

State Office: Assembly District: 60

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Questionnaire

1. As a legislator, what are the three issues you will prioritize in the next legislative session?

The top priority of my campaign is to ensure affordable, quality health care for everyone in Wisconsin. I will work diligently to enact a single-payer, comprehensive, universal health care plan.

Secondly, quality education is the keystone of a quality life and a robust society and is the best investment we can make in the future. We need to expand funding for the entire public education system in Wisconsin; including early-childhood education, K-12, the technical college system, and the UW system.

Thirdly, are three inter-related issues: the environment, jobs, and the economy. We need to move toward a sustainable Wisconsin and build eco-municipalities throughout the state. We need to reduce greenhouse gas emissions and remove the pollutants from our water and air. By making the state a haven for “green” and high-tech industries, we can grow our economy and create high-paying jobs.

Having the best health care, the best public education, and the greenest environment in the nation will be a huge enticement for businesses and provide a higher quality of life for all the people of Wisconsin.

2. Studies indicate that one in four Wisconsinites have diagnosable mental illness and would benefit from effective treatment. In addition, mental illness is the leading cause of disability for working age adults in the United States. People often can not access effective treatment, frequently citing affordability as a barrier. What will you do as a legislator to increase access to effective treatment and community services?

Part of the “comprehensive” health care plan I am advocating must include parity for mental health treatment. We also need to revamp the Shared Revenue program and remove revenue restrictions to allow local municipalities the opportunity to fund the services needed by their constituents.

3. Poverty is a reality for many people with disabilities in Wisconsin. Consider these facts, from the American Association of People with Disabilities.

- 27.5% of people with disabilities aged 18-64 live below the poverty line.
- The unemployment rate for people with disabilities is three times higher than for people without disabilities.
- The SSI supplement for Wisconsinites with disabilities has not increased in over ten years.

As a legislator, what will you do to address poverty for people with disabilities?

Poverty is not acceptable. Firstly, job training programs tailored to a person's specific needs must be instituted along with effective job placement programs with an outreach to local employers to develop job opportunities for people with disabilities. Secondly, I would work for an increase to the SSI supplemental benefits and ensure that those benefits are tied to inflation or the cost of living.

4. One of your constituents contacts you. She is a 68 year old woman whose 70 year old husband has just had a stroke and is now in a nursing home. They have a 46 year old daughter with cerebral palsy who has always lived at home.

Up until now, the family has been providing their daughter's personal care as well as help with mobility and transfers, for example in and out of the bathtub. Now with dad in the nursing home, mom cannot care for their daughter alone. The family is covered by Medicare and the daughter is Medicaid eligible.

All the family's available resources have been expended through caring for their daughter and dad's nursing home costs. Your constituent needs help to provide the assistance her daughter needs and she does not know where to turn. Please describe how you would handle this situation as a legislator and what specific steps you would take to assist this constituent.

First of all, no one should be in a position that requires them to use all their financial resources to provide basic care for their family. We need to enact single-payer, comprehensive, universal health care now! Second of all, I am troubled that a county or state agency has not already approached the family with assistance. I am also troubled that the family doctor (who probably has cared for the daughter most of her life, who probably cared for the father during his stroke and recommended he be admitted to a nursing home) did not offer advice or assistance in coordinating care. Because of my job, I am frequently approached by people with care issues ("My aunt broke her hip and needs help with ..."). There are state and local agencies that provide such services, but few are aware of them. These agencies need greater community outreach. Unfortunately, case loads are very high and funds are very low, so many agencies keep a low profile.

That said, I would refer the mother to the proper county agency and follow up to ensure that she was receiving the appropriate advice and assistance in coordinating available services, whether through Medicare/Medicaid, SSI, or other state and federal programs. Initially, the immediate needs of the family must be addressed, but, just as importantly, the long-range needs of the daughter must be considered to ensure that, when the parents are no longer able to care for her, she is able to lead a full and dignified life.

5. Do you support expansion of Family Care statewide? Why or why not? If you support other initiatives to increase options for people with disabilities to live in the community, which ones and why do you support them?

I am employed as a program facilitator in a group home (CBRF) for developmentally disabled adults. When we were first briefed about the pending transition to Family Care in Ozaukee County, we were told that services for our residents would improve: case work would be streamlined and tailored to the specific needs of each client; there'd be a single advocate coordinating all the services from the various county, state, and federal agencies; the residents would have more choices and direct input into their care; etc. Well ... what we have discovered with the implementation of Family Care in Ozaukee County was less than what we were told to expect.

As each of our residents was transitioned to Family Care, they underwent an assessment that was handled in a less-than-caring manner – rather cursory and perfunctory. Most of our clients had built a life-long relationship with a specific county case worker and were confused when told a total stranger was going to coordinate their care. With the reduced funding available through Family Care, their monthly stipend for personal expenses (clothing, socks, underwear, toothpaste, shampoo, entertainment, craft items, outings, medical and prescription co-pays, etc) was cut by 41%. The staff at the group home has found it increasingly difficult to budget for the residents' personal expenditures as well as implement the programs we have developed to enhance the lives of our residents.

Perhaps the problems we encountered could be attributed to “transition pains”, and I will grant that we are in the early stages of implementation, but we've yet to realize the benefits that had been touted. Possibly, with massive revisions, Family Care could prove to be an effective and responsive program. But, in a word, no – in its current incarnation, I do not support the expansion of Family Care.

6. A constituent in your district who is attending high school plans to attend college in the near future. Her high school offers college prep courses and other extra-curricular activities after school. Counselors often recommend that students participate in these activities to make their college applications stronger and to inform them about options and resources they have when it comes to making a decision to attend college.

Your constituent has a physical disability and uses a wheelchair. She is not able to drive or take public transportation. Her high school does not offer

accessible transportation for these after-school programs. This constituent would like her college application to be competitive with students who can participate in these programs. How would you respond if she called to request your assistance?

I would make certain she got the transportation she requires.

7. The 2000 census showed that approximately one in every 6¹/₂ Wisconsin residents has a disability. As a legislator, what specific steps will you take in order to reach out to the disability community and ensure you are proactively meeting the needs of this constituency?

As mentioned above, I work as a program facilitator in a group home for developmentally disabled adults. Additionally, I have been involved with the local chapter of The Arc, Portal Industries, and Rehabilitation for Wisconsin. I am acutely aware of the needs of people with disabilities. I will work diligently to guarantee people with disabilities get the services they need and deserve.