

2020 ELECTION QUESTIONS – CONGRESS / SENATE

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

In Congress, I will have three top priorities: to make healthcare more affordable and accessible for everyone; to promote economic policies that broaden opportunity, particularly for middle-class families, and harness the vitality of rural America; and to restore Congress' role as a co-equal branch of government promoting sound national security policy.

I am running for Congress to continue a career of public service and to ensure that Southern Minnesotans have a representative who will stand up for their interests in Washington, not those of corporate special interests. I believe that my experience as an active duty soldier, teacher, and Acting Assistant Secretary of Defense under President Obama afford me a unique insight into representing Minnesota's First Congressional District and advocating for the policies that will be best for our economy, our families, and our communities.

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 vacuum of federal leadership in combating the coronavirus pandemic has been unacceptable. That my opponent has promoted conspiracy theories about COVID-19, continued to accept campaign contributions from Big Pharma, and supported repealing healthcare coverage for those with pre-existing conditions at a time when access to affordable, quality healthcare is more important than ever is particularly shameful.

Posing our economic interests against public health interests is a false and dishonest choice: our economy, our schools, and our lives will not get back on track until we address the COVID-19 pandemic. In Congress, I would advocate for a national testing and tracing strategy, as well as a plan to manufacture sufficient PPE for our nation's essential workers. I would also support measures to spur the economy during the COVID-19 pandemic by providing emergency aid to our farmers, rural hospitals, and working families struggling to make ends meet.

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?

This summer, I have been inspired to see so many speak out across southern Minnesota and call on Congress to make all of our communities safer and more equitable. These calls have gone unanswered for too long, and I believe it is Congress's role to respond to those calling for justice and to lead in changing the culture around policing.

This means reforming and reimagining not only our criminal justice system, but our education system and our healthcare system, all of which have perpetuated structural racism for hundreds of years. In particular, we need to address the inequities in these systems that disproportionately affect our Black neighbors. In Congress, I will continue to listen to those calling for justice and work with advocates and experts to promote policies that increase equity and keep our communities safe.

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.

I've spent much of my career defending our nation – first, in an Army uniform during two Iraq combat deployments, and then for three and a half years in the Pentagon as an acting Assistant Secretary of Defense. I believe I am uniquely qualified to lead on issues of foreign affairs in Congress.

As southern Minnesota's representative, I would work towards ending Washington's disastrous, scatter-shot trade policy and build upon agreements like the USMCA which I supported. Our farmers worked for generations and put their own money on the line to open up new markets around the world. Yet today, farmers in southern Minnesota are losing access to those international markets and paying the price for Washington's reckless trade policies. We must hold bad actors like China accountable. That said, we can and should do that in a smart way that does not needlessly slash farm incomes, jeopardizing the economy in regions like southern Minnesota.

I also believe it's of critical importance that Congress reassert itself as a co-equal branch of government at a time where we have been at war continuously for nearly two decades. In Congress, I would lead the charge to open debate for a new Authorization of Military Force, and work to ensure that the Congress authorizes force on an annual basis dependent on the meeting of pre-established conditions, requirements and boundaries placed on the executive branch.

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

Healthcare must be affordable, accessible, and high-quality for every southern Minnesotan. For people who like their current private coverage — they must always be able to keep it. For those who don't, I will work to expand Medicare by lowering the eligibility age to 55 and creating a public option so people can buy into a program like Medicare. I will also join the bipartisan efforts to build on the successes of the Affordable Care Act and strengthen the individual market, which our farmers, entrepreneurs, and others rely on, making it more stable and more affordable.

On the campaign trail, I have heard countless stories recounting southern Minnesotans' negative experiences with our broken healthcare system. Congress must ensure that no family ever has to choose between avoiding financial ruin and getting the treatment they need. In Congress, I would fight to prevent insurance companies from having localized monopolies, end surprise medical billing, and defend coverage for those with pre-existing conditions. Further, we need to make sure that the realities of rural communities are part of health reform discussions and that they have a seat at the table— both to address the challenges they face and to learn from their successes. In Congress, I will work to address growing rural healthcare workforce shortages and challenges by promoting early exposure to health careers and supporting programs that recruit and train providers in rural areas.

Finally, we must bring down the skyrocketing price of prescription medications. Minnesotans are spending too much of their paychecks on the rising cost of their prescriptions, forcing many families to make the difficult choice between paying for needed medications or putting food on the table. Our neighbors, loved ones, and others, shouldn't have to make this choice. In Congress, I will fight for price transparency, empower Medicare to negotiate directly with drug companies,

enable safe generic drugs to compete on a level-playing field, and strengthen Medicare Part D benefits for seniors. Additionally, I won't take a single dime or any talking points from pharmaceutical companies. Because I am not beholden to these or any corporate special interests, I will be able to advocate for legislation that will actually lower prescription drug prices.

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?

In southern Minnesota, lack of rural broadband access has been a major obstacle to ensuring all students are able to keep up in school during the COVID-19 pandemic. In the short term, the federal government should provide support to programs that provide hotspots and other forms of temporary, immediate access to families without internet at home. In the long term, the federal government should invest in the infrastructure required to expand rural broadband access.

Additionally, in Congress, I will work to make college more affordable by expanding Pell Grant access and fixing the Public Loan Service Forgiveness program. I will also work to encourage partnerships between local labor, businesses, technical schooling opportunities, apprenticeships, and 2 and 4-year degree programs so that each child can be exposed early on to the many opportunities in sectors like manufacturing, healthcare, IT, agriculture, logistics and transportation that exist in our communities.

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

As a member of Congress, I will advocate to implement thoughtful environmental policy which will allow everyone to prosper and allow Minnesota's First District to be a leader on energy independence. I will lead the fight to make investments in solar, wind, and biofuels, while always ensuring that our climate policies don't disadvantage southern Minnesota.

I am a strong advocate for the Rural Green Partnership, a plan proposed by Representative Cheri Bustos. This proposed legislation emphasizes the important role that rural communities and agriculture can play in solving the climate crisis, and lays out a framework for federal efforts to support homegrown energy jobs in rural communities. The Rural Green Partnership includes provisions to do this by investing in green infrastructure, workforce development, and basic and applied research on clean energy development, as well as exploring new markets for ecosystem services that establish economic incentives to adopt conservation practices that sequester more carbon in soil, crops and forests.

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

Our nation's crumbling infrastructure represents a major problem for farmers and manufacturers in southern Minnesota. Transporting goods and services to market in a global economy requires an efficient and cost effective transportation system, and inefficiency leads to higher prices for producers. I believe that investments in our transportation infrastructure, including upgrades to our locks and dams, are critical to the future of industry in southern Minnesota and across the country.

In Congress, I will push for greater investments toward needed infrastructure projects to rebuild our nation's roads, bridges, and waterways. I will work with anyone at any level of government, whether local, state, or federal, to improve our transportation infrastructure. Furthermore, I will fight to ensure critical projects in southern Minnesota, like the expansion of Highway 14, get prioritized by the federal Department of Transportation.

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

As a combat veteran who served in Iraq, I have put my life on the line to keep our country safe, secure, and free. For too long, politicians like Jim Hagedorn in Washington have failed to get meaningful immigration reform accomplished. I'll always fight to keep our country safe and our borders secure, and work to actually make progress on this issue. Specifically, I would support and advocate for comprehensive immigration reform to compassionately strengthen our communities, our agricultural sector, and economy in southern Minnesota. The uncertainty that currently exists in our immigration system compromises both our country's security and economic health. That's why I will work with both parties to ensure that we prioritize going after drug traffickers, criminals, and terrorists who try to enter this country. We must also work with other countries to stem the sources of trafficking and terrorism. I would seek the input of law enforcement on the ground and provide funding for better training and technology.

I support the bipartisan DREAM Act which will help grow our communities and bolster our economy and I would work on legislation with local schools, agriculture groups, businesses, and communities to ensure we have an immigration system that prioritizes our security in southern Minnesota and strengthens our economy. While Congressman Hagedorn opposed the Farm Workforce Modernization Act, a bipartisan immigration reform bill that was supported by the Farm Bureau, I would work with both Republicans and Democrats on legislation that meets the needs of our farm economy and ensures we have a strong guest worker program with flexibility for employers and protections for workers.

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

As southern Minnesota's representative, I would work to end Washington's disastrous, scatter-shot trade policy and build upon agreements like the USMCA which I supported. We've seen here the casualties of this ill-conceived tradewar in communities like Winnebago, where the CornPlus plant closed down. It's time to step up, put our farmers first, and replace aid with trade. Our farmers worked for generations and put their own money on the line to open up new markets around the world. Yet today, farmers in southern Minnesota are losing access to those international markets and paying the price for Washington's reckless trade policies. We must also hold bad actors like China accountable and work to diversify the types of agriculture we produce here to build resilience in our farm economy and against climate change. We can and should do that in a smart way that does not needlessly slash farm incomes, jeopardizing the economy in regions like southern Minnesota.

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

In Congress, I will be a champion for campaign finance reform and ending the culture of corruption in Washington. Washington is broken because corporate special interests like multinational oil conglomerates and East Coast pharmaceutical companies have not only purchased a seat at the table— they have completely taken it over, leaving southern Minnesotans to fend for themselves. One campaign contribution after another, their outsized voice has crowded out the needs of southern Minnesotans. That is unacceptable, and I will fight to end this corruption and always put the people of southern Minnesota— not special interests— first.

I am proud to have pledged since the beginning of my campaign to refuse all corporate PAC donations— period, no exceptions. My record on this issue could not be more different from that of my opponent, Jim Hagedorn, who happily accepts thousands from Big Pharma and Big Insurance, votes against bills that would lower prescription drug prices, and supports repealing coverage for individuals with pre-existing conditions. Further, recent revelations of corrupt and potentially illegal self-dealing in Congressman Hagedorn's office with hundreds of thousands of dollars of taxpayer money raise serious concerns about Rep. Hagedorn's ability to be a responsible steward of taxpayer resources, and are an example of everything that is wrong with Washington. Southern Minnesotans deserve better, and in Congress, I will fight to end the very culture of corruption that Rep. Hagedorn has embraced.

Briefly summarize your personal background and qualifications.

After growing up north of Rochester, I joined the Army after 9/11 and served two combat tours in Iraq, taught middle-school math, and served as an acting Assistant Secretary of Defense at the Pentagon. My career in public service taught me how to be an independent leader that gets things done in spite of disagreement or challenges presented. I am running for Congress to keep serving and put people first in southern Minnesota at a time where corporate special interests influence my opponents' votes and corruption with taxpayer dollars comes before his constituents.

In a global pandemic and economic crisis, we are running a campaign to give southern Minnesota the independent leadership it needs to strengthen the middle-class and protect workers' rights to organize. We must deliver accessible, affordable, and universal healthcare. We must reform an education system that doesn't saddle our students with staggering debt. And we must build a fair economy and tax code that works for all of us, and promotes growth for our rural communities and family farms. In this fragile time for our republic, we need leadership that points to challenges and offers solutions that are centered in improving the lives of people, not the bottom line of corporate special interests. That is what I will do as a member of Congress.