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United Way IL Candidate Survey: 71st District Rep. Tony McCombie (R-Savanna)

United Way recently asked legislative candidates in Iowa and Illinois to complete a candidate survey so that we could share their stands on issues related to our priorities: education, income, health and equity.

While United Way does not participate in partisan or political activity, we are pleased to offer this information so that voters can assess each candidate's alignment with issues important to United Way as they prepare to cast their ballots.

All answers below are posted in their entirety, as submitted by the candidate. To see the full list of responses to candidate surveys ahead of the 2020 General Election, visit www.unitedwayqc.org/candidate-surveys.

1. What specific actions can the State of Illinois take to address the disparities in school achievement and graduation rates between African American students and their white peers?

This starts at determining where the disparities begin for all demographics and communities across the state. Periodic education disparity studies should be conducted by State (ISBE) and be data driven, both quantitative and qualitative data, to determine where the inequalities within school buildings and districts are. Appropriate support services and other resources should be directed where the disparity data indicates that is needed. This may start early in a child's education. If we continue our investment in the earliest stages of development and education, we identify and reduce differences and ensure that there is equal opportunity, equity and access for all.

2. Would you support changes to the school-aid formula to provide additional support to districts with high rates of poverty, minority populations and English language learners to help stem the decline in academic success among these populations?

Yes! We need to first and foremost keep the promise of additional annual funding of \$300 million dollars. The Evidence Based Funding Formula that was crafted and passed in 2017, historically changes how school districts are funded. The goal is to give more funding to those with the most need, but there is still much more work that needs to be done. This model seeks to bridge the gap between equity and adequacy, and allow more resources to be sent to the

most under-resourced schools in Illinois, which is needed, but the funding needs to be fair. I support the model, however I could not support the bill as it was amended in the last hours to prioritize one part of the state over another. Picking winners and losers... giving less to District 71 and 72 by roughly \$10 million. While it was a comprehensive change to how the State of Illinois funds education, adjustments need to be made, especially as the legislature passes unfunded mandates, overall costs increase, our state evolves and districts change.

3. What role could the State of Illinois play in ensuring all K-12 students have access to broadband and technology to enable virtual learning?

Ensuring broadband and technology availability to schools statewide would require more state funding. Right now, with remote learning, we have learned that this is more relevant than ever. If we are going to increase funding, we need to be realistic about where that cost fits into our state budget. With the pandemic, one of the side effects of having a routinely out of balance state budget and mounting debt problem is that our state is ill-equipped to financially face emergencies like this one. We would need to take a closer look at what areas we could cut unnecessary spending to adjust for this cost. Connect Illinois, a state grant program, aims to bring broadband access to all Illinois communities by 2024. Governor Pritzker has made a priority to use \$50 million of state grant money as well as privately matched dollars to help achieve this goal.

4. A network of quality, affordable childcare services – including wrap-around care for school-age children – is critical to parents remaining in the workforce and businesses retaining staff. Do you support additional state investment in childcare services and, if so, what ideas do you have for strengthening the childcare system in Illinois during the COVID crisis and post COVID?

We must remember that access to affordable childcare was an issue pre COVID. We had unclear direction from the Pritzker Administration in what was and wasn't allowed for childcare providers. It has been and continues to be difficult for families and businesses to navigate their needs with the level of access. The State of Illinois has provided Business Interruption Grants to childcare providers and childcare centers. Grants can be cumbersome and hard to obtain in some cases. I would support additional investment, however I would also support a waiver process allowing for expansion of home daycares and fees to help with the gap that state restrictions have mandated due to COVID. It has been extremely difficult for facilities to open, stay open and serve families so providing support is something that must continue. I support more investment in affordable childcare services and strengthening this system post COVID-19.

5. Rock Island County has a high rate of poverty which dramatically impacts the health and stability of families and the community. What could the State of Illinois do to provide more opportunities for residents to achieve economic independence and meet basic needs?

We must focus on growing the tax base in Illinois instead of continuing to look to for ways to raise our tax rates. When citizens are able to earn and keep more of their money they stimulate our economy by spending. If we are going to help bring stability and growth to the state there has to be serious structural and political reform in Springfield. Stability and growth will grow not only our tax base, our business sector, but fund services to help our most vulnerable populations.

6. Describe what you'd like to see the State of Illinois do – perhaps in partnership with city and county governments – to address systemic racism.

Racism in any institution should not be tolerated in any form. Prejudices combined with economic policies that were passed decades ago have limited equal opportunities in Illinois. We must have conversations about these issues, work to better understand their root causes, and develop policy to better serve the families of Illinois. I have been having conversations with constituents, business owners, and elected officials to understand what proactive changes we can make in the 71st District. These conversations must continue at the local level and I look forward to working with state, county, and city governments to help facilitate that change.

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About United Way of the Quad Cities

United Way is a community-based social change organization that puts opportunity in the hands of all Quad Citizens. Working with our determined partners, volunteers, advocates and donors, we lead the charge to improve education, income and health – the building blocks of opportunity. The result is a mobilized community where every Quad Citizen is living their best possible life. unitedwayqc.org