



Interview with Palmetto Promise Institute | January 2020

Why did you run for public office? I have deep South Carolina roots. Both of my parents grew up on farms – my Dad in Fork Shoals, S.C., and my Mom in Cameron, S.C. The values I was raised with taught me that you don't have the right to complain if you aren't willing to do anything about it. After never considering politics before, I answered the calling in 2012 because I believe that we sell ourselves short in South Carolina. As a small businessowner and lifelong South Carolinian, I thought maybe I could help make a difference. I ran for office because I believe the conservative position should be one of action with a long-term vision – not a band aid approach. You can't just kick the can down the road on major issues – it will only cost you more later.

What do you enjoy about serving in the SC Senate? What is the biggest challenge? I enjoy the people. As I mentioned, I had no political experience prior to becoming a senator, and my perception of politicians wasn't that great. But what I have found is that everyone is genuinely trying to do what is best for their district and the state – we just don't all agree on what that is. The biggest challenge for me is understanding that some people enjoy sound bites more than they do substance. I laugh at myself because I want people to really understand the issues, while many times they just want a resolution.

What are the top issues you want to see the General Assembly address this year and why? The top 3 issues for me are Education, Tax Reform, and Santee Cooper. Education is the long-term solution to our workforce development issues. We need to grow our own to be the people getting the jobs in our high-tech industries. In 2035, we will be experiencing a 20% reduction in available workforce because of the decreasing birth rate. (These are the students currently in 4K.) It's imperative we get this right.

Tax Reform is second. A group of Senate Republicans had a plan to reduce income tax alongside the gas tax over a six-year period. With this plan, we could have paid for our roads through the growth that is coming to our state. Despite the terrible condition of our roads, we couldn't keep enough support because the plan included the gas tax. Today, the ones who said they didn't want the "tax swap" are yelling to reduce the income tax without any leverage other than a surplus General Fund. Corporate property taxes also need to be reduced, because an unnecessary burden was placed on them in the last "tax reform."

Santee Cooper is the third big issue. We should have the reports back in February to show us our options. Did you know that if we sell Santee Cooper, it will be the largest state-owned asset sell in the history of America? While I believe that the state doesn't need to be in the utility business, I am not for a "fire sell" of this asset. This is more of a geography vote than it is Republican versus Democrat issue.

Looking ahead, what are the most important issues you see coming up in the next 3-5 years? What is the most important thing you'd like to accomplish as a Senator? As fast as we are moving, the three issues above could still be our biggest issues in the next 3 – 5 years. I would definitely add Pension Reform to this list, because our "over 65" population is supposed to quadruple by 2030. Lt. Governor McConnell called it the "silver tsunami." We need to be proactive on how we plan to handle that growth.

What's the best thing about living in South Carolina? We have held onto our values of family and faith and loving our country, so despite our differences, the vast majority of us stand on the same solid ground of faith. Couple that with having an incredible, unmatched coastline and the mountains in the upstate. We are reminded daily that as South Carolinians, we are to be stewards of this land that God blessed us with.

What's your biggest hope for South Carolina's future? I want to see us move from education from being in the bottom 10% to being in the top half of the country. I think if we see that kind of movement, a lot of our other problems will become very manageable.

What's your favorite hobby or what you enjoy doing in your free time? I love to play golf, hunt, and watch Clemson Football with my family.

What are you most looking forward to in 2020? I am looking forward to moving the ball forward on Education Reform, which includes an updated funding formula, Early Childhood Education expansion, and more choice for parents of kids in failing schools and kids with special needs.

Any interesting fact(s) folks might be surprised to know about you? I love to sing country music when I am in the car by myself!