

Democracy for Pittsburgh
Response of JACK WAGNER
Feb. 17, 2010

1. Health care: what version(s) of public option and/or single payer do you support? Please be specific as to structure, funding, and who should administer the program. (Gubernatorial candidates: answer this presuming that a pre-empting national health program will not be passed, or that it will allow latitude for state-specific options. Senatorial candidates, please answer this question presuming that the issue will not be answered before the winner takes, or returns to, office.)

It is my hope that comprehensive health care reform will soon finally be achieved at the federal level. As an early supporter of Barack Obama in the 2008 Democratic primaries, I am confident that his administration will be the one to finally deliver on this Democratic ideal. I supported the "public option" and would not opt out of that or any similar element of federal health care reform. Yet regardless of what happens at the federal level, state government will have an important role in health care reform.

As Auditor General, my audits have identified hundreds of millions of dollars that could be saved in the state budget by improving the management of various programs and services. For example, I have identified potential savings in the Medicaid program that can be easily achieved without reducing benefits for eligible recipients. Public funds should be paying for health care for those who need it, not going to insurance companies as part of capitation payments that are made even if care is never provided.

As Governor, I will implement my audit recommendations and other ideas in order to generate significant savings that could be used to provide access to affordable, quality health care for all Pennsylvania residents. I will make it a priority to expand the adultBasic program and other programs that serve the most vulnerable Pennsylvanians, such as the Children's Health Insurance Program, in a fiscally responsible way.

2. Do we need to reform regulations controlling the provider end of health care delivery? As with the question above, please assume that these issues will still be in play at the state and / or national level. Please address some or all of the following: geographical limits to access; auxiliary costs such as ambulances, lab fees, doctors who impose "minimum visit" requirements (additional visits, services, or tests); group drug buying agreements; for-profit liability insurance; clinics.

Again, I believe that state government will have an important role in health care reform no matter what happens at the federal level. That includes regulations addressing these and other important issues if necessary to provide access to affordable, quality health care for all Pennsylvania residents.

One area of particular concern is the need for minimum nurse-to-patient ratios in hospitals and nursing homes. The relationship between employee recruitment/retention, staffing ratios/levels, and working conditions, on the one hand, and patient safety and quality of care, on the other hand, is well documented. I have worked on this important issue for years through my department's support of the Pennsylvania Culture Change Coalition, which seeks to improve the quality of care in health care facilities. I was also a strong supporter of the ban on mandatory overtime for nursing and other health care employees and was pleased to see the ban finally passed into law. As Governor, I will continue to focus on these issues.

3. We and our friends want to start businesses, but can't get loans. How will you ensure that "economic stimulus" will allow new, innovative businesses to sprout, instead of primarily encouraging the spread of large multinationals, to the detriment of locally-owned businesses? Do you believe existing tax and incentive structures are about right or is there a built in bias for larger or smaller businesses? If elected, what changes, if any, would you seek, to adjust that balance?

As Governor, I will work with the private sector to improve the employment situation in the Commonwealth, so that all Pennsylvanians who want to work hard and pursue the American dream have the opportunity to do so. I will use my experience as Auditor General to fix the state's economic development programs and hold the recipients of state assistance accountable for creating and retaining the jobs promised. For example, our first-ever special performance audit of the Opportunity Grant Program exposed the state's lax efforts in recovering grants for jobs that were promised by businesses but never created or retained. The Department of Community and Economic Development agreed with most of our findings and recommendations, but we are keeping watch to ensure that all of our concerns are addressed. My administration's economic development programs will focus on small locally-owned businesses, which create the jobs needed in the Commonwealth. We cannot depend on large national or multinational businesses without any ties to our communities; we have to develop and nurture Pennsylvania businesses.

I will also use my experience to bring transparency and competition to state government's awarding of contracts for goods and services. I am very concerned about public contracting that is neither truly competitive nor cost-effective. These are issues at the heart of my special performance audit of the state's information technology contracts, where we found over a half-billion dollars in no-bid, emergency, and sole source contracts given to a single vendor – while that same vendor received \$2.25 million in state economic development assistance to service those very same contracts. Many of the insiders who profit from the current broken system are resistant to change, but reforming that system is one of my top priorities as Governor. It is not only the right thing to do, but it will provide opportunities for businesses throughout the Commonwealth, particularly small locally-owned businesses.

My audits have also promoted openness and responsibility in employment practices by state and local government agencies. For example, my audit of the Pennsylvania Gaming Control Board examined whether families and communities are benefiting from the expansion of legalized gaming. It is essential that the board and licensees place a priority on hiring local residents representing the diversity of the areas where casinos are built. As Governor, my administration will lead by example in hiring and working with women, minorities, and disadvantaged communities.

Finally, as Governor, I will continue to stand up for working men and women, as I have throughout my career. After graduating from high school, I worked at Duquesne Light Company as a meter reader, draftsman, and payroll clerk, and was a member of the International Brotherhood of Electrical Workers. I am proud to be an honorary member of the union today and to have received significant support from organized labor as a candidate and elected official. As Auditor General, I have fought to protect the rights of the men and women of organized labor, uncovering violations of the prevailing wage, unemployment, and workers' compensation laws, as well as violations of the fundamental right to form and join a union. I will continue to do so as Governor.

4. All of us are downwind, downstream, occupationally exposed to, or "up the food chain" from toxic wastes. What can you do--what do you intend to do--to strengthen the rights and broaden the legal options of affected populations across county, state, and even national lines?

My professional background is as a safety engineer. In 1974, I graduated from the Indiana University of Pennsylvania with a degree in Safety Management, a new field arising out of the federal Occupational Health and Safety Act. As a safety engineer, I helped businesses create safe work environments for their employees. The issue of safety, particularly in the workplace, remains a strong area of interest for me today. I am very sensitive to the importance of preventing and addressing toxic wastes and other hazardous situations from negatively impacting our citizens.

As a State Senator, I voted in support of just about every environmental protection law currently on the books. In addition, as Auditor General, I have audited state agencies to ensure that they are enforcing those laws. For example, our audit of the Department of Environmental Protection found that its oversight of dam and levee safety inspections was lax. Crumbling infrastructure is particularly important given the demands that will be placed on our environment by the development of the state's new Marcellus Shale energy resources.

One of my priorities as Governor is to maximize the Marcellus Shale to create jobs and reduce the cost of natural gas in an environmentally responsible way. These new energy resources give the Commonwealth an unparalleled opportunity in the coming years to create tens of thousands of good paying, high quality jobs in our

communities and bring in much-needed revenues to state government. As Governor, I will make sure that the industry understands that these resources belong to all Pennsylvanians, that we – not outsiders – intend to reap the benefits, and that we will not tolerate any harm to our precious environment. I will insist that the costs of the increased government oversight necessary to build and monitor this new industry be borne by the industry itself.

Please vouch that these answers have been approved by the candidate:

Yes. These answers were approved for submission by Auditor General Jack Wagner on Feb. 17, 2010.

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