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Page 1

Q1

Identity-Please fill out the indicated fields.

Candidate Name: Riley Keaton
Office Seeking: Delegate
Party Affiliation: GOP
District: 15

Q2

Contact Info-Please fill out the indicated fields.

Address 261 Simmons St
Address 2 NA
City/Town Spencer
State/Province WV
ZIP/Postal Code 25276
Country USA
Email Address riley.keatonwv@gmail.com
Phone Number 3045318246

Q3

Education & Experience-Please fill out the indicated fields.

High School Attended (Ex: School name, city, & state)

Roane County High School, Spencer, WV

Colleges Attended & Degrees Obtained (Ex: Marshall, MBA)

West Virginia University, Pursuing BA in Economics

Current Employer & Job Position (Ex: WVMA, Director of Operations)

Diocese of Wheeling-Charleston, Camping Director

Describe your current job & responsibilities

Responsible for the operation of statewide camping ministry including staffing, program planning, risk management, program implementation, and whatever else needs done to make Catholic camping ministry a success. I have 16 direct reports and work with my Assistant Director make sure it all gets finished.

How long have you worked for your current employer?

2 years. Previously ran camping for the Ohio-West Virginia Youth Leadership Association, formerly Hi-Y.

Q4

Describe your overall philosophy toward the role of state government as it relates to business and industry.

State government has a responsibility to defend, elevate, and elevate the interests of their citizens while preserving our freedoms, constitutional rights, and way of life. As it pertains to business and industry, government has a role of being a self-conscious, self-critical partner in growing our economy. For example, the state shouldn't think they can do everything, or maybe anything, a business can do but they have a talent and responsibility for building infrastructure, encouraging the flow of private capital, and settling disputes in such a way that business and industry can thrive.

Q5

What do you bring to the office you seek? Specifically, what have you built, improved, or changed for the benefit of your community or business?

In 2020, the Diocese of Wheeling-Charleston closed camping ministry and let go of all of the staff responsible for its operation. I was hired in November to rebuild the ministry - it was just me. I'm very proud of the staff I've built, the camp program I've prepared and implemented, and the path we've put the property on toward accreditation by the American Camp Association. Camper participation numbers have increased 3x over from Y1 to Y2, expecting roughly 350-400 campers this summer over 160 last number.

Q6

Please list any groups, associations, or non-profits in which you are an active member or volunteer such as civic groups, labor organizations, advocacy groups.

Member, Diocesan Pastoral Council
Advancement Committee Chair, Youth Leadership Association
Board Member, West Virginians for Life

Q7

West Virginia is facing many challenges. What do you consider to be the most important and critical challenge that threatens our state and what is your plan to alleviate this threat?

The biggest challenge for West Virginia can be seen in most small towns you drive through or larger cities you visit. Everywhere you look there are signs that folks have simply *given up* on our state. Drugs, crime, trash, vagrancy, dilapidated buildings, and other visible signs like that. We, as a people, need to believe in ourselves and our state again.

My "plan," as much as there can be one for such a larger multi-faceted problem, is to tackle the sources of despair and build up the sources of fulfillment in life. Combat drugs, idleness, and physical decline. Lift up and support family life, high-wage work, and volunteerism.

Q8

Do you support the passage of Amendment One on the November 2022 General Election ballot? The measure provides the legislature with the authority to repeal or phase out tangible personal property in the future, this includes tax on personal vehicles, small business inventory, and tax on manufacturing inventory, machinery, and equipment.

Yes, supported 100%. Hope to see the full BPPT dealt with in 2023, but top priority is machinery and equipment.

Q9

What ideas do you have to help build our state's economy and improve West Virginia's position in competing for investment and job growth?

I believe the state of West Virginia needs to identify areas of competitive advantage and lean in. We're an energy state and a resource state. That's why I support the development of our natural gas, power generation, and rare earth/critical mineral industries.

Business climate is huge and the Legislature has made a lot of steps to shed our disadvantages. We have an opportunity to assert a competitive advantage over the next several years - further legal reforms, establish a rational pro-growth tax system, and a leaner regulatory regime.

In my campaign, I emphasize developing a manufacturing sector with high-wage, family-supporting jobs. For many communities, their only real exports are age, sickness, and poverty. Medicaid/Medicare payments and means-tested transfer payments make up the huge majority of dollars flowing into my hometown - because we don't make anything the world wants and is willing to buy from us. Investing in attracting new manufacturing capacity to the state and connecting people in communities like mine to those jobs will do so much for the culture - we make something the world wants, we sell it, and we sustain ourselves.

Q10

Use of and addiction to opioids in West Virginia and our region have reached crisis levels. This is a problem being recognized not only at the state level, but at the federal level. What ideas do you have to help stop this devastating trend in our state?

I support expanding treatment options, especially lifting the moratorium on CONs for opioid treatment programs. I support updates and stronger sentencing, along with more aggressive enforcement, in our organized crime statutes to disrupt the flow of dangerous drugs into the state.

I also think a good job solves a lot of problems. Get someone supporting themselves, reconnected to family life, living in communities where people haven't given up, addressing root causes of mental health struggles, and I think we'll see a lot of the drug problem evaporate on its own.

Q11

Racial justice and equity, LGBTQ rights and gender equity are important factors for many current West Virginia employers, companies that consider moving to our State, and employees who may consider relocating to West Virginia. How would you address these issues to recruit and retain companies and employees for whom this is a priority?

West Virginians are some of the nicest people in the world. Existing state law prohibits discrimination.

Q12

What are your specific ideas for addressing workforce skills gaps in industry? Specifically, with the growth of manufacturing jobs in the state and need for diverse and skilled labor, what are your ideas to prepare the state's current and future workforce for manufacturing jobs.

The state has been very attached to shoving a square peg into a round hole. "How do we adapt higher education or CTE to give the employers what they want?" instead of ever asking the question, "How can we help employers train someone for the job posting they have out right now?"

I support policies to encourage employer-provided training and certification programs so there's a direct, one-to-one connection between the training received and a good job on the other end.

Q13

What are your ideas for improving outcomes in the state's K-12 public education system?

I support legislative rule making review for the WVDE so we can really dig into these problems. We need to cut a lot of the red tape, hold schools accountable for results, help teachers focus on their craft instead of paperwork, and promote more experiential, hands-on learning options in our schools.

Q14

What ideas do you have for incorporating a focus on STEM education in our public schools and how could industry engage to support increased workforce learning models in middle and high schools, as well as career and technical education centers (vo-tech)?

I'm a huge supporter of kids learning by doing. We should be encouraging schools to take more field trips, establish more partnerships with industry to get real-world experiences in the classroom, and support a really active extracurricular life in their school.

Q15

Please describe policies that you believe may be helpful in balancing state regulations and environmental rules while maintaining a competitive atmosphere for industrial job growth and investment?

Fair and impartial science says our state's environmental regulations do not need tightened. I would be very interested in reviewing permitting requirements, reforming NEPA, and making it easier, cheaper, and just as environmentally safe to build in West Virginia.

Q16

What do you think West Virginia could do to promote energy diversity including the growth of renewable energy sources in the state?

We've made a lot of progress with the nuclear, solar, and geothermal legislation we've advanced. I support a favorable regulatory and legal climate for all forms of energy.

Q17

Many corporations have established environmental, social, and governance criteria. How would such goals impact your decision making on relevant policy issues as a member of legislator?

I'm uncomfortable with ESG targeting our largest industries and tax payers. To the extent we have accommodated the needs of manufacturers' ESG standard with our energy portfolio diversification, I'm supportive of those laws. I think we should focus on making good policy - and many of their asks are good policy - without subordinating the legislative process to governance by a corporate board.

Q18

If you could work on a single piece of legislation to help support manufacturers with in the state of West Virginia what would it be? and Why?

In 2023, I want to see the machinery and equipment tax gone. It's a unique barrier to growing manufacturing jobs in our state.

Longer term, I'm very invested in developing domestic supply chains in West Virginia so I want to do a serious, pro-growth permitting bill for rare earth and critical minerals.

Q19

Would you be available for an interview remotely or in person?

Anytime, you know where to find me.

Q20

Where may the WVMA follow you on social media? Please list social media handles including Facebook, Twitter, and others.

Delegate Riley Keaton on Facebook.
@RileyKeatonWV on Twitter.
