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Government & Politics

Friday, October 17, 2008

Q&A: Michael Ramone

State House of Representatives, District 21

OCTOBER 17, 2008

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1. What should the state do to make people feel safer in their homes, businesses and communities?

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In order for the people of Delaware to feel safer we need to maintain adequate, well equipped police, fire, and paramedic services. This must be accomplished through appropriate staff levels coupled with state of the art equipment and technology. We also need to enhance our emergency response systems, and communication throughout every level of government. Including our National Guard, police, fire and paramedic units. By continuing to update and enhance all our response, defense, and infrastructure capabilities, we will provide our communities, businesses and homes a better sense of safety.

2. What steps should the state government take to improve the health of its citizens, and make health-care more affordable?

Two of the most important issues facing our state today are health care affordability and availability, and the health of our citizens. Affordable and available health care could be enhanced by expanding the local drug companies efforts to provide prescription medications to Delaware seniors at a reduced or free basis. Tort reform would also enable Delaware doctors to afford insurance thus making the costs of their services more reasonable. The net result of this action would be better quality services at lower prices. Next we need to stop industrial polluters. This could be done by levying substantial fines for a first and/or second offense with a shut down and repair order upon a third. This initiative would be a great start to educating the continual polluters that we are not going to take it any more.

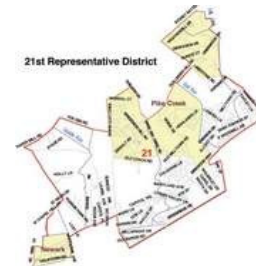
3. The state faced a \$217 million shortfall for the 2009 fiscal year and likely will have little to no increase in revenues for next year. Several attempts to raise taxes were defeated in the 2008 session. How do you assess the current level of state spending and taxation, as well as the priorities reflected in the budget? What, if any, changes would you make in spending, taxes or state services?

Delaware can no longer tax and spend. We need to initiate a three-step plan that will simultaneously build jobs, expand the tax base (while not raising taxes) and develop energy independence. We have a small state with several income sources. We need to expand those income sources while making our state more fiscally attractive for both large and small businesses to locate here. This can only be done with a strong commitment and focus on great schools, affordable health care and reasonable taxes.

INTERACTIVE WEATHER



Michael Ramone



MICHAEL RAMONE

Party: Republican

Age: 47

Family: Lisa wife of 26 years, children Brittany, 22, Ross, 20, and Nicholas, 17

Education: St. John the Beloved, St. Marks, University of Delaware

Profession: Current Founder & CEO of Delaware Swim and Fitness of New Castle and Pike Creek, The Delaware Swim Team and Aquatic Management Systems, Majority owner of BC Communities, Founder and former owner of Ramone's Flower Shoppes, Former owner of Wilmington Florist Exchange, Former owner of New Jersey Fitness, Former partner of Gilmore Nichols Funeral Home. Head Coach of Delaware Swim Team, Western YMCA, John Dickson High School, St. Marks High School, Oakwood Valley Swim Club and North Star Swim Club.

Civic/Public Service: Past President, Hockessin Pike Creek Rotary, Past Treasurer HAND Foundation (Heal Autism Now)

4. What should the state government's role be in public education, how well is this being carried out and what should be done to better fulfill that mission?

The state needs to support our educational system through this five-step plan. 1) Support the displacement of the Delaware State Test; 2) develop a statewide buying pool for all supplies fixtures and equipment; 3) initiate a "prototype" school for each level of education (elementary, middle and high schools); 4) consolidate the number of school districts in Kent and Sussex Counties by half (e.g. 14 to 7); and 5) support our teachers and student through adequate salaries and funding. This initiative will enable us to return our schools to the level of excellence we all expect.

5. How do you assess the state's record in environmental protection, sprawl control and open space preservation? What, if any, adjustments need to be made?

Our state has continually dropped the ball when it comes to environmental protection. One only needs to look at Valero to see our state has no control over the constant release of pollution into our air. Until we shut down the polluters, through my three-strike initiative, their actions will not change. They would rather pay the fines than fix the problems because it is less expensive. As for sprawl and open space, I believe our state is heading in the right direction as it pertains to the adoption of smart growth initiatives. Their efforts in acquiring open space need to continue responsibly.

6. Do you support a law that would ban discrimination based on a person's sexual preference?

A person's sexual preference should not be a measuring stick to justify discrimination. I do not believe in discrimination of any kind for any reason.

7. Are current state laws governing land development adequate and appropriate? What changes, if any, would you propose?

Our current state, counties and municipalities need to communicate in an effort to clarify each others role in the land development arena. Smartgrowth in areas of need or brownfield initiatives should be the focus of all levels of government.

8. Do you support any expansion of gambling in the state, such as the effort to legalize sports betting? Are there other steps the state should take to meet gambling competition from states like Maryland, which has a referendum to add slot machines on this fall's ballot?

I support our current casinos' existence and would consider legislation to enable sports gaming. However, I would tie a percentage of income generated from this revenue source to the education of our children and to support organizations for compulsive gamblers.

9. Do you support any changes in Senate rules governing the power of committee chairpersons over the status of bills, or in General Assembly regulations governing public access to deliberations by the Joint Finance Committee and Bond Bill Committee?

Our government process should be open to public scrutiny. Legislators should be held accountable for all their voting records including personal pay raises. The senate leadership should not be able to "shelf" legislation they do not like thereby halting the discussion on that legislation. Our government is to be of the people, by the people. The people have a right to know how their elected officials are representing them.

10. The state's Transportation Trust Fund faces a \$2.7 billion gap between revenues and spending needed to complete needed projects by 2012. How should the state address this problem? What, if any, new - or higher - fees, taxes or charges would you support to increase revenues? What specific projects or DelDOT activities should be eliminated to reduce spending?

The gap in the Transportation Trust Fund (TTF) is self-inflicted. The state should not have moved the salaries of DelDOT employees over to the TTF in order to balance the budget years ago. The monies in the TTF were for road improvement projects, not for the use of DelDOT payroll. The state must begin to return monies raided from the fund so we can pay for our needed repairs. If this is done over the next 10 years, then we will be able to continue our needed repairs while not raising any of our fees, taxes or charges.

11. The federal Justice Department is now investigating the adequacy of state-provided health care for prison inmates, following revelations of poor care in recent years. What changes - if any - do you think are necessary to address shortcomings in health care afforded to state prison inmates?

We need to revisit our entire prison system. We must first hire the proper person to dissect the shortcomings of our current system, and then we need to implement a plan for change for our prison system, which will address every need and support the changes necessary to fix those shortcomings once and for all.

12. How do you assess the state of Delaware's preparedness to meet emergencies caused by

Delaware), Past Treasurer Chemo Care Delaware, Past Safety Chairman of US Swimming, Mom's House, Attend St. Mary's and St. John the Beloved Church.

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violence, natural disaster or public health crises?

The state of Delaware, through our National Guard, fire and emergency personnel, and our police forces, is adequately prepared to handle most emergencies, which may threaten our state. However, there is always room for improvement. We need to continually update our technology and equipment while constantly supporting and educating our uniformed response personnel.

13. How do you assess the rate of job growth and economic development in Delaware? How do you assess the state's performance in recruiting new jobs and in attracting, retaining or growing existing businesses?

This is one of our biggest areas of need. The economic growth rate in Delaware should be one of the strongest in the nation due to the small size of our state. We should be able to entice companies to enter and reside in our tax friendly state. However, until we improve our schools and the education they provide, we continue to "not measure up" to other states. This major shortcoming will continue to challenge our state's competitiveness.

14. What would be the one most-important thing you hope to accomplish if elected?

I wish to make our schools amongst the top educational facilities in the nation. When I grew up in the '60s and '70s, they were ranked among the best in the nation. I want to return to that level and standard. The initiation of all or part of my five-step plan will be the first step toward that goal.

15. How do you assess the performance of the state and Legislature in handling the Delmarva Power, Bluewater Wind contract for offshore wind electricity? Should the state follow New Jersey's example and use only subsidies and mandatory "clean power" goals to support private development of wind, solar and other alternative energy projects, or should Delaware intervene more directly and force utilities to sign more contracts with selected companies for alternative energy?

I am pleased our legislature has begun a commitment toward alternative energy. I would like to see Delaware be the first state to obtain total energy independence. Together with the legislature, I look forward to being part of the dialog that is successful in bringing alternative energy to Delaware. My experience in business, my knowledge of labor and my passion for constituent services along with many other experts in this area, can only add to the success of Delaware becoming energy independent.

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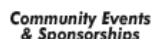
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