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Q1

Describe your overall philosophy toward the role of state government as it relates to business and industry.

Stay out of the way as much as possible. Keep others out of the way as much as possible.

Q2

What do you bring to the office you seek? Specifically, what have you built, improved, or changed for the benefit of your community or business?

I've been in the private sector all my work life - as an accountant mostly. As someone who deals with financial info all the time, I understand how business struggles to stay afloat in this state. I think that experience helps me in the legislature (mostly by opposing well-meaning but ridiculous legislation that makes doing business harder than it needs to be).

Q3

Please list any groups, associations, or non-profits in which you are an active member or volunteer such as civic groups, labor organizations, advocacy groups.

Kanawha Valley Senior Services - board member
Tyler Mtn. Volunteer Fire Department - board member (treasurer)
Kanawha County Republican Executive Committee - voting member
Putnam County Rotary - member

Q4

West Virginia is facing many challenges. What do you consider to be the most important and critical challenge that threatens our state and what is your plan to alleviate this threat?

Our state is struggling to get out from under 80+ years of ever-increasing regulation (strangulation) of business. And I think the single greatest threat is an upcoming generation who thinks we should tax business even MORE to pay for services. This upcoming generation (not all of them, obviously, but many) coupled with our existing people who think business is an endless supply of more tax money don't realize that if we don't support business and make it more attractive to conduct business in this state, that pool will continue shrinking until there's nothing left to tax and regulate.

Q5

During the 2020 Legislative Session, SJR 9 and SB 837 moved in the West Virginia Senate, but fell short of the votes needed to move to the House of Delegates. The intent of the effort was to allow West Virginians to vote on a constitutional amendment to phase-out/repeal of manufacturing inventory, machinery, and equipment tax, business inventory, and tax on passenger vehicles while making local governments and schools whole. Please describe your ideas for addressing this issue which requires a change to the West Virginia Constitution.

Honestly what we need is for constituents of reluctant legislators to reach out in a great wave and let them know how much they want this to pass. I see it time and again... when legislators phones and email inboxes fill up, they start paying attention. Otherwise it's just us up at the Capitol trying to convince each other of what's important. Nothing talks louder (or more effectively) than voters reaching out overwhelmingly to their own representative.

Q6

What ideas do you have to help build our state's economy and improve West Virginia's position in competing for investment and job growth?

Passing the repeal of inventory, machinery and equip would be a good first step. Honestly I can't think of another single issue that would improve the economic outcomes of our existing state businesses. Other than that, I think encouraging entrepreneurial enterprise in the state is important. If we can get our young people creating here in the state (instead of expecting government handouts), we'd be a lot better off. Continue to improve our reputation vis-à-vis our court system would help as well -- businesses thrive on stability and being able to accurately predict outcomes. Our court system needs to provide that stability.

Q7

Use of and addiction to opioids in West Virginia and our region have reached crisis levels. This is a problem being recognized not only at the state level, but at the federal level. What ideas do you have to help stop this devastating trend in our state?

The legislature has put into place an enormous body of law relating to the drug crisis in the last several years - and we are starting to see improvement. I think we need to stay the course and analyze the results - when we see improvement we know it's working. When we see loopholes, we need to close them. One thing we could improve is focusing on long-term rehabilitation with job training at the end of it. If people don't have hope and something to reach for, they slip right back into the cycle and that doesn't help anyone.

Q8

Racial justice and equity, LGBTQ rights and gender equity are important factors for many current West Virginia employers, companies that consider moving to our State, and employees who may consider relocating to West Virginia. How would you address these issues to recruit and retain companies and employees for whom this is a priority?

I think LGBTQIA individuals deserve what anyone else deserves - complete equality. This is not the same as additional rights above what anyone else has though. I believe in equality. Racial justice - I think that is something that every state needs to keep in the forefront of their minds when crafting laws and developing regulations. We should be fair and equal, regardless of race, gender, gender identity or any other characteristic. What we need in this state is people who will treat others with kindness period. We're all just people. If we could encourage that attitude, our state and the country would be welcoming to anyone. I try very hard to practice this in my own life as well as my legislative duties.

Q9

What are your specific ideas related to developing a diverse and skilled workforce in West Virginia?

One idea is restorative justice. We are not a terribly diverse state, but many of our young people, especially BIPOC individuals, end up in a never-ending cycle in our justice system. I created HB 4670 which was modeled after a very successful similar program in Colorado which had a 76% reduction in recitivism. Can you imagine what that would mean in WV? Instead of our children ending up incarcerated, if we could catch the troubled individuals who need a little help and instead of jailing them, put them on the path of becoming a productive citizen? If we had even a 50% reduction in recitivism, think what that would mean for our workforce. That's more young people developing a skill and working. That's more young people not caught up in drugs or crime or welfare, but entering the workforce and contributing to society. Restorative justice in my bill is not a handout and not a get-out-of-jail-free card. It's facing what you have done, learning from it, and deciding to take a different path than the one you were on. It passed the House unanimously and was called by Larry Kump the single most important piece of legislation in his history in the House. I think it could really help the state if we could bring our young people into the workforce instead of the jailhouse.

Q10

The West Virginia Department of Environmental Protection proposed a rule for the 2021 Legislative Session to adopt a portion of US EPA recommended human health criteria which established limits for certain environmental permits. The WVMA is actively involved in ongoing discussions related to these criteria and supports the WV DEPs approach to establish an active work group to further evaluate these important measures. Please describe your position on the proposed rule.

My position is that it is important to determine what is right for WV. WV already uses more stringent factors than many other states - for instance, Virginia uses 1 in 100,000 risk factor in setting the human health standards for carcinogens while WV uses 1 in 1 million. So my stance is going to continue to be, we need to do what is right for WV. Adopting rules that would actually cause us to go backward (because we're already more stringent) doesn't make sense. We should encourage the WVDEP to base WV criteria on state-specific values as allowed and encouraged by the US EPA.

Q11

Please describe policies that you believe may be helpful in balancing state regulations and environmental rules while maintaining a competitive atmosphere for industrial job growth and investment?

I think we need to stop believing that all businesses are full of greedy, evil people. We also need to stop believing that making a profit is evil. It's not. It's what makes a lot of good things possible. WV businesses are mostly owned and operated by people that live here and raise kids here and want what is best for their families and the state, including the air we all breathe and the water we all drink. Creating draconian regulation that is anti-business and anti-industrial growth comes from people who don't understand that having more business in this state would solve a lot of problems. We need policies that help business flourish by providing stability and equity. Usually this means incremental changes that make sense and that put WV on an even footing among our neighboring states. We can compete and grow business (which helps lower the tax burden by broadening the base) if we encourage common sense decisions and consult with industry instead of treating industry like a cash cow that only exists to provide tax revenue to the state.

Q12

What would you like to share with our members that we have not asked?

I am not a business owner myself. I don't consider myself to be an expert in all things. That's why I listen to experts who do know more than I do before I make decisions that affect the very people and businesses and industries to whom I should be listening. Being a good legislator is something I take very seriously. I still have a lot to learn but at least I'm willing to listen and try to improve.

Q13

Would you be available for an interview remotely or in person?

Anytime.

Q14

Where may the WVMA follow you on Social Media? Please list social media handles including Facebook, Twitter, and others.

<https://www.facebook.com/delegatediannagraves/>
Twitter - @DiannaLGraves

Q15

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Dianna Leigh Graves

Q16

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Q17

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