

The Post and Courier's Election 2020 Candidate Questionnaire

NAME: Larry Grooms
OFFICE SOUGHT: SC Senate District 37
PARTY (IF APPLICABLE): Republican
INCUMBENT? Yes or No Yes
EMPLOYMENT: Grooms Marketing
PREVIOUS OFFICES HELD OR SOUGHT: SC Senate

- 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).**

It has always been about helping others and because of my position and experience, I am better equipped to serve the people who live in and around Senate District 37. With senior leadership responsibilities on the Finance Committee and as Chair of the Transportation Committee, I set funding priorities for our region's institutions and projects, I exercise oversight of port operations, I oversee development of SCDOT priorities, and I have input on all major legislation. I wrote and passed legislation that saved the Port, changed the governance of the SCDOT, and created the 10-year plan to fix our roads.

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

Although the Statehouse first received electricity in 1884, it took another 50 years for the legislature to make statewide electrification a priority. Just as electricity became necessary to maintain a minimum standard of living, broadband is necessary today. It is essential for education, health care, and work at home opportunities. Broadband is access to information and that access is not available in many rural areas and certain urban spots in our state. There are many disparities that need to be addressed but we will not make significant progress on other issues until we first address this digital divide.

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

- 3.1 The legislature must address our constitutional and statutory provisions regarding the declaration of a State of Emergency and the use of executive powers by the Governor, county, and municipal officials.

- 3.2 The Legislature must make good on promises to increase teacher pay. Teachers have adapted to virtual and social distant learning models without proper training or support. Many have worked in areas that failed to meet CDC minimum guidelines. And during these most trying and uncertain times, our teachers were still expected to have their students prepared to take many overburdensome standardized tests. Our teachers deserve a little more respect than they have been given.
- 3.3 Issues regarding Santee Cooper affect more constituents in Senate District 37 than in any other. A \$20 million study of proposals to sell Santee Cooper revealed that a sale would increase electric rates, drive debt levels higher, force massive layoffs, and would turn over 190,000 acres of lakes and public properties to private developers. The Legislature needs to end the speculation of a sale and work to reform and restructure the agency just as it did with the SC Ports Authority when they lost their way about a decade ago.

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

Public education in our state continues to fall short of what it could be. Parents should be empowered with multiple educational choices. All children deserve to have access to high quality educational options that include traditional, magnet, charter and other choices. A child should not be limited by their zip code or attendance zone. Attendance lines that anchor good kids to failing schools should be abolished and good schools should be empowered to accept additional students. When parents have good choices, they will exercise that freedom for the benefit and welfare of their children.

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

Government closest to the people best knows the issues of its people. However, state leaders should act when residents' rights are infringed. For example, all beaches in South Carolina are public, therefore municipalities should not limit public access to parking for beaches.

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

While the causes and solutions are certainly debatable, climate change is not. It is real and it is affecting coastal communities at an increasing rate. As one of the senior leaders in the Senate, I can and will ensure that state funds are made available to assist Charleston and other flood prone communities.

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

At 7%, South Carolina has the highest income tax rate in the South and one of the highest in the nation. This rate should be adjusted to more closely reflect our neighboring states of Georgia at 5.75% and North Carolina at 5.25%. Seven states including Florida and Texas have no state income tax.

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

All taxes and fees should be periodically reviewed for effectiveness. General taxes should be low and broad. All adult citizens, not just a few, should pay the smallest amount necessary to support services like education and law enforcement. Government should be limited to providing services that cannot be provided otherwise. Fees that are charged to users of specific services should be adjusted to meet the expenses for providing those services. There are hundreds of fee-based services that benefit certain individuals, industries or groups. These services should not be subsidized with general fund revenues collected from all taxpayers.

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.

In an increasingly difficult and partisan environment, I have a proven record of actually getting things done. My experience, seniority, and ability to work across the aisle have helped me achieve one of the most successful records of any member of the General Assembly. For example, in 2009, I wrote the Port Restructuring Act. Governor Sanford and most of the Senate Republicans opposed my bill. With help from every Senate Democrat, we passed the bill and overrode the Governor's veto. Today, our port is responsible for 1 in 10 jobs in our state.

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

As a senior member of the Finance Committee, I will ensure that capital needs for institutions like MUSC, the Citadel, College of Charleston and Trident Tech will be met. As Chairman of the Senate Transportation Committee, I will ensure that our share of SCDOT's new revenues are spent on our highway, transit, and maintenance projects. I will continue to ensure that conservation measures are funded and that teacher salaries remain above the Southeastern average. I will continue my efforts to expand our economy through industry recruitment and protect our natural resources through landscape mitigation and conservation easement procurement.