on priorities. Funding for accessible, affordable, quality health care should continue to be based on the public-private system that currently exists. An analysis of current state funding should be done in order to re-allocate existing resources from non-core service areas or those of lower priority in order to fund higher order priorities such as health care.

Public/higher education is another area that must continue to remain a priority. A high quality system of public education (preK – college) provides an educated citizenry and a highly qualified workforce that allows our economy to compete in the global marketplace. Without these elements, our economy will not be able to provide the jobs necessary to sustain an effective infrastructure of government services. Every effort must be made to ensure that the primary focus of our spending on public education is directed to the classroom and to the students being educated. Teaching strategies must be relevant to students to better engage them in the learning process. Engage learners are more academically successful. To fund such a focus, we must examine the existing \$6 billion being spent annually on public education in Virginia to ensure that the money is being spent to educate children and not to maintain an excessive bureaucracy.

Recent efforts to expand post-secondary educational services must also continue. Access to such services should not be limited to the wealthy or well-to-do. The ultimate goal of every post-secondary educational setting must be to prepare students for the world of work. Articulation agreements between the tradition four-year public colleges and the community colleges have opened the door to more students accessing higher education services. The Community College Transfer Grant program and the Tuition Moderation Incentive Grant Program have also helped to make college more accessible and affordable for Virginia students. Initiatives such as these should continue. I also believe that Virginia should consider options, as funding permits, that expand capacity for Virginia students through integrated efforts with Virginia’s outstanding private colleges. This integration includes continuing the Tuition Assistance Grant (TAG) program for undergraduate and certain limited graduate Virginia students attending a private college in Virginia. Many Virginia private colleges have classroom

capacity that could help to mitigate current overcrowding situations in our public higher education system.