

Election 2024: It's time to Meet the Candidates

It will soon be time for every voter to make their voice count. As we know, electing the right officials is not just a matter of going to the polls and pressing the correct lever. Citizens who take this responsibility seriously really need to dig deeply to discover what the various candidates have to offer, what they stand for, and what they intend to do once they are elected to office. This can be an overwhelming task!

The Central Delaware Chamber of Commerce is here to help! The CDCC's Legislative Affairs Committee has taken the time to conduct interviews with the various candidates who are running for office in the General Assembly and Kent County Levy Court. The interview questions focus on issues that are likely to have a significant impact on the Central Delaware business community. Topics for the potential legislators included the relationship of the General Assembly and the Business Community, rent control, environmental issues, HB 350 – The Hospital Bill, and education.

As we approach Election 2024, the CDCC encourages everyone to vote – and to vote responsibly. Use the information provided by the CDCC as you choose your candidates. Keep the health of the business community in mind as you cast your ballots. The Chamber is happy to provide this research for you – please use it as you make important decisions that will influence the way that business is done in Central Delaware.

These interviews will also be available on the CDCC's website at www.cdcc.net under the Homepage tab called "Legislation."



Representative – District 29

William Bush

1. How do you see your role as a Legislator in communicating with the business community?

That is an important call. I am the chair of the economic development, banking, insurance, and commerce committee, in that role, I truly try to work with the business community in all bills that come before it, whether it happens to be an economic development bill, a business bill, an insurance bill, or a banking bill. It is very important to have that input. I do not like it when legislation is put forward that hasn't been properly vetted with everybody. I look forward to a lot of legislation coming up, not just on the big scale, but there's one targeted towards microbusinesses and I'm really looking forward to that. I think we can do some good stuff this year.

2. Paid Family Leave: Currently, businesses are exempt from this program if they employ less than 10 employees. Would you support an effort to raise this threshold to 25? 50?

That's one in which I really understand some of the concerns. I think we need to sit down at the table and really talk about this one. I think we really should look at whether it should go up to 25. I do have a concern about the impact of small businesses.

3. Sick & Safety Leave: Do you support this proposed legislation?

I think it's a bill that needs to be discussed. I think we first must see how Paid Family Leave affects the businesses. I do understand why some people want some of the things in that bill. An important thing to look at is the impact on our small businesses and who it impacts. There were different options put out there last year that could be looked at. I hope that I can help and talk about the interests of the business community. Maybe it

needs to be expanded – maybe it could be unpaid leave. I understand that concept of people returning to work without fear of being fired.

4. Many small businesses suffered losses during the pandemic and are still fighting their way back. Would you support a tax credit designed to help cover a portion of their loss?

I think it depends. That is such a generalized thing. There might be some merit. I'd have a few questions like how are/were they impacted and for what reason? Is that the correct remedy? I always have great concern for those struggling businesses who have been impacted by the government – especially if they are suffering from something we did. We need to find ways to remedy that.

5. What is your position on the current EV mandate in DE... specifically, do you support the ban on the sale of all vehicles below the weight of 14,000lbs by 2035?

First of all, I am a believer that the market will dictate what we should actually have in terms of EV vehicles. I am concerned with the infrastructure that we have to support electricity. It's something we should let the market dictate. I don't think it's a bad idea to set goals with EVs and try to improve the infrastructure for them. What concerns me is the actual grid, the mandate, and the infrastructure. If we let the market dictate, the use of EVs will naturally grow at a rate that it should.

6. Do you support eliminating the use of gas stoves and gas furnaces in new home and office construction?

We have to be smart about the infrastructure that's out there. I don't know that this is a route we should be going down yet. I think looking at it is okay, using clean energy is okay, but it's too soon to mandate it.

7. What is your position on rent control for all multi-family apartment buildings in the state?

I do not support rent control. We should be trying to increase the supply and provide incentives for builders to create more affordable housing. I don't think that rent control is the proper way to handle it.

8. What is your position on HB350, the Hospital Bill – specifically would you support amendments that reduce the impacts upon the private hospitals in DE, such as reducing the role of the oversight board to defined areas, or would you support an outright repeal?

I thought transparency was the important part. I believe there should be a look at the way the board is set up and the functions of the board. I hope that everyone is having discussions right now right now at how this is really going to play out in January. The bill went through the legislature very quickly. I believe that a review of the role of that board will really benefit everybody.

9. What do you see as the number one problem in Delaware's public schools? How do you propose we address this problem?

I think a lot of what we are doing already is trying to address those problems. Improve the education of those who are younger is important... and in need. We need to ensure that students are truly concentrating on learning as opposed to other things within the classroom is important. We need to ensure that teachers are truly feeling supported. There's truly a movement right now to do that. There was a big change in the situation after COVID. We need to be complete in our state by increasing the salaries in order to put more high-quality teachers in place and they don't go to work in a different state. We need to have good teachers in those classrooms. We need to support those kids at younger ages. We need to improve some of the disciplinary issues in the classrooms to create a good learning environment within the classrooms.



Representative – District 29

Anthony Egipciaco, Jr.

1. How do you see your role as a Legislator in communicating with the business community?

It is absolutely important to engage the business community. Part of this role is not listening only to the residents, but the business owners as well. If we don't listen to the business community, we are not helping the community.

2. Paid Family Leave: Currently, businesses are exempt from this program if they employ less than 10 employees. Would you support an effort to raise this threshold to 25? 50?

Yes. I would be in favor of raising the threshold to 25 or 50. Having a family is the decision of an individual – not the business. For time off while taking care of a family member, we'd need to define who that family member really is and outline how that might be verified. I would want to examine the bill more closely to see if there are items that should be changed before it is implemented.

3. Sick & Safety Leave: Do you support this proposed legislation?

Absolutely NOT. This places another burden on businesses that they may not be able to afford. Many businesses are already giving employees sick leave and vacation. If a person needs sick and safety leave and they are applying for a job that doesn't offer this, they should not take the job. No one is required to take a job in which there are no benefits.

4. Many small businesses suffered losses during the pandemic and are still fighting their way back. Would you support a tax credit designed to help cover a portion of their loss?

If they were forced by the state to close, then I would not mind a tax credit because businesses had no choice in the matter.

5. What is your position on the current EV mandate in DE... specifically, do you support the ban on the sale of all vehicles below the weight of 14,000lbs by 2035?

Anything mandated by the state, I am against, especially this EV movement. I don't believe we are receiving the whole truth regarding these cars. Are we really saving the planet if we have to go somewhere else in the world to destroy the earth to retrieve the minerals needed to make the battery. I am always against not having a choice. I am a truck driver that transports gas and petroleum – why would I be in favor of legislation that will cost me my job?

6. Do you support eliminating the use of gas stoves and gas furnaces in new home and office construction?

NO! It just makes no sense. We have an abundance of natural gas and very good propane companies that specialize in delivering it safely.

7. What is your position on rent control for all multi-family apartment buildings in the state?

Again, the blanket coverage I don't agree with. I came out of the projects in NYC. There, this was called "rent stabilization." The problem is that there will come a certain point where some people can do better in life if they work hard. Sure, there's rent stabilization, but other taxes and fees and costs continue to increase. Now this person could get out of there, but can't because of these other costs. costs still increase...that person is in limbo.

Now these people are no longer lower class, but middle upper, and can't afford higher rate apartments. So, as a result, the rent control disappears, the cap on rent is removed, and the owners raise the prices.

8. What is your position on HB350, the Hospital Bill – specifically would you support amendments that reduce the impacts upon the private hospitals in DE, such as reducing the role of the oversight board to defined areas, or would you support an outright repeal?

I would support an outright repeal. This is one of my campaign issues. It is a disaster because it is a government takeover and may end up being government mandates as well. Hospitals don't make a lot of profit to start with. Government controlled healthcare is a disaster. Let's take a look at Europe who has been doing this kind of healthcare for years. Cancer patients there are complaining about the long wait time in getting their first appointments. I find it laughable that healthcare officials in those countries are coming here to receive healthcare in order to beat the long lines. That's what I don't want to see here. I would vote for outright repeal.

9. What do you see as the number one problem in Delaware's public schools? How do you propose we address this problem?

Education in Delaware has been a disaster since 2009. The democrats got control and education has gone down. Right now, we are only 23% proficient in math and we are just 50% proficient in reading. We are in the top 10 states in spending, but rank 4th from the bottom in testing. The problem is government. We are doing something foreign to what I knew growing up and we need to get back to the basics. We must invite parents to be part of solution; education is a partnership. COVID was a blessing in disguise because it caused more parents to become involved in their child's education than ever! We must return to a more classical educational system. This country has produced some of the smartest and brightest people by using classical education. We should remove the electronics and go back to paper and pencil. Cursive is necessary and should be brought back. We need better results beginning with the essentials of math and reading.

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Representative – District 32

Kerri Evelyn Harris

1. How do you see your role as a Legislator in communicating with the business community?

We absolutely have a duty to speak with members of the business community. In order to create balanced legislation, I don't think there should be winners and losers; you must have all stakeholders at the table. In reality, you must have robust and thorough conversations with folks who are directly impacted by the legislation, or you will leave people in the margins, you leave holes and create problems that were not anticipated. We may not always agree, but if my aim is balance, I can't have balance without the right people at the table.

2. Paid Family Leave: Currently, businesses are exempt from this program if they employ less than 10 employees. Would you support an effort to raise this threshold to 25? 50?

I think that I would need to see the data. I have several small business owners in my family, and their ability to provide healthcare and other benefits varies. Other industries are just barely skating the margins which forces them to choose between things like benefits or a higher pay rate. How do we grow both the business and the workforce? Where's the balance?

In terms of the exemptions, I would think that the exemptions would be based more on revenue vs. the number of employees.

3. Sick & Safety Leave: Do you support this proposed legislation?

I have concerns. On the heels of Paid Family Leave, we need to make sure our businesses are stabilized. His bill sounds great, BUT if we already have additional expectations of our business community, it will be hard to add something to that.

4. Many small businesses suffered losses during the pandemic and are still fighting their way back. Would you support a tax credit designed to help cover a portion of their loss?

Without seeing the legislation, it sounds like a decent idea. The question would be how do we prove that it is due to COVID and not poor business practices? We must think with a business mind to ensure that the money is going to the people who really were hurt. It would depend on how it's written, but if we are accounting for those things, yes, I would support it.

5. What is your position on the current EV mandate in DE... specifically, do you support the ban on the sale of all vehicles below the weight of 14,000lbs by 2035?

We worked on that legislation. There are pieces within the legislation saying that those targets can move depending on how the market is working in our state (according to Sec. Garvin). There were hesitations even on the democrat side: do we have enough charging stations? The time it takes to charge up? Safety concerns regarding charging stations at night or in bad neighborhoods? Range of EVs? BUT how DO we make moves to protect our environment which does have an impact on business as well?

We know that individually driven vehicles account for much of our pollution, but we haven't even accounted for one of the biggest pieces, which is rubber on our roads. We haven't addressed tires yet, but they are leaving toxins on our roads. EVs don't solve that. We also have toxic winds coming from other states. EVs don't solve that either.

I believe this is an issue that warrants deeper conversation.

In terms of the Assembly having a larger role in the EV mandate, I say yes and no. We definitely need to have a say, but we really need people who do this all-day full time to guide this charge. We need to be part of the conversation, but time is always an issue.

6. Do you support eliminating the use of gas stoves and gas furnaces in new home and office construction?

I would like to see us head in that direction because of health issues that can affect our workforce. BUT we have a grid problem, and we have done nothing to solve it. My mantra has become "we are NOT prepared." What are we doing to solve that? We have the tendency to put the cart before the horse. As much as I would want to head in that direction, we don't have the infrastructure for that, so it will have to wait.

7. What is your position on rent control for all multi-family apartment buildings in the state?

Rent control failed in all the other states that had it. I think we need to incentivize housing owners to rent at Delaware's market rate. There are many property owners who don't have hundreds of properties, they have only a small number. I worry that we are going to harm people who are trying to create intergenerational wealth – who are renting just 5, 10, 20 properties – not hundreds... We must come up with an alternative that is more

effective. It is really important to paint a picture of what you care about in order to inform the uninformed electorate.

8. What is your position on HB350, the Hospital Bill – specifically would you support amendments that reduce the impacts upon the private hospitals in DE, such as reducing the role of the oversight board to defined areas, or would you support an outright repeal?

We don't know what make-up of the board is going to be, so we can't really guess how to change it. I do think that transparency is important. We know that markets do better when there's true competition – but we also know that there is not true competition between our hospitals, because they're far enough apart.

We are starting to see a bit more of a competitive space when it comes to urgent care. This may result in some pricing competition.

But we also need to be aware of other pieces... how do we solve for them being competitive with other states in bringing in physicians? More than that, what about transparency – why are we blaming just hospitals for increased costs when we know there are other factors? And why are those folks not at the same table to discuss things?

What will the caps look like at each of the hospitals and are they such that we will be able to bring in the physicians that we all need? What do those formulas look like? Will this practice cause problems or do they just not want it?

As a Kent County representative, I know that Bayhealth is going to suffer, and I want to take the pressure off.

The promise is that we have time before anything kicks in. Many legislators want to talk about this. But it needs to be real conversation where people bring their ideas. We cannot just put it off. We cannot just talk about the problem. We need to really bring ideas that could help solve the issue.

9. What do you see as the number one problem in Delaware's public schools? How do you propose we address this problem?

According to US News and World Report, Delaware's Education ranks 30th in the nation, behind New Jersey, Maryland, and Pennsylvania. We were #35 for Pre-K through grade 12, and #22 for Higher Education. What do you see as the number one problem in public schools? How do you propose we address this problem? What should be the first step in addressing this issue?

I think the problem is that we think that we don't have ONE problem. We're seeing unprecedented behaviors in adults and children. Parents are not holding their children accountable. In fact, they come into schools angry when the schools try to hold them accountable. We're seeing a lack of instilling a sense of pride in students. We have kids that think that deadlines are just a suggestion because they've never been held accountable.

There also exists a new negative attitude regarding homework. Schools can't give even minimal homework without parents saying that we're causing too much stress.

Referendums are a problem because there's a great deal of misunderstanding of what the referendum will really cost them. We need to figure out a funding system that will work.

We need to stop testing every single student with the SAT. Those not going to college should not be required to take this college prep test. If they take the test and don't care because they don't want to go to college, this will affect the scores.

We have a literacy problem... There are summer programs (Freedom Schools) designed to increase literacy by one to two grade levels. For the business community, this means all day courses for their children, decreasing the need for childcare in the summer, and promising to give them additional skills in reading. Some argue that these are not

necessary because the Governor has deployed literacy coaches into schools – the problem is that it’s not enough. Students need a bigger impact, a heavier injection like the summer program, but then work to maintain the skill with the coaches. This is an investment that we need to make to produce an industry-ready workforce.

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Representative – District 32

Amy Spampinato

1. How do you see your role as a Legislator in communicating with the business community?

I do think that we need to work with the business community, especially in Dover where the businesses are struggling. We need to do anything we can to ease the regulations, support them, help them start new businesses – and STAY. That is an issue – they come, they open, and they leave. We want to help them, support them, and stay out of their business, so that they stay here.

2. Paid Family Leave: Currently, businesses are exempt from this program if they employ less than 10 employees. Would you support an effort to raise this threshold to 25? 50?

I would! I think PFL is a good idea. As a mom, you need that time, to bond, heal, regroup. It’s great that men are involved in this, too, because this is a family issue. With this bill, I do worry about the small businesses. Too many regulations hinder their growth. Some are on the threshold of hiring the next person but won’t because of this bill. They will never grow.

3. Sick & Safety Leave: Do you support this proposed legislation?

This is not a bill that I am familiar with, but now hearing about it, I would support the idea of it. Again, I do see a need for this kind of bill. There was a situation with someone I know where this became an issue. With that being said, I do not like it when the government gets involved in telling businesses what to do.

4. Many small businesses suffered losses during the pandemic and are still fighting their way back. Would you support a tax credit designed to help cover a portion of their loss?

So, this sounds like a good idea. For me, it would depend on how easy it is for business owners to actually to receive the tax credit. Sometimes there’s too much red tape or it turns out to not really be real and doesn’t do them any good.

5. What is your position on the current EV mandate in DE... specifically, do you support the ban on the sale of all vehicles below the weight of 14,000lbs by 2035?

I think that the EV ban is not really a good idea. There is currently not enough infrastructure in terms of the grid and charging stations, the cost of the vehicles is prohibitive, they weigh too much. This mandate will cause truck drivers to revamp their who system and will cost them a tremendous amount of money.

6. Do you support eliminating the use of gas stoves and gas furnaces in new home and office construction?

NO! I do not support that. Gas stoves have been around for a long time and I think it's the best way to cook – I don't think the government needs to tell people how you can or cannot cook.

7. What is your position on rent control for all multi-family apartment buildings in the state?

Before I moved here, I lived in NYC. There are many rent controlled places, and they are coveted. In DE, this is not a good idea. This set up just inspires people to stay there and no one is ever motivated to move on. Instead, there need to be incentives to build more buildings.

8. What is your position on HB350, the Hospital Bill – specifically would you support amendments that reduce the impacts upon the private hospitals in DE, such as reducing the role of the oversight board to defined areas, or would you support an outright appeal?

I would LOVE to do an outright repeal, but if that is not possible, I would definitely support the amendments. I grew up in Canada with socialized medicine. Delaware, with bills like this, is inching closer to that. The hospitals don't like it, and the medical community doesn't think it's good. I think we should scrap it.

9. What do you see as the number one problem in Delaware's public schools? How do you propose we address this problem?

Discipline. Discipline. Discipline. We are in the CR school district, and we were happy to be there until the pandemic hit, and we home-schooled. My children just went back to school – one in public and one in private. What I have experienced is a complete lack of discipline. The rules don't matter – there are no consequences. The students run the show, and we all know that 13-year-olds do not have the capability to run anything. The culture there is like anarchy.

Some of my closest friends are teachers and work very hard. They are struggling with discipline. They are in a situation where they want discipline in place. Teachers get no support from the parents or the administration. Teachers fear assault, lawsuits, slander.

Here's an example: Kids are not allowed to have cell phones. Yet, in the locker room, kids are videoing others changing clothes. Instead of enforcing the cell phone rule, the kids are now not allowed to change clothes and are required to walk around all day in the same clothes that they sweat in during PE class.

Everyone should be able to learn without the distraction of bad behavior which causes chaos, stress, dropping grades, noise, a high level of anarchy, etc. There must be discipline, rules and respect. It's hard to understand how things have gotten so far off the rails. Appropriate discipline will result in higher grades, peace in the classroom, all around support, etc.

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Representative - 34th District

Tracy Miller

1. How do you see your role as a Legislator in communicating with the business community?

It is imperative that the work of crafting legislation includes the business community any time that proposed legislation can/will impact a business. I think the best thing to do is to include all stakeholders in what we do.

- 2. Paid Family Leave: Currently, businesses are exempt from this program if they employ less than 10 employees. Would you support an effort to raise this threshold to 25? 50?**

No.

- 3. Sick & Safety Leave: Do you support this proposed legislation?**

I support it to an extent. In my own experience, I had to work somewhere for a set period of time before I was able to collect leave insurance, etc. I believe that if you are a full-time employee you deserve benefits – certain markers must be set. This is something, however, that must be left up to the employer – this is not for the legislature to decide. For full-time workers, I think benefits should definitely kick into place after a certain period of time. To insure a part-time employee and have them collect sick and annual leave, doesn't make sense. But if they are a full-time employee working 40 hours per week, then absolutely.

- 4. Many small businesses suffered losses during the pandemic and are still fighting their way back. Would you support a tax credit designed to help cover a portion of their loss?**

So now, 3 years outside of COVID, I know we still struggle with staffing. Yes, but we would really need to explore where that revenue will come from. I am a firm believer in helping businesses, but we would have to have a plan to see where that revenue will come from. There would need to be a committee appointed to see how it would work and what it would cost.

- 5. What is your position on the current EV mandate in DE... specifically, do you support the ban on the sale of all vehicles below the weight of 14,000lbs by 2035?**

No.

- 6. Do you support eliminating the use of gas stoves and gas furnaces in new home and office construction?**

No.

- 7. What is your position on rent control for all multi-family apartment buildings in the state?**

I think there might be an opportunity for more section 8 housing and affordable workforce housing, in which rent is already under certain controls. I'd like to see us have a specific focus – teachers, police, firefighters, military – I'd like to see those categories of people be able to live in places where the rent isn't increased every year to a level that makes it difficult for them to pay. I have feelings about affordability for folks in the area, but I'd have to really look at the bill and see how it addresses the issue. I'd like to see us do a lot more mixed-use housing like what's happening in Downtown Dover.

- 8. What is your position on HB350, the Hospital Bill – specifically would you support amendments that reduce the impacts upon the private hospitals in DE, such as reducing the role of the oversight board to defined areas, or would you support an outright appeal?**

As the wife of a doctor, I'm not a big fan of that. I don't find that it's good policy for someone who is not immersed or educated in the health care field to make decisions for hospitals. I understand the premise of trying to bring down healthcare costs and trying to harness an understanding as to why the costs are increasing. That is not for state government to control those things.

I would not support a repeal. In general, the idea is not a bad idea in that it points out that something needs to be done differently, and the hospitals need to be driving it. I think they do need to be held accountable because of spending because that affects everyone – but they are the experts on this, not the legislature. Currently, there are no guard rails for healthcare that allow costs to escalate on both ends. The premise of HB350 could be okay – but it needs to be reworked. As it stands, it is causing horrible ripples throughout the community. I think we could amend this to be a decent bill, but it’s going to involve many stakeholders. If we’re going to have an oversight committee, let’s have the committee be made up of people who understand how hospitals work. Let’s back up and come up with a plan that’s helpful to everyone.

9. What do you see as the number one problem in Delaware’s public schools? How do you propose we address this problem?

Education is a big part of my platform. The first thing we need to do is address the unit-based counts that we use. It has not been updated since World War II. This needs to be addressed. We need to set up schools for success rather than failure.

Next, we need to pay more attention to Special Education and multi-language learning. We do not have any dispensation for schools who are overwhelmed by multi-language learners. I have a school in my district that is 80% multi language learners with no multi-language learner teachers.

In Delaware, ALL students are required to go through testing – multi-language learners, special ed kids, etc. The SAT is a college-based test – but every student is required to take it... why? Why would I require a student who wants to pursue a trade to take a college-based test? And to complicate the issue, teachers are teaching to this test, instead of all the amazing things they could be teaching.

Education in Delaware is a broken system that needs to be rebuilt. From the program to the testing to the school buildings themselves - crumbling schools, lead-based water fountains, etc., we must address things that are REAL.

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State Representative – Lyndon Yearick

34th District

1. How do you see your role as a Legislator in communicating with the business community?

Good legislation involves stakeholders. The work of the government is going to impact a variety of industries. In order to advocate for the business community, we need to listen to those stakeholders – it is important.

2. Paid Family Leave: Currently, businesses are exempt from this program if they employ less than 10 employees. Would you support an effort to raise this threshold to 25? 50?

I would advocate for the complete elimination of Paid Family Leave. I’ve talked to many employers – large and small and they are already offering these kinds of leave. The mandate is an inappropriate overreach on the part of the legislature. I would be in favor of its abolishment.

3. Sick & Safety Leave: Do you support this proposed legislation?

I do not support Sick & Safety Leave as outlined in the bill. Employers can make the best decisions for their employees. Government should be responsible for what we do best – but the government has gone way too far into the business of the business community with this bill and others like it.

4. Many small businesses suffered losses during the pandemic and are still fighting their way back. Would you support a tax credit designed to help cover a portion of their loss?

YES. The State Government kept the state and schools shut down too long. We were very fortunate with a financial surplus and, during that time, only gave residents a one-time \$300 stipend.

5. What is your position on the current EV mandate in DE... specifically, do you support the ban on the sale of all vehicles below the weight of 14,000lbs by 2035?

Leaders need to eliminate the implementation of the EV mandate. I would guess that, 18 months from now, there is going to be an immediate response from the loss of market shares in our state, and the lack of consumer choice. I predict that legislation will be drafted that will take it away. I am not against EVs, but in terms of their use, we must let the market decide. The mandate is going to reduce the market share available to customers and will do nothing to impact the environment.

6. Do you support eliminating the use of gas stoves and gas furnaces in new home and office construction?

The elimination of gas stoves and furnaces is ridiculous. It will have no impact on the environment and will drive business to other places.

7. What is your position on rent control for all multi-family apartment buildings in the state?

Rent control has never worked. We should be looking at affordable housing. We could implement measures related to construction and planning in the county that might reduce spending. At the state level we could expedite the approval process to reduce costs. We could work with other legislators to create tax credits for developers. In regard to the private sector, rent control will increase costs and shrink supply.

8. What is your position on HB350, the Hospital Bill – specifically would you support amendments that reduce the impacts upon the private hospitals in DE, such as reducing the role of the oversight board to defined areas, or would you support an outright appeal?

This is a ludicrous bill, ridiculous. I was opposed from the beginning. It will not do anything to drive down health care costs.

9. What do you see as the number one problem in Delaware's public schools? How do you propose we address this problem?

We must eliminate the outdated unit count system. We spend over \$2 billion on education and we need to give the districts greater flexibility on how to spend it. We need to encourage, attract, and retain teachers and let them know they are supported. Teachers leave because they lack administrative support and because a lack of discipline creates a poor school climate. We must reduce distractions caused primarily by disciplinary issues to improve the learning environment. We must focus on proficiency in reading and math. Students should have a high level of proficiency in basic math and reading by the end of third grade. We can no longer just pass students through. Social emotional wellness is important, and we must serve students who need help in these areas, but not at the expense of the rest of the students in the class. The absentee rate is ridiculously high – that

needs to be addressed. We also need to ensure that students graduate workforce ready – in that area we've made some great strides with apprenticeships and internships, but more needs to be done.

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Representative – District 36

Rony Baltazar-Lopez

1. How do you see your role as a Legislator in communicating with the business community?

I believe it is vital to communicate with the business community. I am the son of a small business owner. Dad came here in the 90's and then started a business in the early 2000's. At that time, there were no centralized services which caused many challenges in navigating the business space. I am happy that has improved over time

with benefits like Edge grants and other incentives from DDSB and the like. Members of the General Assembly have a duty to bring people from the economic space into the legislative process. Legislators can't do any work without getting input from that community.

2. Paid Family Leave: Currently, businesses are exempt from this program if they employ less than 10 employees. Would you support an effort to raise this threshold to 25? 50?

I would support the discussion of this. There's a conflicting issue for me in that I get what paid family leave does for families, but also what this does to businesses. I would support a discussion to make these changes.

3. Sick & Safety Leave: Do you support this proposed legislation?

No.

4. Many small businesses suffered losses during the pandemic and are still fighting their way back. Would you support a tax credit designed to help cover a portion of their loss?

Yes.

5. What is your position on the current EV mandate in DE... specifically, do you support the ban on the sale of all vehicles below the weight of 14,000lbs by 2035?

I support the EV mandate. In order for us to combat climate change, which the Governor and many legislators have already pledged to and started working to achieve, we do need to ensure that Delawareans are meeting a threshold in which car owners have access to EVs. I do not have an EV, but I would like to do my part in contributing to the combat of climate change. Milford does not have sufficient charging stations, so there's more work to be done in that space, but I do support it.

6. Do you support eliminating the use of gas stoves and gas furnaces in new home and office construction?

NO – not yet.

7. What is your position on rent control for all multi-family apartment buildings in the state?

As someone who rents right now, rent is getting out of control. I am concerned about low-income families who can't afford rent. Do I think that rent control is a policy that could help alleviate those concerns for low-income people? I would support that.

8. What is your position on HB350, the Hospital Bill – specifically would you support amendments that reduce the impacts upon the private hospitals in DE, such as reducing the role of the oversight board to defined areas, or would you support an outright repeal?

I would support amending the legislation, but only after having several discussions with the stakeholders, the hospitals, and community members to get their input. We've seen rising health care costs and there have been other states in which this was successful. I felt that there was not enough discussion on this when it was passed. It went through too quickly and there should have been more discussion.

9. What do you see as the number one problem in Delaware's public schools? How do you propose we address this problem?

In 2019, I served on the Milford School Board and have seen first-hand what some of the issues are. The biggest issue post covid is the shortage of teachers across the state, which is due to teacher burn out, and quite a lot of distraction caused by cultural conflicts and bad behavior. I also serve on the Delaware Advisory Council for Technical Education. We are so focused on getting our students ready for college and not necessarily ready for work. Not every student wants to go to college; some want to join the workforce. Yet, college prep is where our focus continues to lie. We need to institute a pathway for teachers. We need to continue supporting our multi-lingual, low income, and students with disabilities. We've been able to secure some money, but there is so much more to do. We need to adjust the student count. We need to invest in capital infrastructure. In terms of increasing the spending on education. I think right now we are trending to spend more than we are bringing in on the state budget. I think that we need to evaluate the whole system in general. I don't think that increasing spending is THE solution but could be one of the solutions.

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Representative – 36th District

Brian Shupe

1. How do you see your role as a Legislator in communicating with the business community?

I definitely think it is our responsibility to talk with business owners and others not only when we are drafting legislation, but when the legislation is being considered.

I am a small business owner myself and have experience over 13 – 14 years of opening small businesses. I've seen over the past 6 years how important it is to have business people at the table even before we start drafting. Their input is

tremendously helpful, and they know more than we do on what the impact will be if we pass certain bills.

This January our businesses will be required to take on Paid Family Leave and a \$15 minimum wage. We've already had to raise our prices twice and we've seen the effect: many customers have been upset or left. But it's the only way we can afford to bring in the additional revenue need for those government mandates. In

January, when minimum wage goes up again, many of the legislators do not understand the issue of compounding salaries. People who are already being paid \$15 per hour will also need to get a raise.

I would like more businesses have a seat at the table. Not all legislators understand the regulations that come from the federal government. These sometimes mean that we must take workers off salaries or have to let them go. This kind of action hurts morale and stings the employees who were up for a raise.

- 2. Paid Family Leave: Currently, businesses are exempt from this program if they employ less than 10 employees. Would you support an effort to raise this threshold to 25? 50?**

I would. There was a lot of discussion with the business community AFTER the paid family leave act was already put into place. The next year, legislation came back and took down some of the requirements, the regulations were decreased. At that point, a discussion was not had with the public – and that was a missing piece. This will be hard for businesses who have gone out of their way to take care of employees who are taking care of someone or are sick themselves. To regulate that and make sure the state mandates it in a certain way put outside pressure on the business so that they can't act in the best interest of their customers.

- 3. Sick & Safety Leave: Do you support this proposed legislation?**

I am not in favor of any bill that mandates business owners to do a certain number of anything – that should not be the job of the assembly. We work with our employees individually on meeting their needs, so I would not be in favor of this proposal.

- 4. Many small businesses suffered losses during the pandemic and are still fighting their way back. Would you support a tax credit designed to help cover a portion of their loss?**

Of course – yes. Not only do I support that. I support eliminating the gross receipts tax. At Fur baby Pet Resort we currently have 30 employees – we'll soon have 30 more. It takes a lot of money to pay that many employees. When it comes to gross receipts taxes, no one takes into consideration the money that's being spent; they only take into account the money that is coming in. We have no problem paying taxes on our business. I think there are other ways to generate business revenue for the state and would like to see us consider those.

- 5. What is your position on the current EV mandate in DE... specifically, do you support the ban on the sale of all vehicles below the weight of 14,000lbs by 2035?**

I don't think there should be any mandates from the government that you have to buy certain products or that you can't buy certain products. It flies in the face of a free and fair market system. Anything mandating or prohibiting people from buying in a legal business is not good for our economy.

- 6. Do you support eliminating the use of gas stoves and gas furnaces in new home and office construction?**

No – based on the same principles I discussed regarding the EV mandate.

- 7. What is your position on rent control for all multi-family apartment buildings in the state?**

Again, I think rent control is a really puts a strangle hold on free market economics. When I was the Mayor of Milford, we had a lot of people who were – and still are – struggling. We made a very big distinction between living conditions and rent control. We implemented standards and inspections. There needs to be some sort of balance; I think the less government interference the best. Rent control is trying to regulate the

market again – and you’re doing it in a way that pushes a narrative that I don’t like – us vs them. I think that there are other ways to get at rent – more housing, more competition.

Speaking from a landlord’s perspective, I believe that people don’t take into consideration what it costs to bring a building up to speed. Capping landlords at a certain rent, they might not be able to make those modifications that will make it a safe and we will not be able to offer a nice place to live.

In a related area, there needs to be more financial literacy in our schools; once you understand your finances, it will change your world. My wife and I were not versed in this and made many mistakes. Just a simple financial literacy course can make a large difference for people.

8. What is your position on HB350, the Hospital Bill – specifically would you support amendments that reduce the impacts upon the private hospitals in DE, such as reducing the role of the oversight board to defined areas, or would you support an outright repeal?

I voted against it and was very vocal about it on the floor and in our community. I didn’t support it because it was the government managing the finances of a business or a nonprofit. This bill gives the government the authority to do that. This could set a bad precedent. If they start with the hospitals, next it could be grocers or retail stores or rent control or any other area. I would be more than happy to drive the cause of having that bill repealed. I think getting government into the business community is not helpful. There are other ways to cut costs in hospitals that have been successfully done in other places that have not been tried here. For example, we could introduce competition, eliminate a need, create between state compacts, accepting medical personnel from other states without requiring re-licensure, etc.

9. What do you see as the number one problem in Delaware’s public schools? How do you propose we address this problem?

There are several... and nothing will be the silver bullet. The immediate challenge that we need to take on is childhood literacy; the rates are terrifying. Only 44% are reading at grade level, only 31% are doing math at grade level. When you cannot read or do math, you cannot comprehend all the other subjects that are coming at you in a day. The old adage says that up to age 9 you learn to read, after that you read to learn.

How to get there? We need to very much involve our nonprofits, our faith based communities, and our parents to ensure that literacy is a cultural thing that we want – to instill that success depends on it. We need to make sure that kids are learning vocabulary and reading at the earliest ages possible. There are really simple things that parents can do at home – it’s not that they don’t want to, they don’t know. Perhaps this wasn’t part of their experience. Basic things: Reading to your kids every night – and getting them to read. There are many words that are used in almost every sentence- teach them those to start. There are programs in the libraries and Read Aloud Delaware that encourage an appreciation of reading.

We need to build that culture back. It has to be something fundamental in our communities that we push and help families understand. This is the first step that a child needs in order to be able to learn successfully. We need to then build this reading practice into every single grade after that. There are states that have legislation that require a child who does not read at grade level after 3rd grade to be retained in 3rd grade.

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Kent County Levy Court – 5th District

G. “Jody” Sweeney

1. What is the single biggest issue facing Kent County?

I believe that we just completed a failed reassessment, and we are now faced with dealing with the repercussions of that. I don't believe that the actual valued assessments were correct. I thought that our marginalized communities may receive a lower value than previously, but they went up. Farmers were also hit hard. Commercial properties made out well. The next assessment is scheduled for 5 years from now – this will be a paper assessment, not boots on the ground.

2. What do you believe are or should be Kent County's priorities for economic development?

I would love to see more of the same. Look what the Kent Economic Partnership under Linda Parkowski's leadership has accomplished! And now that we have the joint use agreement, we must get the word out and really work that asset. In addition, we need to assure companies that are considering a move to Kent County that this is the place they want to be and that it will benefit them to move here.

3. What is your opinion about the county's planning & permitting processes? If given the opportunity what would be the top 3 things you would change?

Permitting can always be improved. We need to continue to push for the automated permitting system. In addition, we need to eliminate the reviewers' ability to slow down the process instead of continuing to require those submitting permits to return over and over again.

4. What is your opinion on how the county should respond to the production, distribution, and retail sale of marijuana?

The county should stay out of this issue. People can do what they want on their own time. This is a state issue. As far as implementation, the county will not create new zoning – the zoning will remain General Business (BG).

5. What is your number one project you will be promoting/sponsoring in Kent County during your term as commissioner?

It took nearly 17 years to obtain our public gym, and currently, it's totally maxed out. We need to build another one. There is additional property for another gym. My hope is that we can build a gym with an indoor 6-lane track. This project needs to be a priority.

The General Election
will be held on
Tuesday,
November 5, 2024

Please make your
voice count and
VOTE!

Polls are open from
7am - 8pm

For more information
about this year's voting process, please visit
<https://ivote.de.gov/voterview>