



Indivisible Indiana District 5 State Candidate Questionnaire- Don Westerhausen.

Please send your replies to nmaspenson@gmail.com by
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- 1. How will you undo our gerrymandered election districts?** Indiana is one of the worst states for gerrymandering. The fairest method to draw districts is through an independent, bipartisan redistricting committee that would consider competitiveness, with the goal of creating districts that would be as evenly split between the two parties as possible. The goal should be to preserve the geographic boundaries of communities, promote fairness and to eliminate the temptation to create districts that favor one political party over another. I support legislation to create a bipartisan commission and plan to either author a bill to do so or am happy to co-sponsor legislation to accomplish this important goal.
- 2. What is your position on vote by mail and same-day registration? What will you do to make voting easier in Indiana?** I support both vote by mail and same-day registration. We should make voting easier for citizens in Indiana. People have busy schedules with work, school activities and childcare. Many people do not have flexible work hours or paid personal time that permit voting during the day on Election Day. Early voting in the state of Indiana is helpful but still requires a flexible work schedule. Other states vote by mail without any problems and Indiana should move towards this practice. We already have a system in place for absentee voting by mail and should consider extending the availability to everyone with no reason required. I also support making Election Day a national holiday.
- 3. What will you do to move Indiana toward legislation to enact common sense gun violence prevention?** Common sense gun safety laws can decrease the rate of suicides and other gun violence. In 2004, a bipartisan Indiana General Assembly (Democratic House, Republican Senate and Democratic Governor) passed one of the 5 "Red Flag Laws" in the country that allows law enforcement to take guns away from a person known to be a risk to their own safety or others. That law, over a ten year period, decreased suicides by 7.5%. I also support, as the majority of citizens do, expanding background checks to private sales and gun shows. Indiana has a history of bipartisan cooperation on gun safety and

we should renew our commitment to that effort. Regarding schools and gun violence specifically, the Indiana Department of Homeland Security and Indiana Department of Education released the 2018 Indiana School Safety Recommendations this summer. The committee who prepared the report found that school safety cannot be addressed only by providing protection in the event of a school shooter. They emphasized that to effectively prevent gun violence in our communities and schools, we must approach this challenge as a public health issue. I support the committee recommendations to: 1) Enhance mental health services for students, educators and parents. 2) Invest in equipment, technology, tools and training (for example, metal detectors, entrance security) 3) Consider policies and legislation to improve gun safety. I support this comprehensive approach and plan to introduce or support legislation to address this issue.

4. How will you ensure public schools receive adequate funding? In 2011, the idea of vouchers was introduced as a way for individual students from low-income families to access different schools if their public school wasn't meeting their needs. The policy made sense to many people. Since 2013, the program has expanded to give vouchers to students who've never attended public school, broadened income qualifications and the schools themselves are not required to meet the same standards as public schools or serve the same children. Recent studies, including one from the University of Notre Dame, have shown that the students are losing ground in their math scores at voucher schools. Currently, \$150 million is diverted from public to private schools in Indiana each year. That has real consequences for the school corporations in the District I hope to represent. For example, in the 2017-2018 school year, Penn-Harris-Madison School Corp lost nearly \$1.5 million to vouchers and School City of Mishawaka lost \$758,000. (Source: "District Impact Vouchers," Indiana Association of Public School Superintendents. <http://lapss-in.org/wp-content/uploads/2018/04/District-impact-vouchers.xlsx>.)

Our legislators have created an unfair playing field for public schools and then claim they aren't performing well by comparison. Public schools have been the great equalizer in American society. No matter who you are, what you look like, where you come from or what you start out knowing, public schools welcome children of all abilities to learn and discover their interests and talents. I believe the voucher system is an experiment that needs to pause for further evaluation before we shift any more funding from public to private schools.

5. How would you promote the growth of small businesses in our State?/ How would you tackle unemployment and get more people working?

SMALL BUSINESS

Indiana does a good job of supporting businesses and creating an environment where businesses can flourish. At this point, promoting additional business growth requires investment in our citizens' education and healthcare so that our business leaders can hire people with the skills and ability to meet the demands of employment. Indiana has low taxes, loan programs and mentorship for new business. To attract greater venture capital, Indiana must become a more attractive place to live and work. We need investment in public transportation and green spaces. Mishawaka's development of the riverfront and parks and the support of the Granger Paths project (initiated by local citizens) are examples of these types of initiatives.

UNEMPLOYMENT

With an unemployment rate of less than 3.5%, there are now more job openings than qualified workers to fill the job need. While connecting citizens to education and training to fill positions that require specific skills is a necessity, the bigger challenge facing Indiana is the stagnation of wages. Since the early 2000's, Indiana's work climate has changed for workers. An imbalance in policies that focused only on strengthening business has resulted in Indiana's median wage slipping from near the top of the Midwest to the level of a Southern state. Decreased union membership due to Right to Work, a minimum wage unchanged at \$7.25 since 2009 and the repeal of the Common Construction Wage are all decisions made by the Republican majority in the Indiana General Assembly that led to the decline in income for our workers. Our policies need to balance investment in people through education, a living wage, healthcare, affordable housing and affordable childcare with the needs of business. We've lost a lot of ground in the last 10 years and need to return Indiana to its past position as a leader for wages and benefits for workers in the Midwest.

6. What is your position on passing hate crime legislation in Indiana? I would be proud to cast a vote to enact hate crimes legislation in Indiana. I completely agree with Governor Holcomb, "Indiana should be 1 of 46 states with hate crimes legislation -- not 1 of 5 states without it." It is important to have a law in place in Indiana that says we won't tolerate crimes against people just because of who they are, how they live their life or what they believe. Bills to pass hate crime legislation have been unsuccessful for the last three years in the Indiana legislature. It was encouraging that a interim study committee met to consider hate crimes legislation this summer, however, their summer committee concluded without any recommendations or a proposed bill. It's time to change who is casting the votes on your behalf in order to pass this important law.

7. Will you support a state resolution to call for an article V convention to add an amendment to the U.S. constitution to restore free & fair elections?

The proposal to call for an article V convention is in response to the *Citizens United* decision by the Supreme Court that bestowed corporations with personhood and unleashed excessive amounts of money into the political process. Normally, addressing this type of decision would be done through the legislature, however the *Citizens United* decision overturned the bipartisan McCain-Feingold bill that intended to reform campaign finance. We haven't had a Constitutional Convention since the first one in Philadelphia, and there are other states that have called for an article V convention to require the federal government to have a balanced budget. Amending our Constitution is a serious endeavor, but since I agree that too much dark money has influenced elections since the *Citizens United* decision, I support pursuing this goal.

8. How can we help homeless people find housing and help prevent people from becoming homeless?

Homelessness is a complex issue. Housing instability can be related to mental health issues, resources and the affordability of housing itself. As the importance of housing stability to health, well-being, school performance and employment become more recognized by our community leaders, Indiana should explore the partnerships between government, hospitals and communities of faith that other states are

utilizing to increase the availability of affordable housing. In addition, working to increase wages so citizens can afford housing would also assist in preventing homelessness.

9. What do you believe should be done about racial profiling and the school-to-prison pipeline?

I support reforms to our criminal justice system that reform sentencing, prohibit racial profiling and shift the response to drug use from the criminal system to healthcare. It is well known that people of color are jailed the most and receive the longest sentences, causing instability in families and neighborhoods. One of the best things we can do regarding the school-to-prison pipeline is invest in early childhood education for every four year old in Indiana. Studies clearly demonstrate that education is the most effective protection against criminality in addition to offering development in neighborhoods long excluded from investment.

10. According to the 2017 America's Health report, the state of Indiana is ranked 38th for the overall health of its citizens. It is among the highest in infant mortality and among the lowest for the health of its children. We have lead poisoning issues in South Bend and counties in the southern part of the state have unusually high incidents of childhood brain cancer. How do these poor rankings affect our economy and what responsibility does the State have to protect the health of its citizens and what can it do to improve it?

Indiana's poor health outcomes are one of the main reasons I am running for office. As a physician, I see on a daily basis the consequences of poor health on a person's economic stability. Indiana has higher than average health insurance rates and businesses also spend a great deal on health related costs. Our high smoking rate results in billions spent on medical care as well as loss of productivity in the workplace. Indiana can not expect to attract companies that offer higher wages and benefits when our population is sicker and less prepared with skills than our neighboring states. Our air quality is also in the bottom ten states in the nation and this clearly has a connection to our higher rate of asthma, infant mortality and cancer. The State of Indiana has a responsibility to protect its citizens. Currently, we are 49th in the nation in investment in Public Health. One policy I support to begin to address this problem in Indiana is through increasing the tax on cigarettes that would pay for public health initiatives.