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Collector: Web Link 1 (Web Link)
Started: Wednesday, July 29, 2020 5:06:15 PM
Last Modified: Thursday, July 30, 2020 8:10:08 AM
Time Spent: 15:03:52
IP Address: 173.81.193.164

Page 1

Q1

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

Business and industry have the knowledge and skill set to determine the proper allocation of capital. Broadly speaking, business makes better decisions about the economy than government.

Government sets the foundation for business's decision making. Fair courts, an educated workforce, and necessary public investment in infrastructure (transportation of goods and people, water, sewer, electricity, movement & creation of knowledge) all contribute to making our state a great place to earn a living.

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?

Once of the best complements a mentor ever gave me was, "Riley, you're a spark plug." I've got a passion for taking ideas, thinking them through, and turning them into real life.

In my professional life, I've taken ideas for youth programs and fundraising from "idea" stage to reality for years at Camp Horseshoe. I designed and ran the summer program at Horseshoe for two summers and consulted on a third. Survey results suggest that my programs were the most beneficial, well-liked summers in years.

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.

Parishioner - Holy Redeemer Catholic Church in Spencer, WV
Program Director - Ohio-West Virginia Youth Leadership Association
Assistant Catechist - St. Elizabeth of Hungary Mission in Elizabeth, WV
Chairman Emeritus - WVU College Republicans

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?

Nearly every problem we have - from generational poverty to limited job opportunities to educational quality to infrastructural decay - tracks very closely with population decline. Addressing our shrinking population will force us to confront several "deeper" problems and set us up with a growing tax base to address challenges moving forward. Alternatively, allowing population to continue to decline greatly reduces the size of our tool kit in solving problems.

I believe in crafting policy to address the specific strategic goal of creating high-wage, family-supporting jobs that are accessible to West Virginians with at least a high school education. Public policy - from tax to legal climate to infrastructure to regulatory to public investment - should support the rebuilding of the family through good, family-supporting jobs and pro-family housing policies such as down payment assistance.

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.

I would have voted for SJR 9 and SB 837.

Speaking from my limited formal training in economics, a potential idea to reduce the price tag of the business personal property tax cuts would be to repeal the tax on *new* capex spending. Lost revenue would likely be similar to the "phaseout" approach taken in SJR 9 and SB 837 while packing the full economic punch of outright repeal.

Business property tax cuts are attractive for the growth in manufacturing, industry, and small business that could be delivered. Making the tax cut focus on prospective investment would deliver all of that economic benefit without the sharp drop-off in revenue.

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?

Our organizing principle of economic development needs to be the creation of accessible, family-supporting jobs. Several opportunities come to mind in pursuit of this goal:

1) Industrial Infrastructure Development

- Many county EDAs own vacant industrial buildings or sites that aren't in usable condition. These are underdeveloped assets with tremendous economic potential.
- We've got to think big about how to deliver utilities, market access, key industrial infrastructure, and financial capital to prospective industrial site developers. Employment generated from industrial sites tends to be high wage and more accessible to our workforce than advanced finance and software engineering. for example.
- I support a whole-of-government approach to getting our industrial sites open for business. Beyond government, we should look into the public-private partnerships that have been used to develop brownfields across the country.

2) Workforce & Employment

- Efforts at workforce development hit two road blocks. Firstly, they're shooting at a moving target. If a program takes two years to implement in the schools - which would be record time for WV schools - then that's two whole years of new skills, different needs, and changed priorities for our employers. The second problem is that we view workforce training as a separate system than the employer.
- A consolidated job training and employment would prepare our people for jobs that need filled right now.
- I believe in direct state support of employer-based job training and a regimen of ongoing state support for employers creating jobs that: pay the median household income, offer health and retirement benefits, and are open to any West Virginian with a high school diploma.

3) Venture Capital & New Industries

- West Virginia can't just compete for new companies. We're a state that has lost, or is losing, our chief economic activity of the last century - coal. Our state is on the market for entirely new industries that lead to company formation and job creation.
 - There is a rich, mine-able vein of ideas and research at our universities' engineering schools. There are brilliant business ideas in peoples' heads who don't have broadband access to do their research. Our state ranks near the bottom of the pack when it comes to entrepreneurship because we haven't built an entrepreneurial ecosystem to support new industry formation.
 - I support catalyzing venture capital investment in our state through legislation that looks a lot like Speaker Hanshaw's Impact Fund. Part of attracting key venture capital dollars would be strengthening the research-to-commercialization pipeline for new ideas at our universities. With an eye on new industry formation, I would also support increased matching dollars for the SBIR grants in West Virginia.
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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?

Simply put: Addiction is viewed by addicts as a substitute for a good life.

Overcoming the chemical and medical aspects of addiction is critical. We need to make sure everyone who needs treatment can get it. Drug courts and early intervention are both a major part of directly addressing the addiction problem.

Winning the war, though, takes more strategic vision than just focusing on winning individual battles. If addiction is viewed as the substitute for a good life, we need to make life worth living for the people struggling with addiction.

The drugs moved in when our collective hopes moved out. Rebuilding an economy of family-supporting jobs with pro-family housing policies will set the stage for a revival of civic life - churches, service clubs like Rotary, social clubs, volunteerism - in our state. Work, family, and community are what the good life is made of. Let's extend the good life to those wrestling with addiction.

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?

West Virginia is under the jurisdiction of the federal Equal Employment Opportunity Commission and our state's workforce is entitled to those protections.

Q9

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

As stated above, I'm supportive of an integrated approach to job training and employment. Making our state the best place in the country to earn a living and raise a family will attract new and diverse populations to our state.

I support the 2019 education reform law. I support efforts to make schools more dynamic and student-focused through regulatory relief and liability reform for our teachers. Better schools produce a better skilled workforce.

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.

I have reviewed the WVMA's recommendations to the WVDEP from September 30th, 2019 and found them persuasive.

Environmental standards should be written for our state's demography and unique features - not copy and pasted from the 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?

A fair-minded approach to environmental regulation operates on a case-by-case basis, listens to all parties involved, and has humility about what government knows and can do well.

Oren Cass, founder of the thinktank American Compass, wrote extensively in his book, "Once and Future Worker" about the sloppy statistics work that goes into a lot of the environmental movement's cost benefit analysis. I share the opinion that the green movement in this country has sacrificed a lot of good jobs and economic dynamism for only marginal improvements in environment quality.

Q12

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

I offer a can-do, comeback attitude. I'm passionate about big ideas and doing right by the communities that made me who I am - the communities my family has called home for at least two centuries.

At the same time, I understand, at least in part, what it means to be a freshman legislator. While I talk on a survey like I have most, maybe even all, of the answers, I know full well there's a lot to be learned from the folks in the House. I'm not afraid to listen, learn, and think my way through my freshman year at the Legislature.

Thank you for taking the time to review my answers and I hope to have your support.

Q13

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

Both! I can do in-person, Zoom, conference call, whatever works best for you.

My cell phone is (304) 531-8246 if you want to set something up.

Q14

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

Facebook: www.facebook.com/rileykeatonwv

Twitter: @RileyKeatonWV

Q15

Name

Riley Keaton

Q16

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Q17

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Republican

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