

2009 JCRC Virginia Candidates' Questionnaire

Responses by Jody Wagner, (Democratic candidate, Lieutenant Governor)

1. Economic crisis: According to the Virginia Commonwealth Institute's May 2009 report the current economic crisis has helped push Virginia's unemployment rate up 122% with nearly 10% of our population living in poverty. How could government leverage state resources to take advantage of Virginia non-profits that are providing services to low income individuals during this downturn?

I began my life in public service working as a volunteer leader on boards of the United Way, United Jewish Federation, and some of their supported agencies. In government, I worked to enhance those efforts. Virginia already leverages non-profits to assist in caring for our neediest residents, but more can be done. Many of our non-profits provide needed healthcare, education, training, emergency assistance and counseling and the State encourages this help. The NAP Credit program is a prime example of how a state incentive has a multiplier effect to increase services to low-income residents. I believe the NAP Credit program should be expanded by adding to the qualified credits. Virginia frequently provides funding to some of our non-profit agencies as grants. This has permitted agencies to try pilot programs or to buy needed capital items. In addition, many of our non-profits leverage Medicaid dollars to provide high-quality care.

The free clinics have helped expand available healthcare, and to assist those clinics, Virginia now provides available malpractice insurance and funds for medicines. In addition, having been the President of Jewish Family Services of Tidewater, I have seen first hand what a strong non-profit can do to leverage dollars, in home healthcare, counseling and other senior and youth services for citizens of all faiths. As Virginia struggles to take care of our citizens, we will continue to look to the services of our quality non-profit agencies.

2. Health care access: Virginia ranks as the 9th wealthiest state in terms of per capita income, yet Virginia's \$609 annual per capita healthcare expenditure on Medicaid means that we rank 48th amongst states in terms of Medicaid reimbursements. What is your position on increasing Medicaid eligibility for very low income workers and expansion of home and community based services?

I believe expanding health care access, including Medicaid, should be a priority for state government. However, I also realize that in the current economic climate, when budgets and spending is being cut across the board, increasing spending on Medicaid may not be feasible immediately. Under Governor Warner we made enrolling more children in health insurance programs a priority and with Governor Kaine I worked to increase coverage under the FAMIS MOMS program, and add to the number of mental retardation waivers. I look forward to continuing to work towards better health care access at Lt. Governor.

3. Virginia Israel Advisory Board: The Virginia Israel Advisory Board (VIAB) is tasked by the Governor with creating jobs in Virginia through greater ties between the

Commonwealth and Israel. In 2009, VIAB created 125 new jobs and \$6.9 million in annual economic growth, resulting in an estimated \$396,750 in direct state income tax revenues. VIAB has been operating on a budget 30% lower than its 2003 level. What is your position on the proper role and funding of VIAB?

I believe VIAB plays a very important role in the Commonwealth's business community, and should be fully funded. One of my main goals is increase number of bio-tech and green energy jobs in VA and as part of that strategy we need to look at increasing the funding for VIAB.

4. 1st amendment: What's your position on the 2009 Senate Bill 1072, "Prayer at Public Events?" What is your position on House Bill 2413 on the "State Volunteer Chaplaincy Program." What are your views about the proper separation between religion and state?

I do not support SB 1072 or HB 2413.

5. Energy security: Fluctuations in oil prices and the threat of global climate change are helping to spur interest in alternative energy and U.S. energy security. What actions do you support at the state level to pursue energy security?

Virginia should become a leader in renewable energy production and consumption. We have the resources, the educated workforce, and the business environment that would allow the renewable energy industry to thrive. I also believe we should look at other means of stabilizing our energy supply, such as further investment in nuclear technology.

6. Divestment: What is your position on targeted divestment by state pension funds of companies with large scale activities in Sudan? In Iran?

I believe that Virginia's state pension funds should be invested responsibly, and while I personally would encourage divestment from companies with widespread business ties to governments that are threats to the United States, I have been advised that the Virginia Constitution does not currently permit that.

7. Discrimination: What is your position on legislation extending to Lesbian Gay Bisexual & Transgendered people the provisions of the state laws banning discrimination in public and private employment and housing? Would you sign a personal pledge not to discriminate in your own hiring?

I support the legislation, and was proud that both Governors Warner and Kaine extended housing benefits through Executive Orders. I do not believe discrimination for lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgendered people should have any place in hiring.

8. Predatory lending: What is your position on bringing auto loans within the scope of the state Consumer Finance Act, which would place a cap on the annual interest rate for such loans?

I believe that predatory lending in Virginia has become a serious problem that demands attention from state government, and I would support efforts to bring auto loans within the scope of the Consumer Finance Act.

9. What is your position on the following issues?

A. A woman's right to reproductive choice – I strongly support a woman's right to choose.

B. A moratorium on the death penalty – I believe the death penalty is an acceptable form of punishment for the most heinous crimes, and that the current threshold in Virginia is appropriate however it is critical that we ensure it is applied fairly and with the highest legal standard.

C. The ability of cities and counties to adopt gun control regulations more stringent than those adopted by the General Assembly? – I believe the first step in combating gun violence in Virginia is to properly enforce the laws and regulations already on the books. I believe we should close the gun show loophole, and ensure that firearms stay out of the hands of criminals and the mentally unfit. While I recognize the desire of some communities to adopt more stringent gun control regulations, the Dillon rule currently prohibits such proposals. These issues need to be part of a much broader discussion about changes to the Dillon rule and which rights are given to local governments.