

The Post and Courier's Election 2020 Candidate Questionnaire

NAME: Dr. Debbie Chatman Bryant, RN
OFFICE SOUGHT: SC State Senate, District 44
PARTY (IF APPLICABLE): Democratic
INCUMBENT? No
EMPLOYMENT: Associate Dean of Nursing
PREVIOUS OFFICES HELD OR SOUGHT: None

SC Legislature

1) Why are you the candidate who should be elected? Please be specific about your own accomplishments and what differentiates you from your opponent(s).

Voters want leaders who overcome adversity, show tenacity, and remind them of good neighbors. As a nurse, educator, and community leader, I've worked with people from diverse backgrounds on disease prevention, early detection, education, and public safety. As a mom of two children, I understand the struggles and concerns of parents in the Lowcountry. As the wife of a 23-year US Army veteran, I recognize the sacrifices and needs of service members and their families. I've spent my life stepping out of my comfort zone to build alliances for the greater good and I'll do the same in the Statehouse.

2) What do you see as the state's greatest challenge, and how would you try to address it?

The biggest challenge our state faces is division. We can tackle any other challenges we face if we set aside partisan labels and bickering to chart a better way forward for South Carolina. We have to start with more leaders that come from backgrounds where they've built diverse coalitions to get things done. We will never improve our schools, fix our roads, expand access to healthcare, or face the reality of a rising sea level if we don't start with extending our hand in good faith. That's what I've done in community health, that's what I'll do in the legislature.

3) What are the three things the Legislature most needs to do next year? Please be specific. (200 words)

Our state has no shortage of important issues to address. Three in particular (COVID-19, health care, and redistricting) will require immediate attention in 2021.

We need immediate action to protect the public from COVID-19, or it will continue to be the achilles heel of both our physical health and the health of our economy. We need to heed expert medical advice to halt COVID's spread: rapidly expand the accessibility of testing; invest in resources needed to protect people, particularly the most vulnerable and those without the ability to work from home, like teachers, retail, and hospitality workers; and have our elected leadership legislate and model appropriate behavior with masks and social distancing.

South Carolina has needed to expand Medicare under the ACA for a decade. Currently, 75% of that cost could be borne by the Federal government. We can increase the number of South Carolinians who are covered while drastically reducing costs. In the middle of a pandemic, there couldn't be a more critical time to act.

Once the 2020 census is finalized, the next legislative session is *required* to deal with redistricting. It's high time we end partisan gerrymandering by creating a nonpartisan redistricting commission to ensure everyone is represented equally.

4) What is the most important thing the Legislature can do to improve public education in South Carolina?

We have to start treating education like it actually is the perennially important issue politicians say it is during each election season. To find real solutions, we need more public school teachers around the table, and we need educators, like myself, in elected office making decisions based on our knowledge and experience. We need to develop a long term strategic plan for moving our schools from the lowest ranked in the country, designed by coalitions of educators, administrators, students and parents. "Funding" isn't solely a discussion of teacher pay, it's about classroom resources, work-life balance, class size, recruitment and retention.

5) What if any changes would you make to laws affecting the authority of city and county governments?

From potholes, to violent crime, to cloudy water from the faucet, when people need something, they call local government agencies and officials. We need the state to be a better partner, under Home Rule, in supporting local communities and their governments by holding up its end of the bargain in maintaining state roads, strengthening schools, reapportioning state funds, and bringing home more resources from the Federal government. If the state isn't going to provide what municipalities need, we should look at changing whether the state should have the final say in how local tax revenue can be levied and allocated.

6) What if anything should the Legislature do to help reduce flooding in the Lowcountry and throughout South Carolina?

First, recognize that the issue exists, that it's going to get worse, and that we're responsible for mitigation. We need to create a legislated structure that drives growth in areas where the

floodplain is higher, and away from flood prone, low lying areas. Then we need to invest in technology, and environmentally sound infrastructure, to keep water from areas that have already been developed. We need to work with the Federal government to secure the necessary funding that we will not be able to provide ourselves, for the massive infrastructure projects we will need to undertake, particularly in the Lowcountry.

7) What if any taxes or fees should the Legislature increase or reduce?

What is true in our households is also true in our government— the allocation of financial resources shows where our priorities lay. Budgets reflect priorities and should be logical calculations.

Before we can determine whether current revenue levels are appropriate, as a legislative body, the next General Assembly needs to specifically outline our priorities in terms of public health and safety, infrastructure, and education. Once we have consensus on those as top priorities, we can assess what funding is necessary for specific desired outcomes and whether we have more than, or not enough, funding to accomplish those goals.

8) Under what circumstances, if any, is it appropriate for the Legislature to increase or reduce taxes or fees?

Before considering increases to taxes or fees, I would want to know the following.

Whether the project, program, or organization is truly in need of additional funds, and if those funds are (or should be) the responsibility of the State of South Carolina.

Whether there is genuine need for new revenue, or if funds are available through reallocation.

Whether the revenue stream directly correlates to the program being funded in ways the public can understand.

For reductions in revenue:

Whether decreased funding would harm programs of substantial value.

Whether another program of substantial value urgently needs that same revenue stream.

9) Describe at least one instance that shows your willingness to work across party lines even when that's at odds with your political base.

My efforts in building networks for the health and wellness of communities where we live, work, and play would have gone nowhere if political affiliations were brought into the conversation. Being successful in public health has meant focusing on areas where people agree

and can coalesce for real solutions. For those reasons, I've found support from people who know me, even when opinions differ. When people recognize shared values and know you to be trustworthy, someone who listens and works in everyone's best interest, regardless of labels, alliances are built and success accomplished.

10) Please tell us anything else you think it's important for us to know about you or this election.

Growing up in Moncks Corner, during the civil rights era, not everyone expected me to become a nurse, scholar, and educator forging alliances on major issues like public health and disease prevention. Those accomplishments have taken determination, hard work, and the ability to listen and build broad coalitions with people from different backgrounds. I have done all of that without ever asking someone's political affiliation. That positive mindset has proven successful throughout my life, and it's one we desperately need in our State Senate. I will use that same approach in serving District 44 constituents, and all South Carolinians.