

81st District Candidates Respond to Questions

The Huntingdon County Chamber of Commerce has partnered with *The Daily News* to share responses from questions posed to the candidates of the 81st Legislative District. We encourage you to vote in the November 3 election, and hope that these responses will assist you in making your selection. 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 four questions. The candidates, Richard Irvin (Republican) and Ian Kidd (Democrat), were instructed to limit their answers to 250 words each. No changes have been made to the answers submitted.

Question # 1. What is your position on property tax reform?

Richard Irvin: "I have always been a proponent of property tax reform. Since taking office I have supported property tax reform and voted to provide an additional \$5 billion to offset property owner's taxes but the bill failed to make it into law. For the past forty years we have been arguing over the property taxes. Currently, with the underfunded pension system our schools are required to contribute over 30% of payroll towards pension contributions. This coupled with rising charter school enrollment has increased the burden on our property taxpayers and brought forward a real push to reform how K-12 education is funded especially in southeastern PA where tax bills can average \$10 thousand annually. Seniors, young families and unemployed struggle to keep their homes, but reform is a hard sell in Harrisburg because property taxes are a very stable source of revenue compared to an earned income and sales tax based revenue source.



A system would need to be put in place to level out the peaks and valleys that would occur in a shift to this funding method as we experience economic downturns. Another area of concern is any changes made to our current funding formula could negatively impact our county schools as they derive 50 to 65% of their annual budget from the State compared to 15% in your extremely high property tax locations. Providing other revenue options for our school boards to match their communities could be explored to keep decisions at the local level."

Ian Kidd: "I am a proponent of property tax reform. Citizens in the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania pay, on average, 1.58 percent on their properties. This statistic means that PA property owners are forced to pay the eleventh-highest percentage of tax on their property in the United States. Representing a district where many individuals and families are working paycheck to paycheck in order to make ends meet, I believe it is imperative for the local governments throughout the state to undertake some form of

property tax reform. For too many people in the 81st District and beyond, home ownership is a dream deferred, sometimes indefinitely. It is incumbent upon those in a leadership position to do the necessary work of making home ownership more accessible to a larger swath of the population. Reforming the property tax system within the state is one tangible step toward achieving that goal.”

Question # 2. What is your position on state investments in education?

Richard Irvin: “Education is the key to providing opportunities to our youth and one of the State’s major responsibilities. Decisions on education are best made at the local level, parents and taxpayers, must demand our school boards and teachers have the final decisions to meet the educational needs of our students rather than mandates and program specific funding handed down from the State and Federal level. When we debate investments in education, higher education must be part of the discussion. Our greatest export in this State is our educated children. They are leaving PA to find higher paying jobs in demand in other states. To stop our Commonwealth’s “brain drain” we must create a business friendly climate here to attract companies and those high paying jobs. I would never discourage anyone from pursuing college education, having a four year degree myself, but we need to match our educators and job creators and fill the need for technical and vocational training. A two year degree or certificate may not have as high a starting salary as a four year degree, but students will enter the workforce quicker with a better chance of finding a career with less debt. In most cases a family sustaining job with a better earnings ratio compared to the debt of the ever rising costs of college education. I have supported and will continue my support for education particularly in the much needed career and technical fields.”

Ian Kidd: “As the son of two public educators, and as a substitute public school



instructor myself, I have seen firsthand the deficiency which our students are forced to cope regarding their own education. The Pennsylvania government currently funds approximately 38 percent of public school expenses on a yearly basis. Over the last few decades, the percentage of public school expenses which the state government funds has decreased by nearly fifteen percent. While taking the necessary and proper action of reforming the property tax system within Pennsylvania, it is possible for us to also modify and improve the process by which we fund our public schools. By switching the method of funding from property tax to a more equitable tax on personal income, we have the opportunity to create a more equal educational environment for the student populations within our school districts. Zip code should not be

a determining factor in the quality of education which a child from our communities receives.”

Question # 3. What do you see as the most pressing state issue and what do you think the state legislature should do about it?

Richard Irvin: “The Covid-19 pandemic and the negative impact it has had on our economy. Many of the business owners who have worked a lifetime are closing their doors without any hope of reopening. This is driving our unemployment numbers to record highs and threatening the way of life for our citizens of PA. We are living in unprecedented and challenged times and never before have the people of our Commonwealth had these restrictions and polices forced upon them. I am entrusted by the people of the 81st District to look at multiple angles of issues; to try and control the outbreak of this pandemic and not allow our large and small businesses to fail taking with them our family sustaining jobs. Throughout this pandemic our republic has been threatened by unilateral decisions being made without the voice of the people. Whether you agree or disagree with this administrations actions, over the past seven months there has been time for the Governor to work with the General Assembly while still having the ability to respond quickly if needed. We deserve a representative democracy and must get the people of Pennsylvania back to work and build back our economy. Our long game is to amend the Pennsylvania Constitution to require legislative approval for a disaster emergency declaration to last longer than 30 days. Our government is dependent on checks and balances and I feel we are experiencing a true government overreach into the lives of our citizens with this Governor.”

Ian Kidd: “The most pressing issue within the state of Pennsylvania at present is partisanship. The families of the 81st District deserve better than for their representation to play politics with the “kitchen table issues” which they face on a daily basis. As representative, I will work to create a productive, bipartisan environment both here in our communities and in the halls of the capital. The entrenched, career politicians representing both political parties in Harrisburg have done a disservice to their constituents by refusing to work together in order to accomplish our primary goal: ensuring the safety and welfare of our people. By removing those politicians who refuse to cross the aisle in order to achieve mutual objectives, such as improving our local economy, increasing access to life-saving healthcare, and creating more possibilities which will allow our young people to stay in the area, voters can change the way Harrisburg works. In the meantime, representatives can stop playing politics and start doing the real work of helping their constituents.”

Question # 4. What is your position on providing safe harbor, during a pandemic, for businesses that are following guidelines?

Rich Irvin: “I completely support providing limited Covid-19 related liability to businesses, non-profits, colleges, universities, healthcare providers, and others that follow guidelines. The concern of frivolous lawsuits has hampered our state workforce reopening and is still on the minds of businesses inflicted by substantial economic losses related to the state-ordered shutdown. It makes sense to protect businesses, who have been trying to protect the public, from lawsuits brought by customers, employees, and other individuals related to the COVID-19 pandemic. Unfortunately, the

trial lawyers and Wolf Administration has given pushback against our legislative efforts to pass this protection in Pennsylvania. We have run into the same road block on agritourism, such as pick-your-own businesses and corn mazes. Agritourism is growing in popularity as farmers look to create a secondary source of income. However, under current law, these farmers face enormous liability risks when they open their land to the public for a fee. These types of legislation have been passed in other states and are vital to protecting business from extensive litigation costs but still hold bad actors negligent.”

Ian Kidd: “Our campaign for state representative has been forced to change and adapt due to the ongoing public health crisis and the issues which have accompanied the pandemic. Businesses throughout the 81st District and the Commonwealth of PA have been forced to change and adapt as well. The state government must ensure the protection and survival of those businesses which have consistently followed health and safety guidelines. Economic stimulus packages for the small businesses of the district must be funded in order to assist business owners in their long trek back toward normalcy. No business, and no family, should be forced to shudder their doors permanently due to a global situation which they had no role in causing. We have witnessed incredible acts of service by neighbors and community members who are doing everything in their power to support local businesses and their owners. The state government and those representing our families and businesses must do everything in *their* power to be a lifeline during this difficult time as well. I will support any economic program which will provide direct stimulation to the local businesses within our district. The primary function of any governmental body is to ensure the protection and well-being of a constituency which has entrusted them with their own physical and economic health. It is our responsibility as the voices for those families in Harrisburg to do absolutely everything we can in order to help our businesses meet and defeat this current crisis.”