

2021 Legislative Interview Questions and Answers Representative Michael Schlossberg, D-132

Interview Questions:

1. Background Information

- a. Name and email address of person submitting question responses: Rochelle Kaplan (kaplanr@ptd.net) and Julie Ambrose (julie052789@gmail.com)
- b. Local league name-**League of Women Voters of Lehigh County**
email@lwvlehighcounty.org
- c. Interviewers name- Julie Ambrose, Rochelle Kaplan, and Bob Elbich
- d. Interview date- March 1, 2021
- e. Interview method : Zoom

2. Legislator Information

- a. Name: Michael Schlossberg
- b. Party: Democrat
- c. Office Representative
- d. District #132
- e. Legislative Staff Contact : Kira Zickler- KZickler@pahouse.net Phone: 717-705-1869

3. Section 1: ACT 77

Act 77 was the first major update of Pennsylvania's election laws since the 1930s. It provided PA voters the opportunity to vote by mail in a safe, secure way and was used and celebrated by many. At the same time, there have been some concerns about specific implementation.

- a. *What specific changes to Act 77 would you support?* Mike supports any change that will provide more access to voters such as, all mail voting, ease in requesting ballots, automatic voter registration, and early voting.
- b. *What changes would you oppose?* Any changes that would restrict voting. The changes that the GOP are putting forth such as, eliminating drop boxes, and no excuse mail voting, he opposes, because these changes will suppress voter access.
- c. *Would you support the pre-canvassing of absentee and mail-in ballots?* He supports pre-canvassing and more drop boxes.
- d. *Would you support the elimination of secrecy envelopes?* Mike does not support eliminating the use of secretary envelopes. However, he does not want people to be

penalized if they do not use one. He does not want ballots to be thrown out just because a person did not use a secrecy envelope.

NOTE: Mike mentioned Colorado, Washington and Florida as models for election laws that provide more access to voters

4. Section 2: Redistricting Reform

Bills to create an independent redistricting commission received more cosponsors than any others in the 2017-2018 and 2019-2020 sessions, but were never given a final vote. While it's now too late to change the major decision-makers of PA redistricting in time for the 2021 process, it's not too late to put safeguards and greater transparency in place for 2021.

- a. *Have you had a chance to review LACRA, the Legislative and Congressional Redistricting Act?* Mike supports HB 22. He knows and likes the prime sponsor Wendi Thomas and has worked with her on other committees.
- b. *Will you plan to support it?* He will become a co-sponsor. He would like to see it become law.
- c. *Do you have any further thoughts on redistricting reform?* Mike said that unless this changes, nothing will change in Harrisburg. See also Section 4 below.

5. Section 3: Judicial Districts:

In the last legislative session, both the House and Senate passed House Bill 196, now HB 38, a proposed amendment to the Pennsylvania constitution to create judicial districts for state appellate courts. It passed in both houses along strictly partisan lines, with no apparent evidence of public support and very limited debate or explanation of motive.

- a. *What can you tell us about HB 38 and the motivation behind it?* Mike said that this was an effort by the Republicans to change the Pa Supreme Court because they did not like some of their decisions.
- b. *Are you concerned about the way it would threaten the independence of our judiciary? Why or why not?* Yes, he is concerned. He sees this as a threat to the independence of the judiciary and a clear conflict of interest.
- c. *Do you plan to vote for the judicial district amendment HB 38 if it comes up for another vote?* He will vote against HB 38.

6. Section 4: Legislative Rules:

When we consider the way the non-partisan redistricting reform bills failed to receive a vote, then look at the fast passage of HB 38 with no vote or support from the minority party or from any advocacy stakeholders, we find ourselves wondering about legislative rules.

- a. *Why would HB 38 pass without any expert testimony or clear public support, while redistricting reform bills, with clearly documented public support, never received a vote? Would you support rules to make sure bills with bipartisan support receive a vote in committee?* Yes, he will support such rules. However, he does not believe that rules reform will ever get passed. The party that is in the majority does not want to give up that power and control. Rules reform is such a dry topic that it would be hard to make it enough of an issue to push it over the top.
- b. *Would you support rules that ensure bills voted favorably from committee with bipartisan support receive a vote on the floor?* Yes, he would see subsection d
- c. *Would you support a commission to study the rules and recommend changes?* Mike would support a commission to study the rules. He opined that having a commission might be a more viable way to get any reform passed.
- d. *What specific changes to the rules or to committee composition would you want to see?* He would support a rule change that if legislation has a majority of cosponsors (102), the legislation would get a committee and/or floor vote.
- e. *Has there been any legislation that you support that did not move.* Mike does not introduce legislation unless he feels that it will get passed. However, he has supported legislation for LBGTQ rights, fair funding for schools, and gun safety legislation that he knows has no hope of getting to the House floor.

NOTE: Mike believes that focusing on rules loses track of the bigger picture which to him is redistricting reform. He believes that nothing will get done until political gerrymandering is eliminated. At its core, gerrymandering stifles the will of the people. He believes that redistricting reform has a better chance of passing than rules reform.

7. Section 5: Open Primaries

As more Pennsylvanians register as unaffiliated voters, there's increasing interest in open or hybrid primaries, which would allow unaffiliated voters to participate.

- a. *Do you have an opinion about open primaries?* Mike said that at this point he would support the co-sponsorship memo by Jared Solomon. Mike believes that Open Primaries would permit people who register Independent to get either an R or D ballot and vote in the primary. He thinks that allowing independents to vote in primaries might be a good way to pull people back to the center.
- b. *Do you have a preference between open or hybrid primaries?* Rather than a preference for one type, Mike expressed concern about scenarios where you could lockout candidates that receive high votes by siphoning votes to other candidates.
- c. *Would you support one or both of those options?* Mike supports keeping the parties' ballots, but running the Primaries as open, so the Independent or non-affiliated voter would pick sides when they go in to vote. Mike would absolutely support Rank Choice voting.

8. Section 6: National Popular Vote Compact

Concerns about the current electoral college system have focused new attention on the National Popular Vote Compact.

- a. *Are you aware of the push for 270 by 2024?* Yes, Mike is aware of this but does not like it. He supports eliminating the electoral college altogether and determining the winner by popular vote directly.
- b. *Would you support Pennsylvania's adoption of the compact?* No. Mike indicated that right now only blue states have supported the compact. He said the way it is written, it might be too easy to elect a Republican when the Republicans would not give Democrats the same opportunities, so he would not support this.

9. Section 7: Regional Greenhouse Gas Initiative

The Regional Greenhouse Gas Initiative (RGGI) is a cooperative effort among ten, soon to be eleven, northeastern coastal states to limit the amount of carbon dioxide emitted by fossil fuel fired power plants.

- a. *Should Pennsylvania join RGGI? Why/why not?* Mike believes entering RGGI is a good thing. He voted against overriding the Governor's decision. Rep. Schlossberg sees RGGI as an effort to expand Pennsylvania's access to renewable energy and that is good. He admits that RGGI is minor in the scope of addressing the problem of greenhouse gases, but it is a good first step.

10. What are your own legislative priorities for the session ahead?

- a. Mike's first priority is getting the Governor's budget passed. He supports the budget because it accomplishes tax fairness, educational opportunities, charter school funding reform and workforce development.
- b. Mike's second priority is creating/passing the Suicide Prevention Task Force. This would provide critical interventions, would establish a fee to assist the 988 suicide prevention number and would fund crisis services.

11. Interviewers asked How the League can help: Mike indicated that members can voice support for the budget and for doing a better job of funding mental health initiatives. He indicated that he is trying to figure out the balance, because Republicans have a majority and we need to find ways to work together. He indicated that he had a striking conversation with a Republican colleague about suicide prevention; and he and Speaker Cutler had worked together to get a bill on healthcare shortages passed.

12. Interviewers asked about County Health Bureaus and Emergency Services: Rep. Schlossberg indicated that Allentown and Bethlehem are acting much like county health bureaus now. He would fully support the state's support of health bureaus to direct additional money and authority to them to do the work. He was unaware of efforts to allow counties to take over fire stations and emergency services, yet acknowledged that many fire companies struggle, particularly small ones. Mike mentioned that Woodlawn and Greenwalds are in his district and they receive direct support from South Whitehall.