

Seven Questions Answered by John Adams

In a summer edition of Style Weekly, Claire Guthrie Gastanaga, executive director of the Virginia ACLU, [proposed seven questions](#) that Virginia voters should consider when deciding which attorney general candidate they would support. When I saw these questions I felt compelled to answer, as she is correct that these are important questions that voters in Richmond and across Virginia should have answered. Below are my thoughts on each question posed.

1. How would the candidates represent your interests as consumer counsel?

Consumer protection is one of the most critical functions of the Attorney General. When I am Attorney General, Virginia will be a very inhospitable place for businesses or individuals that use deceptive or unfair practices to prey on our citizens. As a federal prosecutor, I prosecuted fraudsters who lied to people to steal their money and I look forward to ensuring that Virginia is a safe place to conduct business. My experience also teaches me that many of our most vulnerable citizens – the elderly, new immigrants, and the less fortunate – are often the most at risk and deserve vigilant protection. And as a veteran, and the son and brother of veterans, I will stand a vigilant watch to protect our service members from those who would take advantage of our soldiers, sailors, airmen, and Marines who are often deployed and moving from station to station. Finally, Virginians deserve committed and objective legal representation as energy consumers. Virginia must have reliable, clean, and affordable energy. They will have no stronger advocate than me as Attorney General.

2. How do the attorney general candidates see their role in ending discrimination in Virginia?

I believe in merit. Whether it was from my time right after VMI as a Naval Officer all the way through my most recent experience as a partner at a law firm, I have built and lead teams of diverse individuals to work together to achieve results. As Attorney General, the only criterion I will use in hiring for the office is who is best suited to represent the Commonwealth of Virginia. And as Virginia's lawyer, I will apply the laws of Virginia firmly, but fairly and equitably, across the board. The power of the state must never be allowed to discriminate.

3. What are the candidates' positions on criminal-justice reform?

I am passionate about criminal justice reform, and it is an issue I have focused on my entire campaign. To be sure, there are those among us who would do us harm. And those individuals should be prosecuted to the fullest extent of the law. There are also individuals who make non-violent mistakes, particularly at a young age, where the decision to saddle them with a felony or otherwise place them in the criminal justice system may not be the best choice for a host of reasons. In addition, we need to strengthen reentry programs, so that those who have served time stand a chance to rejoin society in a meaningful way. Things such as the handling of driving privileges and the restoration of civil rights need to be handled in a way that balances public safety and our desire to have people return to full citizenship and move ahead in a productive way. My views on criminal justice reform are informed by many things, including economic, moral, and public safety concerns.

4. How would the candidates exercise their ethical responsibility to do justice regarding prosecutorial misconduct and biases in the criminal justice system?

This is an area that requires calmness, rational discussion, and civility – something sorely lacking in today’s political debate (remember, I have never run for office before). My view, based on my experience, is that the overwhelming majority of our law enforcement officers are truly exceptional public servants who put their lives on the line for strangers every day in incredibly stressful situations. They are to be honored. Of course, there are situations where good people make bad decisions, and rarer situations where bad people are given the public trust and do bad things. In those situations, dispassionate and firm application of the law to the true set of the facts is the answer – holding people accountable for their actions. At the end of the day, communication and presence are always key. Our police officers should be present in minority communities, developing long-term trust and relationships. It is a two-way street, and we need to get about making more progress in this area sooner rather than later. Blaming the other side does not move us forward.

5. Will the candidates be activists or strict constructionists when interpreting the law?

I will not be an activist. Indeed, as a person who has never run for office before, I am running for attorney general to get the politics out of the office. Our current attorney general, Mark Herring, is an activist attorney general who only defends positions he agrees with, and has even turned on his client, the Commonwealth of Virginia, over the last four years. That’s not what a lawyer does. It’s a lawyer’s duty to represent their client – in this case, the Commonwealth of Virginia. Additionally, I will provide counsel to the General Assembly to help them pass laws that are Constitutional in the first place. My advice to members of the General Assembly, and other Virginia officials, will be the same whether they are Republicans or Democrats – it will be accurate, objective, and timely. If you want fair and objective application of Virginia’s laws, I am your candidate.

6. Would the candidates be good stewards of your tax dollars?

As uncovered and reported by the Associated Press, Herring has utilized funds from an asset forfeiture case to give certain staff in his office back door pay raises. This is inappropriate. Funds seized in asset forfeiture proceedings are not supposed to be used for that purpose. In addition, by refusing to defend certain Virginia laws, he required the state to hire outside counsel to defend a law he politically didn’t agree with – costing tax payers \$800,000. Your tax dollars have already paid for a law firm. I will ensure we don’t waste money on outside lawyers. I know how hard you work for your money. You deserve to not have it wasted by politicians.

7. Will a candidate’s management practices as attorney general reflect a commitment to full equality of opportunity at all levels?

As I said in an earlier question, I will hire the most talented and capable people to work in the attorney general’s office and those are the only standards I will apply. Conversely, according to Virginia Lawyer’s Weekly, last year Herring’s office was sued for violating the Equal Pay Act by a female assistant attorney general who was being paid less than others in her position. Herring's office kept her on through two big trials and then fired her right after. Herring settled the lawsuit for almost \$200,000. As I said before, I will hire the very best people to represent Virginia. And I will pay them fairly, regardless of whether they are men or women.