

2020 Candidate Questionnaire Response

How can a member of Congress best support the LGBTQ community?

On a fundamental level, Congress has a responsibility to not only act as a voice for their constituents specifically but also to promote and protect the interests of marginalized communities throughout our society. As a member of Congress representing Brooklyn, a melting pot on a level of its own, I have an even more acute responsibility to consider the needs of marginalized communities when making any and all legislative decisions. Without the willingness of members to take a stand in the support of groups like the LGBTQ+ community, special interests will exert their influence over members they have bought and paid for to promote their own ends at the expense of the marginalized.

Legislatively, Congress has the unique capacity to protect the interests of discreet and insular minority groups. The federal government passes legislation on a regular basis that impacts the dignity of certain groups, both intentionally and unintentionally. For every bill seeking to police what bathroom individuals can choose from there is an automatic budget cut for programs that provide necessary assistance for the LGBTQ+ community that attracts far less attention.

As a member of Congress, having touchpoints in these communities both on the payroll in my offices as well as operating in an unofficial advisory capacity allows for greater responsiveness to their needs. Knowing the nuances of how well-intentioned laws may have negative impacts when practically applied makes all the difference between good policy and unintentionally ostracizing an entire community. You cannot address the root causes of someone's pain if you do not first know that they are hurting.

The Trump Administration has actively moved to impose policies that discriminate against same-sex couples seeking to become foster or adoptive parents via placement agencies that receive federal funding. Do you oppose these actions? If elected to Congress, what if anything would you do to correct these policies?

Children need loving families regardless of the construction of the family unit. One truly loving, nurturing parent better serves the interest of a child than two indifferent or incompetent parents that happen to be in a heterosexual relationship. Two truly loving parents, whether they be in a same sex or gender-neutral relationship, provides the best possible foundation for a child that will allow them to live a life of happiness and fulfillment. As such, I vehemently oppose the Trump Administration's attempts to limit the privilege of adoption and family formation to heterosexual couples. If re-elected, I will pressure the (hopefully new) administration to reverse these decisions and do right by our children by allowing any loving family to adopt.

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While HIV rates are decreasing overall, new HIV infections are increasing for certain LGBTQ populations, notably among young men of color and transgender women. Moreover, ending the HIV epidemic is uneven across the country with some jurisdictions doing far better than others. What would you do to increase access to HIV preventative medication (PrEP and PEP)? What steps would you take to better and more effectively end the HIV epidemic across the country?

Every victim of HIV deserves access to the life-saving drugs discovered and patented with the assistance of government aid. Sadly, young men of color and transgender women have some of the lowest employment and labor force participation rates in the entire labor market. When they are able to find a job, it all too often comes in the form of contingent, at-will work such as fast food service and driving for Uber which typically do not offer benefits. As a result, it becomes disproportionately difficult for them to secure healthcare coverage, a critical life protection that most Americans still receive through their jobs.

I am a proud supporter of Medicare for All, a policy goal that ensures that every American has access to the life saving healthcare they need. While I ultimately hope to achieve this dream of a single-payer American healthcare system, I also am a proud believer in the Obama theory of politics: better is good. Considering that a public option will likely be the next big advancement in the healthcare space, this too should provide much needed relief to the LGBTQ+ community. Regardless of whether the next legislative step in healthcare a single-payer system or a public option is, the path forward should and will provide access to the life saving HIV drugs that the community needs.

Do you support the Stop Enabling Sex Traffickers Act (SESTA) and the Fight Online Sex Trafficking Act (FOSTA) as passed and signed into law? What steps would you take to address the concerns of consensual sex workers who indicate that these statutes have made them less safe and less able to negotiate condom use?

When originally introduced, I was a cosponsor of FOSTA-SESTA. Section 230 of the Communications Act of 1934 requires reinvestigation in light of the world of technological change that has taken place in the last century. In no uncertain terms, it would be morally reprehensible to allow sex traffickers and other abusers to pervert the intention of Section 230 to absolve them of responsibility for their actions. In a world where tracking the traffickers requires increasing levels of technological savvy, we cannot give bad actors any legal cover that might protect them from warranted and necessary prosecution. Creating more stringent penalties for those that facilitate prostitution, namely the pimps that have historically avoided rightful prosecution, reorients the focus of enforcement measures on the true criminals involved. However, these laws require significant improvements in order to ensure that no one suffers from wrongful prosecution under its jurisdiction. These laws do make unregulated sex work more dubious because it creates a possibility for victims to become defendants. Critically, these issues stem from our

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overarching approach to sex work as a country rather than a discreet issue about how we regulate online advertisements for sex work. If we regulated sex work like any other industry, FOSTA-SESTA would not create the same potential land mines for innocent sex workers simply seeking to sustain themselves. In fact, opening up sex work to a market-based regulatory framework would streamline the industry improving the economic realities of all participants while also allowing them to seek the protection of the state. Giving sex workers access to the service and protection of police limits their exposure to dangerous pimps, mitigates the risk of assault, and eliminates the risk of imprisonment.

If elected, what restrictions, if any, on the use of solitary confinement in federal prisons would you seek?

Solitary confinement does not conform to the constitutional prohibition against cruel and unusual punishment. Socialization is not a privilege but rather a fundamental need for human beings. Depriving people of human interaction for 23 hours a day at times amounts to nothing short of a moral failure on the part of the American government. The First Step Act made the first dent in solitary confinement by prohibiting the use of solitary confinement for youth in federal facilities. In future criminal justice initiatives, I will work to expand this prohibition to all cover all housed in federal facilities and incentivize states to do the same.

Do you agree that Title VII of the Civil Rights Act of 1964, as amended, prohibits employment discrimination against LGBTQ+ individuals? On October 8, 2019, the US Supreme Court heard three cases to determine whether it does. If the Court finds that Title VII does not apply to LGBTQ+ individuals, what if any legislation would you pursue?

Among the many lessons learned from the Trump Administration, the inability to place our faith in the Supreme Court sits close to the top. For far too long, Congress has abdicated its duty to uplift the rights and interests of minority and marginalized groups in light of a spat of positive Supreme Court decisions. The Court may have successfully pushed the Constitution to legally condone same-sex marriage, but we cannot sit idly by and expect this to happen for every marginalized group on every issue that matters to them. When the Court gutted the Voting Rights Act, the members of the Democratic Caucus introduced legislation to bring real enforcement heft back to the bill. Similarly, if the Court decides that Title VII of the Civil Rights Act of 1964 does not protect LGBTQ+ individuals then Congress must pass legislation making explicitly clear that the Constitution protects them.

Do you support HR 5, known as the Equality Act, which recently passed in the House and would prohibit discrimination based on sex, sexual orientation, and gender identity in a wide variety of

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areas including public accommodations and facilities, education, federal funding, employment, housing, credit, and the jury system? Specifically, the bill defines and includes sex, sexual orientation, and gender identity among the prohibited categories of discrimination or segregation to existing civil rights law and prohibits the Religious Freedom Restoration Act of 1993 from providing a claim, defense, or basis for challenging such protections.

As a quintessential issue of civil rights, I am a proud original cosponsor of HR 5 – The Equality Act.

Do you commit to using inclusive and gender neutral language in press releases and other announcements (e.g., “the people of the...” instead of “the men and women of the...”)?

True social acceptance starts slowly and then comes all at once. I look back to the debate regarding same sex marriage as a perfect example of how the question of gender-neutral language will unfold. For far too long, politicians and pundits attempted to split the baby by proposing civil unions as an alternative to marriages that sidestepped the core issue of acceptance and assimilation entirely. The LGBTQ+ community did not want the right to get married simply so they can share benefits and visit each other in the hospital. While those pragmatic realities obviously matter and make a difference in the life and wellbeing of a couple, it in no way does enough to convey public legitimacy on the union. In no uncertain terms, allowing for marriages and civil unions relegated same sex and gender non-conforming relationships to second-class status.

Sadly, the question of proper pronoun usage in public statements treads along many of the same lines. Those that refuse to use the preferred pronouns of any individual or fail to use gender neutral pronouns when applicable fail to appreciate the impact of their actions. This does not simply display an affinity for traditional grammar rules, but rather actively excludes and erases whole swaths of our community. Failure to use gender neutral pronouns not only fails to acknowledge the existence of gender non-conforming people, but also implicitly creates a hierarchy of legitimacy. If you fall into one of the more rigid labels, you qualify as a relevant person. If you do not, your opinion and existence are afterthoughts at best and explicitly unwanted at worst.

With this in mind, I will continue to use gender-neutral language in all public statements to promote the all-inclusive society we claim to strive towards.