

81st District Candidates Respond to Questions

The Huntingdon County Chamber of Commerce encourages everyone to vote in the May 15 primary election and want you to be aware of where the candidates stand on issues important to us. Knowledge is power and we want you to have the power to make a difference by being an informed voter.

We asked the candidates for the 81st Legislative District to answer three questions. The candidates, Richard Irvin (Republican), Rick Rogers (Democrat), and Joe Soloski (Libertarian), were instructed to limit their answers to 250 words each. No changes have been made to the answers submitted.

Question # 1. The current PA permitting process stifles economic growth. How would you promote regulatory reform across all departments?

Richard Irvin:

“Our Commonwealth has thousands of regulations on the books. State government should be a resource for businesses looking to create jobs, not a barrier. Regulatory reform and putting government in its place has been a top priority of mine to generate family sustaining jobs. Many of these burdensome regulations enacted several decades ago by unelected bureaucrats need to be re-examined and evaluated as to their relevance, appropriateness and cost.



One initiative I am currently supporting is strengthening the Regulatory Review Act. Under current law, the Regulatory Review Act only allows the General Assembly to block the implementation of a regulation before it takes effect. By expanding the act to existing regulation, it would give legislators the ability to initiate the removal of economic obstructive rules and regulations by resolution. Although the House Senate and Governor would all need to approve the resolution, it would simplify the common sense removal of outdated and intrusive agency regulation.

Promoting regulatory reform across all departments of State government is a difficult task seeing how many of their bureaucratic jobs are justified by regulation they oversee. State agencies need a clear and unbiased view of their current operations. Performance audits conducted by an independent, experienced auditor would ensure our State agencies efficiently and effectively remain focused on the mission they are tasked and remove resources from areas that do not.”

Rick Rogers:

“The first item on our list of regulatory reform is to adopt The Fairness Act. For Pennsylvania to be competitive we must welcome the talents and skills of all people and provide an environment where everyone is encouraged to succeed. I would also seek to work with my colleagues across the aisle in making their recently introduced suite of 5 regulatory reform bills more palatable and effective. In concept I agree with much of this legislation, but as written the bills take too much power from the agencies. We should not be taking power away from the agencies and placing it in the political world of the General Assembly. I would support a cap on regulations with a one to

one swap (repeal one regulation for every new regulation). I support enhancing transparency when it comes to monitoring the progress of submitted applications for permits. While an Office of the Repealer is an intriguing idea, individual agencies should be tasked with managing their regulations rather than creating a new layer of government at taxpayer expense. In fact, this could be the responsibility of Regulatory Compliance Officers within each agency. One thing to make clear is that even with the tens of thousands regulations that are in force now, Pennsylvania is still a very attractive place to do business. We may not be a Virginia, but we are not New York. We must be serious about regulation reform as our future economic viability is dependent on it.”

Joe Soloski:

“As a Libertarian, I strongly believe that ‘state permitting’ typically results in unnecessary expense and wastes human resources for any business that is required to jump through Commonwealth permitting hoops.

I would advocate for a constant review of every department’s permitting processes and requirements. At every possible turn, I would be in favor of the elimination of such permitting requirements.”

Question # 2. Four lane highways and broadband are important to businesses considering locating in Huntingdon County. Both are lacking in the county. What would you do to improve the state of Huntingdon County’s infrastructure?

Richard Irvin:

“When talking transportation and infrastructure in the 81st district we are also talking jobs and job creation. While we may never get a limited access four lane highway in the Route 22 corridor, I will continue to support strengthening our current highway corridor. Specifically, Route 522 in the southern end of the district to establish a better link to the turnpike and busy Route 30 and also Route 453 in northern Huntingdon County to provide better access to Interstate 99.

The lack of rural broadband is an impediment to economic development, educational opportunities and tele-medicine options in our County. Daily, we receive complaints and concerns about the lack of broadband access and continue to work with private sector providers to ease the problem. Cellphones of today have more computing power than computers did the last time the broadband access laws passed in 2004. Governments working together to update laws and the creation of public/private partnerships to cover the cost gaps in the private sector is a start to addressing our rural broadband needs.

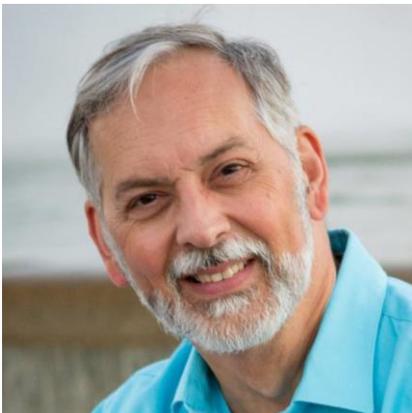
This area is also very fortunate to have many miles of mainline rail running through the district. I commend and support our County Commissioners in the creation of a rail authority in the hopes of connecting rail freight transportation to our major industrial parks. More availability to natural gas should also be a priority, this would benefit both industrial and residential areas. Natural gas is efficient, clean and a product of the region.”

Rick Rogers:

“Expanding Route 22 to four lanes through Huntingdon County is something that may be desired, but it does come with challenges. If expanded in its present configuration all of the businesses currently along the highway would be negatively impacted which would have a devastating impact on our local economy, including tourism revenue. We must make sure that any future development of this highway does not hurt us, but works to spur growth in this region. We do, however, have to prioritize the development of the information superhighway throughout our county. It is unconscionable that citizens of county do not have access to broadband technology. The situation in Mill Creek where residents are working to provide their own access is not a long term solution to this problem. We must be forceful in obtaining more federal funds to address this issue. We must encourage development of new technologies and increased competition among providers. Another important component in providing internet access is expansion of our county library system such that citizens in all parts of the county have nearby access to a branch of the library. Libraries can have a huge impact on the local economy and workforce development and the overall social return is immeasurable. All of our infrastructure needs must be addressed to make Huntingdon County more attractive not only to those who are passing through on our highways, but to those who choose to live, work, and play here.”

Joe Soloski:

“Highways – I would want to be part of any committee that would be advocating for the identified highway needs of Huntingdon County. It is important that Huntingdon County achieves a priority for its projects on the State Transportation Improvement Plan and the 12-Year Plan. If elected, I already have a desire to serve of the Legislature’s Transportation Committee. I would want to be directly advocating for the highway needs of Huntingdon County in every way that I can.



Broadband is a critical issue. Businesses want the ability to transmit data at the highest speed possible. Meeting with current broadband providers, to persuade them to expand and improve their services, is obvious; Attracting new providers is necessary but that is a difficult hurdle. We want more broadband choices county-wide to attract more businesses and to make broadband services more cost competitive; Broadband providers will want to come in to provide those services once the businesses are here. It’s a ‘what comes first, the chicken or the egg’ scenario. There are no simple answers.”

Question # 3. What is your position on economic development incentives offered through the state and what specific actions will you take or endorse relative to your stated position?

Richard Irvin:

"I have remained steadfast in standing up for our hardworking taxpayers by providing the responsible leadership the 81st District needs to make our great Commonwealth's future better through a growing economy. Currently, our state budget has approximately \$800 million of what can be identified as corporate welfare. Programs such as film tax credits to attract the Hollywood movie industry and funding to support the horse racing industry in Pennsylvania are examples. Essentially what happens, the State is picking which businesses will thrive or fail. I believe in limited government to allow economic freedom for job growth. How many times do we see a five or ten million dollar grant awarded to a company that is expected to create ten jobs and see it close a few years later. I'm not saying I wouldn't support a local business in securing incentive funds as long as this practice continues to happen, but Pennsylvania needs to create a climate that attracts both large and small businesses to our State and encourages job growth. This goes in hand-in-hand with holding the line on taxes and matching the efforts of our job creators and educators.

I support Economic development incentives offered through the State that are universal in nature, helping all businesses succeed and grow. There are almost 200,000 unfilled skilled jobs in Pennsylvania. If we provide incentives and partner business with our career and technical education and secondary institutions to fill those positions our economy will grow while providing family sustaining jobs."

Rick Rogers:

"Tax incentives whether one likes them or not are most likely here to stay. They come in many different forms and are administered in many various ways at all levels of government. Our job as state legislators is to make sure they are used judiciously and that they meet the stated



goals. To that end we must continuously evaluate and monitor all the incentives to ensure they are meeting stated goals. I will work to ensure that all incentives are not only legal, but, also, that they are fair, efficient and effective. Too often the electorate is kept in the dark about incentives and that must stop. I believe the public is owed detailed accounting of the incentives in use that shows how well they are meeting established performance measures. To the extent possible we should solicit the advice of our constituents as to the best ways to utilize incentives to spur economic growth. There must be zero tolerance for any misuse of fund. Those who do not meet targets will be held accountable for the reasons they fell short of expectations. Incentives can be an important tool for our economic growth. We need not only to make the process of awarding these incentives more

transparent, but to make sure that we are meeting the goals set forth in the awarding of these incentives in accordance with the priorities of our electorate."

Joe Soloski:

"I will be painfully honest here: I am not a fan of state-based economic incentives because it puts the state in the position of picking winners and losers. Quite often, economic development incentives are nothing more than corporate welfare. The best thing that a government can do is to reduce regulations, reduce taxes, and do all that it can to maximize an individual's freedoms. My position would be to get government out of the way of the individual, in every possible way,

in order to let all people thrive because of their own efforts; not because of government picking winners and losers through its self-prescribed economic incentives.

Where incentives are considered and offered, I feel that the best incentives are implemented at the local level as those are the most focused and have the greatest impact.”