



ALLIANCE CENTER FOR INDEPENDENCE NJ GUBERNATORIAL CANDIDATES QUESTIONNAIRE

NAME: John Wisniewski

1. Currently NJ unemployment rates are approximately 53% among people with disabilities. If elected, what efforts would your administration undergo to hire qualified individuals with disabilities as well as encourage the private sector?

As governor, John will ensure that his cabinet and administration reflects the diverse makeup of the constituency he serves. The unemployment rate among the disabled community is unacceptably high and the tone must be set at the state-level to bring awareness and problem-solving solutions to this issue. To that end, John will work hard to forge a strong partnership with disability advocacy groups across New Jersey to ensure the Garden State becomes truly accessible and welcoming to all of its residents.

2. What steps should the State of New Jersey take to increase access to public transportation currently not served by NJ Transit? (I.e. Sussex County, Somerset County)

Strategic transportation investments in New Jersey should focus on providing easy access from affordable housing to employment hubs with family-supporting jobs. New Jersey's current transportation infrastructure under-serves working people, and the disabled, particularly people of color, who disproportionately rely on public transportation.

John is committed to remaking NJ Transit into the world class transportation provider it once was. He will root out and terminate all patronage hires who consume resources but provide little value to NJ Transit operations. He will insist on a thorough audit of NJ Transit and all independent authorities. And he will make sure that NJ Transit once again has the type of subsidy from the general fund of the state budget to make sure that the trains and buses are well staffed, operated and maintained.

John Wisniewski remains fully committed to building the Gateway Tunnel project, which will replace the current train tunnel used by New Jersey Transit and Amtrak to go into New York City. The current tunnel is failing and in badly need of replacement. As governor, John Wisniewski will work with the federal government, New York State, the Port Authority and Amtrak to secure funding.

If that type of funding isn't available, public-private partnerships are effective tools that can be used to fill in the gaps on this and other important projects. When used appropriately, they can be efficient ways to provide resources for critical needs. Public private partnerships would be done in a manner that keeps the state firmly in control, does not cede authority to private firms, nor becomes a boondoggle for Wall Street banks.

The current Governor raided the ARC Tunnel funds to use for other projects. This left critical infrastructure underfunded because of his unwillingness to address critical needs before running for President.

3. Even though the Americans with Disabilities Act passed in 1990, people with disabilities still face accessibility barriers. For example, inaccessible stores, elevators broken at train stations and snow removal laws not being upheld. What will your administration do to fight discrimination and enforce the ADA?

When he served as New Jersey Democratic Party chair, John demanded that meetings be fully accessible to individuals with disabilities so that no voice would be excluded from the conversation on how to move the state forward.

As governor, John will make sure our disabled community has a seat at the table of social and economic security. Considering our President has openly mocked individuals with disabilities on the campaign trail, it's clear that states will have to be the backstop against Trump's efforts to rollback disability rights.

With a population nearing 1 million, New Jersey is the 13th most populous state for persons with disabilities. Though the state should be proud to have the community as such a significant portion of our overall population, a number of sobering statistics indicate that a record of "more of the same" is not a viable option for our next governor. Too many public spaces in our state, including train stations, government buildings, apartments, and stores remain inaccessible years after the ADA was passed.

4. Do you support or oppose proposals to block grant or per capital cap Medicaid spending in NJ? What Medicaid services in NJ, if any, would you seek to eliminate under a block grant or per capita spending system?

Oppose. Medicaid should be determined by need, not by putting a generic price tag on each person's head.

5. If elected, what would your administration do to ensure that people with disabilities are included in the planning and implementation of emergency preparedness efforts on the county, state and local levels?

First, John would ensure that we have a climate change plan. New Jersey is the only state on the Eastern Seaboard that doesn't have a plan in place to address the next '100 year's storm' which is problematic for able-bodied New Jerseyans as we saw in Hurricane Sandy, but particularly catastrophic for this community. In cultivating climate change, and other disaster preparedness plans, John will council with advocacy groups such as ACI to learn the lessons of the past in order to avoid them in the future.

6. In NJ, there is a shortage of accessible, safe and low-income housing for people with disabilities. How would you propose to increase the inventory of housing throughout the state?

John Wisniewski will make solving New Jersey's affordable housing crisis a cabinet-level priority.

New Jersey's struggle with affordable housing dates back 50 years when the black community began to organize against discrimination. The state's affordable housing obligation comes from the landmark Mount Laurel cases that prohibited towns from discriminating against the poor through exclusionary zoning and requires all municipalities to provide their fair share of the region's need for affordable housing.

One of the first objectives of this office will be streamlining the very difficult land use approval process to make affordable housing cheaper to plan for, cheaper to develop and eventually cheaper to build.

Municipalities must stop utilizing Wall Street gimmicks to essentially "kick the can" down the road. That's why in 2008, Wisniewski voted in favor of eliminating the further use of Regional Contribution Agreements, a Fair Housing Act loophole exploited by municipalities to shirk their affordable housing responsibilities by transferring them to other municipalities.

Wisniewski will explore an innovative solution — a Statewide Community Land Trust — designed to make affordable housing a reality for working

class and disabled New Jerseyans. Modeled after successful programs in Vermont, Boston, and Atlanta, a statewide community land trust would lower the cost of buying a home to this simple premise — the state owns the land, the homeowner owns the home, whether it be a single-family house or an apartment/condo.

New Jersey leads the nation in home foreclosures with an estimated 49,000 homes currently on the market. The state also has the highest number of vacant and abandoned homes in the foreclosure process in the nation. So-called “zombie homes” — abandoned and unwanted homes stuck in foreclosure limbo — would be prime targets for affordable housing options.

The State Community Land Trust would be in position to start purchasing, on a limited basis, these properties and offering homes to New Jersey's disabled community at affordable prices with the state holding the title to the land. This could start immediately to help get ahead of the current affordable housing crisis.

Additionally, the State Community Land Trust would be tasked with working directly with each municipality to find innovative solutions for affordable homes and rental units to meet the Supreme Court mandate.

It is time for New Jersey to step up and help our working men and women with one of the basic elements to survival and human dignity — a safe, affordable home. As our next Governor, John Wisniewski will take New Jersey's housing crisis seriously. New Jersey is one of the wealthiest states in the wealthiest nation — all we lack is the leadership, focus and innovation to solve this crisis and improve affordable housing access for all residents.

7. Persons with intellectual/developmental disabilities are victimized by sexual assault crimes at much higher rates than the rest of the population, and they are often targeted specifically because of their disabilities. What steps would your administration takes to reduce the risk of crimes committed against people with disabilities? Would you direct your Attorney General's office to work more closely with disability agencies on training and prevention?

John was appalled to learn of the rate at which women with disabilities are victimized by sexual assault crimes. To address this problem and shed light on the disparity, John would direct his Attorney General's office to execute meaningful training and prevention exercises geared specifically to survivors with disabilities.

8. In the *Olmstead v. L.C.* (1999) decision, the U.S. Supreme Court ruled that states are required to eliminate unnecessary segregation of persons with disabilities and to ensure that persons with disabilities receive services in the most integrated setting appropriate to their needs. Do you feel the state is doing what it can do to fully implement this ruling? If not, what measures does NJ need to take?

No, and part of the reason why this is the case is because of the patchwork of disability regulations service providers and average residents have to navigate on a day-to-day basis. With John as governor, this community can expect to see a more active and present Division of Disability Services that will undertake the long overdue task of truly ending this segregation and receive services that improve their quality of life in an accessible manner.

9. If elected, would you support or oppose legislation prohibiting insurance companies conducting business in New Jersey from denying coverage to people with pre-existing conditions?

John believes that healthcare is a basic human right and that all New Jerseyans must have access without physical or communication barriers and in formats accessible to them. John Wisniewski's single-payer health care system will be available to all New Jerseyans without regard to what they earn or where the care is provided.

It will cover primary care and prevention both for inpatient and outpatient services, including emergency services, acute care, long-term care, prescription drugs, mental health services, all women's health care services, mental health services and substance abuse treatment.

A single-payer state system will eliminate the profit motives driving higher premium costs and will be a much cheaper alternative to the rip-off rates we pay now.

Under Wisniewski's plan, New Jerseyans will pay less costly premiums to a state-run universal healthcare system instead of paying private insurance companies directly. New Jersey will then be responsible for paying health care providers directly through negotiated rates.

Single-payer consolidates virtually all health care spending into one program, producing significant savings.

Funding will come from four primary sources: Existing federal Health & Human Services appropriations; existing state health care expenditures that will become obsolete through the plan's implementation;

employer/employee premium payments; and negotiating lower prescription drug costs.

All employers and employees will be in the same single-payer insurance pool. Rather than paying skyrocketing premiums to insurance companies or high deductibles, New Jerseyans will pay lower premiums directly to the single-payer system, thus dramatically lowering their out-of-pocket expenses.

In simple terms, our healthcare system should not be a lose-lose scenario. Today, with ACA coverage, those who have insurance are more likely to go to a primary care doctor and get preventive care and treatment. Meanwhile, those without insurance wait until they are very sick and go to the emergency room, which substantially drives up costs for everyone.

10. Do you support the proposal by the Coalition of Direct Support Professionals Living Wage, which would increase the salary of support professionals by \$1.25 per hour every year for five years, bringing the starting hourly wage to \$16.75 by the year 2022. This will attract more support professionals to the field and reduce the high turnover rate that is currently 44%.

Yes.

11. State and federal law provide that students with disabilities have a right to a free appropriate public education in the least restrictive environment. Do you support or oppose increased funding to ensure that New Jersey public schools and teachers have the resources and training necessary to meet the diverse needs of students with disabilities?

As part of John's larger K-12 education plan, he will ensure that the provisions granted under the Individuals with Disability Education Act are fully implemented in order to guarantee applicable students a quality education in the least restrictive environment possible.

Additionally, John is appalled at the way charter schools are allowed to engage in disability student segregation to the point that a student body doesn't reflect the diversity of the community it serves. This is why he wants a moratorium on charter schools until the entire program can be reviewed.

12. Centers for Independent Living are community-based, cross-disability, non-profit organizations that are designed and operated by people with disabilities. CILs are unique in that they operate according to a strict philosophy of consumer control, wherein people with all types of disabilities directly govern and staff the

organization. As a vital resource in the community, would you support additional funding for the 11 CILs in order to meet the increased demand for our services?

Yes.

13. In April 2012, Governor Chris Christie made New Jersey an 'Employment First' state. It means that competitive employment is the first and preferred post-education activity for everyone, including people with disabilities. However, there are still approximately only 47% of the population of people with disabilities in NJ, ages 18 to 64, employed (compared to 79.5% of same age group in the general population). How do you propose to increase employment among New Jerseyans with disabilities?

The unemployment rate for disabled, working age persons in New Jersey is a staggering 53%. Furthermore, we have one of the largest gaps in the nation for unemployment between workers with and without disabilities at 38% and climbing. If any other demographic in the state were experiencing similar statistics, we'd call that what it is -- an unemployment epidemic.

Besides federal Work Opportunity Tax Credits, there is no clear nexus between employers and disabled employees within New Jersey. Our state's Human Services Department has handled various disability issues and is best positioned to fill this obvious need.

That's why John Wisniewski will strengthen the Division of Disability Services through the establishment of a worker placement assistance program. It's simply good business, a springboard to independence for those that are capable, and a problem too large to leave unaddressed any longer. Under this program, the DDS will develop a statewide mechanism to identify good paying jobs, coordinate job training initiatives, and construct effective ways to notify the disability community that they are available.

14. If nominated by your party for the general election, would you commit to addressing the crowd at the NJ Disability Pride Parade & Celebration on Saturday, October 7th in Trenton?

Yes.