

# Candidate Qualifying and Vetting Questions

## QUALIFYING AND VETTING CANDIDATES:

A good vetting process is designed to alert both the candidate and the investigating committeeman to potential pitfalls. It is an essential part of filling local offices and developing a campaign strategy for the selected candidates.

### Pre-Primary or Convention

#### Commitment

A key element of a candidate's strength is desire for the job. By qualifying candidates, we learn their desire for personal gain, general sense of civic duty, and moral compass and conviction that leads them to run. It is also important to ensure that a candidate actually meets the qualifications for the position as set forth by the federal, state, or local board of elections. Do they meet the residency and age requirements? It cannot be assumed that they do.

- Are you willing to devote every weekend to your campaign? Are you willing to give up all vacations with your family? Are you willing to put in as many hours during the campaign as you would in office?
- Does your family support this? Candidates will have to be away from their families traveling, campaigning, eating, and attending fund raising events. Families **must** support the effort. If the family doesn't support the effort, not only will that deny the candidate vital support, but opponents will notice and use that against the candidate. Families must also endure the pressure of time away from the candidate. There will be direct attacks on them, and in general all resources will be drained more with the importance of the office. Candidates will lie about their family problems, as well. It is important to discover any closeted skeletons and dirt that the other side can potentially use. Running for public office is an invitation to scour a candidate's background and personal life for poor choices. Candidates must be prepared for their secrets to be exposed at some point, and must therefore choose between keeping their privacy and winning.
- Are you willing to invest your time and money in specialized training to better prepare you for both candidacy and office?
- Are you willing to spend your own money, and to budget the family's money alongside the campaign's so as to show that you understand the importance of budgeting? Knowing that most donations come from individuals who are placing their faith in you, how do you view those dollars?

**Does the candidate sell? These aren't vetting questions, rather, traits a candidate must possess if they are going to advance and win a general election.**

A "good candidate" has appeal in person, in public speaking, and in mass media.

- Ideally, a candidate takes command of a room upon entering it. But personal presence also means paying attention to grooming and clothing. Candidates for public office cannot take days off of grooming or cleanliness, nor can they afford to be off-image in public. And a "good candidate" would never be photographed eating, drinking, or grooming.
- Candidates should enjoy public speaking, or at least not dread it. Red flags are:
  - ✓ Unclear, too fast or slow speech
  - ✓ A noticeable lisp or thick accent not shared by electorate

## Candidate Qualifying and Vetting Questions

- ✓ Inability to project voice to back of large room
  - ✓ When raised, voice gets tinny or scary
  - ✓ Failure to engage an audience, with rote or scripted delivery
  - ✓ Voice tires quickly (may grow stronger with practice)
- A Good Candidate
    - ✓ Draws energy from meeting people, rather than being drained by it
    - ✓ Can remember names, at least of key players and campaign workers
    - ✓ Maintains eye contact in one-on-one and live audience settings
    - ✓ May not have all of the answers, but never looks caught in the headlights

### Negative campaigning

Can they take attacks impersonally? And are they ready for them?

Defending a position is an essential quality for a person in government. When attacks come, even personal attacks, officials must understand that the attacks are really aimed at the policies they favor, and not themselves. A person who takes these attacks to heart will not last. The campaign is a proving ground for these sorts of things, so we look for people who will stay on message in a foul environment.

### Other Considerations

Does the candidate go in for any conspiracy theories or other unpopular views?

Everyone believes things they cannot prove. It is human nature to devise working theories for the world on insufficient evidence. Sometimes these theories are more complex than the common wisdom, or require a higher level of cynicism. Sometimes they get to the next level, and require magical thinking or involve UFOs, complex plots against the stated interests of those involved, and unwillingness to accept a standard explanation. The more unpopular or ridiculous the theory, the more important it is to uncover it in a vetting session.

### Projection — He is one of us!

Candidates will push their views on issues they know are hot buttons for you as long as they think you will agree, letting you assume that they agree on other issues, as well. For instance, they will inform you of their support for your position on one of:

- Abortion
- Gun rights
- Fiscal conservatism  
*or just mention*
- “I am a conservative”
- Ronald Reagan
- Religious code words

... and expect that you will assume they believe what you believe on everything else. Their message is “I am one of you”. **They may or may not be one of you, and they will absolutely not believe everything you do. Your job in vetting them is to dig deeper.**

# Candidate Qualifying and Vetting Questions

## QUESTIONS FOR THE CANDIDATE:

Do you consider yourself a conservative and, if so, define what that means to you. How is it different from being generically a Republican?

What is more important to you? Will you vote the party line in order to gain party support for your re-election? Or will you stand on principle.

**In the event of a crowded primary of candidates opposing an incumbent, are you willing to “step aside” for the greater good if it increases the chances of a conservative candidate ousting an incumbent?**

## Self Governance Questions

Do you believe that government has too little, the right amount, or too much power?

How should government provide equal rights?

If elected, will you speak with people who do not reside in your district? Will you apply this to paid lobbyists?

Do you believe that the Constitution is a living document subject to changing interpretations?

What did our country’s vision statement, the Declaration of Independence proclaim?

What is the difference in civic responsibility and civic authority? [*Responsibility: obligation to act (vote) Authority: Right and power to instruct and hold elected representatives accountable under the social contract*]

Is the government the center of all decision making? [*If candidate answers yes, he assumes no input from citizenry*]

What is the role of ‘property rights in our form of government? [*Property Rights are the sum or fruits of one’s labor. Property Rights reflects one’s desires, one’s priorities, one’s choices and one’s labors.*]

Text books are teaching that we live in a democracy. Does this matter?

What is your plan to return society to a free market economy? Do you consider this a priority?

Should parents who home school or send their child[ren] to private school be provided with a tax credit or some other form of financial relief? Would you support a system of school choice vouchers for every student?

## Legislation

Will you ensure every bill has a financial impact study on the economy, jobs and working Americans?

If a legislative bill is unconstitutional will you vote no? Are you will to put that in a written commitment to your constituents?

Would you support a resolution calling for a Convention of States for the specific, limited purpose of passing amendments to the federal Constitution that limit the power of the federal government? Why or Why not?

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## Digital Information

Do you believe that Commonwealth entities should justify in advance the reason for Citizen digital information collection and annually justify why they must hold Citizen digital information to the General Assembly?

Would you support or put forth legislation stating unequivocally that Commonwealth entities are responsible for the safe keeping of Citizen digital information and lapses are punishable by fines, at a minimum, employment termination, and/or incarceration?

Do you agree that Citizens should be notified by the Commonwealth entities when they are collecting their digital information? If not, why not?

## BEFORE MAKING A DECISION, CONSIDER THIS:

Candidates tend to want to win elections either by finding a way to package their own opinions for the public, or by adjusting themselves to current public opinion (or a mix of those). Both methods have strengths and pitfalls, and candidates should know what their overall plan will be.

## The Three Variables

Public policy issues seldom have black and white answers. Even when they do, no two candidates will agree on how strongly they believe in a given position, nor necessarily how important the issue is relative to the other issues. So it is not enough to ask candidates if they are pro-life or favor the right to keep and bear arms. For each policy question or area, candidates should answer

1) *What they believe*

Do they know their positions? If you are in a position of guiding the campaign, note whatever knowledge holes the candidate has and supply answers that fit the candidate, the electorate, and the party line. Too many holes are a bad sign.

2) *How convinced they are*

Can they make the case? Do they have any doubt at all about their positions, do their closest advisers agree, and does the position fit within their overall system of belief?

3) *How important it is*

Are they willing to lose an election over this? John McCain famously said during the 2008 presidential campaign that he would rather lose an election than lose a war. That is the best way to determine how important a position is to a candidate. While related to how strongly they hold their opinion, conviction and importance are independent.

For instance, a candidate who favors drug legalization might only barely be convinced of that position, or they might be quite sure that the War on Drugs is, to them, a mistaken policy. Independent of their opinion on the issue, they may also see it as either an unimportant back-burner item, or as a vital social issue with significant impact on race relations, border security, and foreign policy.

**In the long term, honesty is the best policy. A candidate who is afraid to announce his position when it is not popular will find it more difficult to reclaim the high ground when public opinion later shifts.** Our task is to determine what the candidate truly believes.

## Candidate Qualifying and Vetting Questions

The best way to bring out the truth is to have the candidate answer an exhaustive list of the questions of importance in the race, including measures of how strongly a candidate holds his position and ranking the issues in the campaign. As mentioned, **the key question is: "Are you willing to lose the race and stick to your position on this issue?"**

These points must all be taken into consideration and balanced against one another. A candidate with strong financials can have weaker personal presence, but it is obviously best to be strong at both. But a candidate who is well-informed and thoroughly convinced of his policies had better be ready to deal with voters who disagree.

These principles and techniques translate directly into choosing candidates in races in which we are not personally involved. We can watch candidates in the media and listen to the people around them, inferring their qualities. We can read what they write, or what is written for them, and chart on our own their personal convictions in relation to winning and losing.

Portions of this material are attributed to

The Precinct Project <http://www.precinctproject.us/2013/10/vetting-candidates/>,

The Center For Self Governance <http://centerforselfgovernance.com>

iCaucus <http://www.icaucus.org>

American Majority <http://americanmajority.org/>

Carol Stoppes and Ben Slone