

2020 MNA ELECTION QUESTIONS – CONGRESS - Phillips

Top priority: If elected, what is your top priority for the 2021 Congress? Why are you running for office?

I'm on a mission to inspire a culture of collaboration in Congress and restore Americans' faith in our government. It starts by reducing the corrupting influence of special interest money in politics. No matter what one's number one issue is, I ask that campaign finance reform become number two - because we'll never be able to fix our healthcare system, rebuild our economy, or reform public safety until we return power to the people.

I don't take a penny from PACs, special interests, Federal lobbyists, or even other members of Congress. I'm beholden only to my values, the Constitution, and the people I represent. It's how I remain an independent voice, able to reach across the aisle, find common ground, and get things done.

Economy: How do you grade the federal government's response to the pandemic? Are additional measures necessary to spur the economy? If so, what?

The deaths of tens of thousands of Americans would likely have been prevented by an early and robust response by the Trump Administration. Rather than employing the pandemic response plan left by the Obama Administration and following the advice of epidemiologists and medical experts, the President has admitted to downplaying the severity of COVID-19 and the results have been catastrophic.

We're facing the worst economic recession and public health emergency of our lifetimes, and the federal government has a responsibility to help get us through it as healthy, economically sound, and prepared for the future as possible.

To that end, I'm proud that my bipartisan bill to make urgent relief more usable for small businesses, the PPP Flexibility Act, passed almost unanimously through a divided Congress and was signed into law by the President. It helped millions of American small business owners keep their doors open, and it was all possible because Rep. Chip Roy (R, TX) and I listened to our constituents, committed to partnership, and built a strong coalition - including the U.S. Chamber of Commerce, which has endorsed my re-election.

And that was just the beginning. This month, I led a working group of the Problem Solvers Caucus, consisting of 25 Democrats and 25 Republicans, in developing and introducing a bipartisan framework to help break the impasse on COVID-19 relief negotiations. Americans are suffering, and it's time for a new era of respect, cooperation, and commitment to seeking common ground if we hope to realize our collective potential.

Police reform: police reform has become center stage since the George Floyd death and has prompted calls for legislative action at all levels of government. What actions do you support at the federal level?

As a Gold Star Son, I have deep respect for those who wear a uniform and put their lives on the line to keep us safe. That is why I'm honored to have earned the endorsement of the Minnesota Police and Peace Officers Association, the state's largest organization representing law enforcement professionals.

Many of our Third District police departments are taking innovative approaches to public safety, from hiring social workers to assist officers responding to delicate family situations to investing in community relations to build trust with those they serve and protect.

Yet the law enforcement officials throughout our community with whom I regularly engage have communicated that we are asking our police departments to handle far too much. With police officers being asked to address everything from opioid and meth cases to mental health situations - we must ensure adequate training, support, and increased investment in tackling the root causes of crime.

I am pleased that Minnesota came together in a bipartisan fashion to pass criminal justice and police reforms, most recently in the wake of the killing of George Floyd. I remain hopeful that Congress can do the same. We need national standards to ensure equal protection and equal justice under the law.

Foreign affairs: How do you grade President Trump's foreign policy record? Which of his initiatives do you support, and which do you oppose? Be specific.

As a member of the House Committee on Foreign Affairs, I'm gravely concerned about our standing on the world stage and the politicization of the State Department under President Trump and Secretary Pompeo. That's why I stood with colleagues on both sides of the aisle against escalating trade wars that hurt American farmers, against unauthorized use of force against Iran, and against pulling out of the World Health Organization in the middle of a global pandemic.

We're not going to solve these 21st-century problems with outdated isolationist thinking, but I remain optimistic. Republicans and Democrats in Congress, the White House, and business and labor organizations came together to forge a strong and solvent USMCA deal - and I'm proud to have helped bring Minnesota leaders directly to the negotiating table. Whether it's increasing patients' access to affordable prescriptions, protecting workers, or keeping international markets open for Minnesota businesses - this deal is proof that we all win when everyone comes to the table in good faith.

Health care: Do you support the expansion of Association Health Plans?

In the richest nation in the world, EVERYONE deserves access to affordable, quality care no matter their age, race, gender, income, condition, or zip code. But the corrupting influence of special interest money in our politics has left us with a sick-care system, not a health care system.

It's time for an era of healthcare innovation. We can start by reforming our health care delivery model to reward prevention instead of procedures. And we must finally allow Medicaid and Medicare to negotiate with pharma companies for lower prices on behalf of American patients. I'm tired of hard working Americans subsidizing prescription drug prices for much of the world.

I also favor offering Medicaid as a buy-in option for Americans - while allowing those who are satisfied with their employer-sponsored insurance to keep it.

I do not support the expansion of Association Health Plans because of their exemption from state oversight and regulations within the Affordable Care Act. I believe that there are a core package of essential health benefits and products, including Association Health Plans, that do not offer coverage of those benefits that harm both consumers and the insurance market. I co-sponsored and voted for HR 1425, the Patient Protection and Affordable Care Enhancement Act, which states that money appropriated to market and educate the public on plan options should not be used for Association Health Plans.

Education: COVID-19 has had a profound effect on the demands for and delivery of education. What role should the federal government play in ensuring that U.S. graduates can compete in the global economy?

No one who wishes to further their education should be denied access to an affordable two or four-year college degree, apprenticeship, or job training certificate that prepares them for jobs of the future. Education and training after high school are one of the best investments an individual and family can make. Many of today's jobs did not exist a few years ago, and others—like manufacturing jobs—are radically different than in years past.

Now more than ever we need to ensure that our higher education system is prepared to train and equip our young people -- even in a distance learning setting, if necessary -- with the skills necessary to compete in a 21st century global economy. The federal government's role is appropriately limited when it comes to public education, however, so the most important role we can play is actually a simple one: provide the necessary resources. Unfunded federal mandates are driving school districts to cut teachers and support staff, reduce programs and activities, and increase class sizes. This has led to skyrocketing property taxes in many communities. That is why I was an original cosponsor of the IDEA Full Funding Act, a bipartisan bill to ensure the federal government makes good on its promises to our kids and their schools.

And I'm proud to have authored legislation to prevent colleges and universities from using federal education funds for lobbying Congress.

Energy: Is the United States doing enough to reduce carbon emissions? What can the federal government do to promote homegrown energy?

We are not doing nearly enough to confront the existential threat of climate change, which is why I'm working to make our communities more resilient, create incentives to speed our transition to a clean-energy economy, and reclaim America's leadership in reducing carbon emissions.

I am a cosponsor and strong supporter of the Energy Innovation and Carbon Dividend Act, bipartisan legislation that will put a price on carbon to reduce emissions through a market-based approach. All of the revenue collected would be returned directly to American citizens, which would help offset any increases in energy costs. The proposal has the support of Democrats, Republicans, business leaders and climate activists alike.

I will work to incentivize renewable energy from wind and solar, and for infrastructure investments to develop a clean and reliable electrical grid. I support extending the 30% federal tax credit for solar and other renewable energy, rather than letting the credits disappear altogether after 2021, as they will under current law.

Increasing energy efficiency is the most cost-effective and affordable way to reduce fossil-fuel consumption. I support the restoration of expired federal tax credits for energy-efficiency upgrades and the adoption of building-code standards that will save Americans billions of dollars on their energy bills, create domestic jobs, and improve public health by reducing pollution.

Transportation: What role should the federal government play in funding state and local transportation infrastructure? Be specific.

Our country's infrastructure is in serious need of repair. This is an area where Democrats and Republicans should be able to work together to make needed investments -- not just in roads, bridges and transit systems but in water infrastructure and universal high-speed broadband, too. These investments create good jobs right now -- which will be needed to help us recover from the current economic crisis -- while also ensuring Minnesota's farmers and businesses are able to get their products to market and families can travel safely well into the future.

In this way, better infrastructure is an investment in Minnesota's economy and supports existing businesses as they expand and create new jobs, which in turn attracts new business. That private investment helps grow Minnesota's economy, which then can help support additional infrastructure improvements, in a positive upward cycle.

I favor multi-modal transit planning in this country, including both high speed rail and light rail including the Southwest Light Rail (SWLRT) line -- which just received \$929 million in federal funds -- and the Blue Line Extension in the northwestern suburbs. Such investments bring more of our tax dollars back from Washington, which is something we should all celebrate as we rank near the bottom in terms of our net tax outflow.

I support the creation of a National Infrastructure Bank and efforts to expand public-private partnerships to spur greater investments by state and local governments as well as private investors. We should also plan for the eventual phaseout of the gas tax, which is not a sustainable source of revenue with self-driven and electrical cars poised to be the future of transportation.

Immigration: Immigration reform continues to languish at the federal level. What should be the principles of any legislation?

My family came to this country for the same reasons as many others: for opportunity and a place of refuge from persecution. That's the America that I know and love; a compassionate America that values and welcomes hard-working people who come here with big dreams and a simple wish for safety and opportunity. This is not a Republican or a Democratic issue. It is a human issue and an economic issue. We must do better and we must do it together - that's why I led my colleagues on the Problem Solvers Caucus on one of the only bipartisan trips to our southern border in Congress this year.

Zero-tolerance immigration policies do not make us safer, as they fail to address the root causes of immigration. They threaten our national security by forcing us to spend our tax dollars and enforcement resources on locking up children instead of combating real threats, and they undermine core American values and decrease our ability to hold other countries accountable for human rights abuses.

Any immigration reform legislation must include a comprehensive plan for pathways to citizenship. I don't like the notion of rewarding rulebreakers, but it is from a human perspective, and economic perspective, and a very American perspective, appropriate to at least afford the path to citizenship as soon as we possibly can. That doesn't mean that I believe people should be given a free pass. I think the notion of redemption is appropriate because we have thousands of thousands of people from around the country who are waiting in line, paying the money, and going through the legal process to get here.

Foreign trade: Do you support the president's actions on international trade? Long term, will they help or hurt the U.S. economy?

I supported the bipartisan USMCA deal, as it's a good deal for Minnesota's farmers and small businesses. It increases agricultural exports by millions of dollars, and opens up more markets to small businesses in the Third District and beyond, putting job creators first.

I do believe that we've been taken advantage of when it comes to trade relations with China. However, we have a responsibility to look after American jobs and businesses, and China's markets are too big to ignore. We need robust trade alliances all over the world, but unilateral tariffs punish consumers.

Other issues: Are there other issues you want to address?

I've spent more than two years speaking with people across our district. Every issue that comes up, be it healthcare or environmental policy or the skyrocketing cost of prescription drugs, can be traced back, in some form, to special interest money in politics. Viable solutions to the problems we face are regularly undermined by PAC checks. That's why I ask that no matter one's number one issue, please make campaign finance reform number two.

I want to reduce the power of special interests and return it where it belongs - to the people. Our government is plagued by hyper-partisanship and gridlock as a result of the corrupting influence of special interest and dark money in our politics. Right now, Washington lobbyists, PACs, and special interest groups have undue influence over what gets done in Congress. We have to put

government reform front and center if we want to maintain - and enhance - our freedoms and our democracy.

To that end, I authored three amendments included in the historic H.R. 1, For The People Act, that strengthen the independence, diversity and bipartisanship of the Federal Election Commission, as well as bolster ethics standards by closing loopholes that allow for former government officials to lobby after serving the public. This bill, along with countless other democracy reform bills, gather dust on Mitch McConnell's desk.

Briefly summarize your personal background and qualifications.

I'm a father, husband, businessman, Gold Star Son and lifelong Minnesotan who was raised in the district I now represent. I love hockey, the State Fair, and spending time on the lake with my family. I spent much of my career creating jobs and building businesses like Phillips Distilling, Talenti Gelato, and Penny's Coffee, and serving as Chair of the Board of Allina Health System. I ran for Congress in the spirit of listening, problem solving, and mutual respect. Voters of all political stripes joined me in finding common ground and on the mission to restore faith in our government. I'm the only member of Congress to refuse all money from PACs, federal lobbyists, and members of Congress. That's how I can represent the voters of MN03 - and not the special interests controlling Washington.