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**Collector:** Web Link 1 (Web Link)  
**Started:** Thursday, July 13, 2017 8:16:01 PM  
**Last Modified:** Thursday, July 13, 2017 8:21:27 PM  
**Time Spent:** 00:05:25  
**IP Address:** 71.126.165.104

## Page 2: Contact Information

## Q1

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## Page 3: Question 1: Early Learning

## Q2

Virginia is known to have a 'non-system' of early learning where programs operate under different departments and sets of rules. What would you do to better link programs and improve the efficiency and effectiveness of Virginia's early learning programs?

In the General Assembly, I sit on the special School Readiness Committee which works to make early childhood education the best that it can be in Virginia. One major way that early childhood education can be improved in my district is providing public, full-day kindergarten to every student. Currently, Loudoun County is one of three localities in Virginia that doesn't provide a full-day education in Kindergarten.

As a product of the HeadStart program as a child, I'm a great example of why public early childhood education is so important. When preparing the next generation for the economy of the 21st century, the early years of life are the most crucial determinant when it comes to predicting future success.

While pre-Kindergarten and other initiatives are important, I'm working hard in Loudoun to make sure every child has the start he or she needs to succeed in school and in life.

## Page 4: Question 2: Foster Care

## Q3

**Most children entering foster care are returned to their families. In most cases, these families do not receive additional support and services from the child welfare system, which can lead to poor health and education outcomes for children. How do you think the Commonwealth can better support children once they are returned to their families?**

I believe children who enter the foster system should have continued support even when they return to their families. Cases where a child is removed from a home situation are often dire, and the safety of the child is at risk. Foster care programs should continue to follow up with that child and family, to ensure the home life is safe for all involved.

## Page 5: Question 3: School to Prison Pipeline

## Q4

**The US Department of Education data analyzed by the Center for Public Integrity shows that Virginia schools, in a single year, referred students to law enforcement agencies at three times the national rate. Numerous studies show that these school discipline policies increase the chances of these students becoming involved with the adult criminal justice system. If elected, how would you address these issues?**

The School to Prison Pipeline has been a top issue for the General Assembly recently. There were many initiatives introduced that I supported and co-patroned. Setting up children for success should be the goal of the Virginia public education systems; not setting students up for a lifetime of run-ins with law enforcement.

First, I believe that keeping children in a learning environment is much more constructive than suspending them. Often, students who encounter academic and behavioral problems at school have further problems at home. Sending students back into a negative home environment can reinforce bad behavior. Instead, maintaining a student with such problems in a school learning environment, such as in-school suspension or other disciplinary measures, can help foster positive growth.

## Page 6: Question 4: Health Insurance

## Q5

**Virginia's Children's Health Insurance Program (known as FAMIS in Virginia) and Medicaid provide low-income children with health insurance that their families would otherwise be unable to afford. If the federal government cuts payments to the states for Medicaid and/or FAMIS, how would you support the health needs of low-income children?**

First, I believe that expanding Medicaid in Virginia not only makes moral sense, it makes fiscal sense. That would be my first step in tackling the health care hurdles we are bound to face with the current Congress and Presidential administration. Without guaranteeing 400,000 can afford to go to the doctor, we are setting ourselves up for failure. Next, I would do my best to work with the Appropriations and Finance Committees to make sure that our commitments to Virginians who depend on FAMIS are met. If the federal government isn't going to stand up for our neighbors, then we in the General Assembly must to the best of our ability make sure that children can get and stay healthy.

## Page 7: Question 5: Opioid Epidemic

Q6

**Substance abuse by parents affects both the parents and their children. Brain research shows that positive attachment between a parent and child in the first few years of life is critical to the child's healthy brain development. Substance abuse can significantly impact those early bonds between parents and children. If elected, what policy solutions would you promote to address the needs of the whole family?**

The addiction crisis has affected my family personally. Over a year ago, my son Josh came to me and told me that he had been struggling with opioid and heroin addiction for seven years. The last year of his recovery and the experience of helping him through the healing and treatment process has been a learning experience for me, both as a father and as a legislator.

The most important thing for me when it comes to the addiction crisis is to remove the stigma that surrounds addiction and mental health in general, and teach people that it's okay to reach out for help. Increasing the public education as well as availability of treatment centers to help with mental illness is crucial to unlocking the hold this crisis has on our Commonwealth and our nation.

Page 8: Question 6: Cross-Systems

Q7

**A child can interact with many systems (schools, health and mental health, courts, etc.) as they grow up. A Virginia Children's Cabinet has been established to facilitate cross-agency collaborations at the highest levels of state government. If elected, how would you facilitate this type of cross-agency collaboration for children?**

I think it is imperative to improve the communications and collaboration across agencies. In other instances the use of "advocates" or "navigators" have been useful in improving inter-agency collaboration while also insuring the best interest of the child. If re-elected I would pursue the establishment of an interagency forum to improve communications and collaboration and also the establishment of advocates or navigators on an individual basis.

Page 9: Question 7: Mental Health

Q8

**In 2016, Virginia ranked 49th in the nation for the rate of youth with major depression who did not receive any mental health treatment. There are many barriers to quality mental health treatment for children, including: type of insurance, place of residence, lack of access and stigma. What do you view as the most significant barrier to effective mental health care for children and adolescents in Virginia, and how would you propose addressing this barrier?**

As I mentioned previously, the key to unlocking the question of mental health care is first make sure that children and adults alike know that it's okay to ask for help, and to remove the stigma that surrounds mental illness. As for children, we put so much pressure on them in school and in extracurricular activities that overachievers feel that their life depends on every grade and every goal. That kind of pressure is not conducive to children asking their parents, teachers, or school counselors for help when they are feeling anxious, depressed, or overwhelmed. In addition, health insurance coverage of psychiatric help is woefully lacking, even in employer-provided health plans. Increasing access to mental health care first requires that everyone can afford to seek it, without bankrupting themselves or their families.

Page 10: Question 8: Education

Q9

**The achievement gap between lower income students and their higher income peers and between white students and students of color has been a persistent problem in Virginia that has recently worsened. How would you address the achievement gap in Pre-K to 12 education?**

The achievement gap is especially of concern to me when it comes to early childhood education. As I previously stated, public full-day kindergarten is not available for every child in Loudoun County. Without the good foundation that a successful life needs, we cannot expect our children to achieve their full potential. Making sure every child, not just ones chosen by a lottery, has the early building blocks to be successful in school and in life is a top priority for me when it comes to the achievement gap.