

Minnesota Newspaper Association
2020 ELECTION QUESTIONS – CONGRESS / SENATE
Tawnja Zahradka – United States Congress Minnesota CD6

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

I look at it this way, if we don't have our health, we don't have anything. The physical and financial health of the country, planet and individuals are intertwined and create the platform for all other issues to be resolved. Without a healthy population and planet, we are severely weakened and without financial stability, we have few tools to deal with these or any other problems which beset us. My top priority would therefore be the stabilization of this country through efficient management of our resources, both physical and financial, which cannot be accomplished without a comprehensive plan to harness and rein in this Pandemic. We need a cohesive, "one for all, all for one" approach which unites rather than divides, facilitates the return to caring for rather than attacking one another. We further need to streamline our approach and seal up loopholes which allow billionaires to apply for programs meant to help small business and individuals in need, absconding with our tax dollars for their own greed. They should also be made to return any money they inappropriately procured in this manner.

I am running for Congress because I am sick and tired of the imbalance and inequality in all facets of today's society. Women should not continue to make .21 cents less on the dollar, the blue-collar worker who puts in a full day of work should be able to enjoy the basics of life, healthcare, food security, and an affordable, safe place to live. People of all races, creeds and religions should enjoy the same freedoms and protections that our Constitution mandates.

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

Our federal government's response is the epitome of failure, thus my F grade. Americans comprise 4% of the global population yet have 25% of the Covid-19 cases. America needs a coherent, cohesive united approach to expediate the control of this virus and put it behind us, not political disinformation, confusing rhetoric, and divisive language. We need to follow science-based facts to attain a solution to end the pandemic.

Adequate, timely rebuilding of our economy requires efficient spending, managing our assistance programs with targeted recipients in mind. We need to make sure

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those who would fall through the cracks are taken care of and nobody is left behind as well as abolition and steep penalties for wealthy opportunistic corporations and individuals who raid and abuse assistance programs. I believe there is enough money to carry people through this health crisis, stimulate the economy and come out the other side in good shape. We need to monitor our dollars closely and not allow a single taxpayer dollar to be unaccounted for by our Congress. No president should have unfettered power to funnel Federal funds to himself and his cronies.

3. ***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?*

George Floyd's death is an unthinkable tragedy and the collective heart of Minnesota aches for this man and his family. Sadly, this is not the first black eye Minnesota has endured in the National spotlight, but it must be the last. Unfortunately, terminology in the police reform effort has been greatly misunderstood. Language about police de-funding has been widely disseminated as an end to policing. No reasonable person, including myself, would ever lobby for abolishing the police department or abdicating the responsibility of government to protect their citizenry from harm or provide crisis assistance and intervention. This assistance costs money, of course, and that money should be provided. Once again, we must ensure that these funds are used prudently, that the human beings in that department fully understand the purpose of their jobs and have a disposition and mindset to honor their commitment to that aim. There must be a ready remedy for corruption within police departments, no matter the seniority, and a mindset within the culture that encourages mass disapproval of bullying and abuse of power. Incentives should be based on the ability to work with the community, de-escalate situations peacefully, and treat all people humanely to gain respect from those they serve rather than awarding raises based on arrest numbers. The goal should be common respect and courtesy for and by the police. I believe we can all agree on that.

4. ***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.*

Our president's foreign policy record is abysmal. His embrace of dictators while shunning our allies has made us less safe and has opened the door to opportunities

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for dangerous despots to infiltrate and manipulate our country from within. There is virtually nothing this administration has done globally that has benefitted the United States of America or the world at large in any meaningful way, and in fact, the current administration has demoted our authority in the eyes of the world. America's withdrawal from the Paris Climate Agreement, Chinese tariffs and embargo threats have been a disaster for our country. These bad decisions have driven up the price of goods for everyday Americans and crippled our farmers. The abusive treatment of the World Health Organization, who tried to warn us, and whose warning was dismissed had dangerous consequences. The undermining of our important relationship with NATO Allies was appalling. The divisive move of the Embassy from Tel Aviv to Jerusalem, a move which caused more than a thousand deaths in the protest was intentionally provocative. The gut-wrenching abandonment of the Kurds, our brave and loyal allies who fought side by side with our soldiers left them to run for their lives with only the clothes on their backs while Isis prisoners were freed and Russia, Turkey and Syria rolled in to undo everything America, for decades, fought for. Our president's outrageous praise of Kim Jong Un who tortured and killed Otto Warmbier and so many other innocents is sickening. His behavior at the United Nations and every other World Summit he has attended has been an utter embarrassment to our country. Nothing eclipses his most egregious action of all, the breaking of international laws in order to perpetuate inhumane treatment on innocent babies and children. Ripping children from their parents' arms at the border who are legal asylum seekers, while branding them all criminals, and making no effort whatsoever to take measures to ensure their ability to ever be reunited as families, creates an entire generation of children who will be traumatized and damaged for a lifetime.

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

While on their face, AHPs seem like a good idea, I am very leery and skeptical of them as, too often, they become an end-run around the protections put in place by the ACA. In some cases, people have been lured in by lower premiums and a promise of minimal standard care, only to find out that they are discriminated against for pre-existing conditions. These AHP's are geared to younger, healthier people, but payments can be denied for reasons not often highlighted in the pitch to join. High-risk people are left in the lurch and should stick to the ACA programs to ensure fair coverage. If AHPs wish to continue expanding, I feel they should be held to the same standards as the ACA.

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6. **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?*

If I said I had a perfect answer to this question, I would be lying. We are all struggling to figure out the best approaches to this unprecedented experiment. I think the greatest challenge is equity in education for a staggering number of diverse scenarios. How do we ensure that all receive a quality education? How do we guarantee that online education is sustainable for younger children with lower attention spans? What would be the best approach at the end of this crisis to equalize levels of education among a group of children who have received such widely varying versions of learning? I think we will need to give some sort of standards tests at the end of this crisis, not to judge and not to be held against children, but to analyze where they need help. We will likely need some funding for in-class aides who can create breakout groups which can focus on specific areas where the deficiencies lie. We will figure this out together, that is what Americans do.

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

I feel that we were on the right track in reducing carbon emissions but have taken a giant step backward during this administration. We have critical work to do and no time to waste. We are in trouble whether we recognize it or not and the failure to acknowledge the state of this planet is at our peril. I think we need to quit giving huge subsidies to oil companies and other fossil fuel industries. Providing actual corporate welfare for those who make more money than any other industry in the history of the world makes no sense. Instead, we need to reward innovation and give farmers and laborers the tools and financial backing to expand into the clean energies of the future, giving them a base of income that would sustain them through leaner market years. Further, we need to ensure a smooth transition for workers who may lose their jobs because of the changing demand in the energy sector. Minnesota miners should not lose one day of income while their job transitions. They should be paid while in training for a new job which expands their skill set, increases their income, and improves their own outlook for good health and the health of our planet.

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

Streamlining our transportation into a smoother operating system has further reaching implications and effects than most people realize. Think, for instance, of the frustration level people feel as they sit in traffic for hours each day. What could people do with another hour for their family, business or leisure? What effects might that have on their well-being, overall health and productivity? The government benefits in so many positive ways from every dollar spent on infrastructure. From the railroads to the Interstate Highway System, infrastructure is a success story every time. It costs far more to clean up a crisis such as the infamous Minneapolis bridge collapse than it does to implement prevention. Keeping this country running smoothly creates jobs, facilitates commerce, gives people peace of mind, contributes to the reduction of greenhouse gasses and instills civic pride. I believe that all forward-thinking projects should be considered strongly for federal support, that all projects should be open to the bidding process and that companies should be rewarded not only because they bid the lowest, but for innovative approaches as well.

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

This is a question that should be answered with our heart every bit as much as our mind. First and foremost, every decision needs to be put to this one litmus test: Is it humane? As a country of immigrants, it would be hypocritical to approach it any other way. I have some innovative ideas in this arena. I think applicants should be paired with the needs of the farms who rely on their labor, up front, not under the table. I believe that farmers should register with the border processors, letting them know their needs and capacity to care for and provide housing for workers. We could quickly streamline the immigration process in this manner while meeting the needs of our food suppliers. It would be a win/win for all of us and people would not have to live in the shadows. This is only one scenario. Of course, there are other industries who rely on this labor, jobs Americans don't generally want to do. Even our president hires approximately 75 undocumented workers every year for seasonal work. Let's stop pretending we don't need them and give them dignity while they do necessary work. Further, with proof of productivity and a history of being good stewards of our country and our principles, there should be a path to citizenship for those who make our country better. Our decisions should be based

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on capacity and need rather than demonization. I have a lot more great ideas for how immigrants could revive our abandoned factories and ghost towns, taking the decaying remains of these communities and making them beautiful again, restoring purpose to these towns while bringing back manufacturing to our own country.

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

We definitely needed an overhaul in our International Trade practices, but our president has done more damage than good. The theft of our intellectual property by China and others is inexcusable and should be stopped as a precedent to further trade relations. However, we do no good by insulting and demonizing those we wish to trade with. We need to come to the trade table with good will. We need to stop thinking in absolutes as the world is no longer a place where we can live in isolation. We need each other and like all relationships, we can work out better solutions when we approach our partners with warm and welcoming attitudes, even as we let them know we are savvy and no fools.

*11. **Other issues:** Are there other issues you want to address?*

I truly believe it is time we value the everyday working man and woman as much as we value our billionaires. They are the backbone of America and no company can survive without them. Our small towns should be treasured, our veterans and elderly awarded dignity, and our children should be seen as the precious resources they are. No working person should be robbed of the dignity of being able to provide the basics for his or her family, things like food, housing, transportation and daycare. We need to acknowledge the contributions of every single person as valuable. As Americans we all should have an avenue, with hard work, to thrive.

*12. **Briefly summarize your personal background and qualifications.***

Tawnja is a University Of North Dakota Communications Graduate, a 25-year Minnesota Business Owner, a Survivor of Workplace Discrimination, a Passionate Environmental Activist, and an Equal Rights Advocate. Tawnja Accepts No Corporate PAC, Fossil Fuel or Big Pharma Campaign Money. Tawnja is National & Local AFLCIO Endorsed.