



U.S. Congressman Tim Walz

Invest in education, health care, research, innovation

A Minnesota Gubernatorial Candidate Interview

April 20, 2018

Present

John Adams, Steve Anderson, Janis Clay (executive director), Jack Davies, Pat Davies, Lars Esdal, Paul Gilje, John Hayden, Randy Johnson, Ted Kolderie, Paul Ostrow (chair), Clarence Shallbetter, Matthew Thomas, Tim Walz, T. Williams. By phone: Audrey Clay.

Summary

Whether to make investment in education a priority, whether to move toward universal health-care coverage and whether to support investments in research and innovation are three of the top public-policy choices facing Minnesota, according to Minnesota gubernatorial candidate and U.S. Congressman Tim Walz.

He says education must be seen as an important investment in the future and that we need to allocate more resources to early childhood education. He favors moving toward a single-payer, universal-coverage health-care system. And he says we must make investments in research and innovation to continue the state's legacy of producing Fortune 500 companies.

Walz believes the governor plays a crucial role in convening conversations, getting the right people to the table from all across the spectrum, building community and hope, and articulating a long-range vision. He also says the governor should try to bring people together to bridge the urban/rural divide in the state.

Walz says the gas tax needs to keep pace with inflation and that we should not pit urban against rural in transportation. He believes the single-subject clause of the Minnesota Constitution is an important issue and is baffled over why Minnesota does not have a State Planning Agency anymore. He says health care must be cost effective and that we must invest in preventive measures. He emphasizes that we must listen to business on the topic of regulation and practice "regulatory humility."

Biography

U.S. Congressman Tim Walz (D-Minn.) is currently serving his sixth term representing Minnesota's First Congressional District. The district spans the southern part of Minnesota, from the South Dakota border in the west to the Wisconsin border in the east.

Walz serves on two committees in the United States House of Representatives. He is the Ranking Member on the Veterans' Affairs Committee and serves on the Agriculture Committee. He also is one of nine House members to serve on the Congressional-Executive Commission on China. Walz has leadership posts with the National Guard and Reserve Caucus and the Congressional Veterans' Jobs Caucus.

Walz was born in West Point, Nebraska, and is the son of a public school administrator and community activist. Walz enlisted in the Army National Guard at the young age of 17 and retired 24 years later as Command Sergeant Major. Before retiring, Walz served overseas with his battalion in support of Operation Enduring Freedom. Walz is the highest-ranking enlisted soldier ever to serve in Congress.

In 1989, Walz earned a B.S. in social science education from Chadron State College in Nebraska. He spent 1989 to 1990 teaching high school in China as a part of the first government-sanctioned groups of American educators to teach there through a program at Harvard University. When he returned from China, Walz began teaching high school in Nebraska. He then moved to southern Minnesota, where both he and his wife, Gwen, began teaching and coaching at Mankato West High School.

Since coming to Congress in 2007, Walz has made improving the care of our nation's veterans a top priority. The Rochester *Post Bulletin* has described him as having "relentless energy" and touted his strong work ethic, stating "he brings a soldier's work ethic to the House." Walz has been recognized for his work in Congress with awards from AMVETS, the National Association of County Veterans Service Officers, the American Cancer Society, the National Association of Development Organizations, the National Farmers Union and the Matthew Shepard Foundation.

Background

Continuing its focus on Minnesota's competitiveness, since September 2015, the Civic Caucus has been undertaking a review of the quality of Minnesota's public-policy process for anticipating, defining and resolving major community problems. On November 27, 2016, the Caucus issued a report based on that review,  *Looking Back, Thinking Ahead: Strengthening Minnesota's Public-Policy Process*.

In October 2017, the Civic Caucus began a series of interviews with major, announced candidates for the office of governor of Minnesota. The interviews are centered on what can be done to keep Minnesota and its people competitive in a number of realms. This interview with U.S. Congressman Tim Walz is the ninth in that series.

Discussion

Opening Remarks.

Gubernatorial candidate and Congressman Tim Walz sees Minnesota as the state that works.
Walz said the governor plays a crucial role in convening the conversation, getting the right people to

the table from all across the spectrum, building community and hope, and articulating a long-range vision.

Public-Policy Choices.

What are the top two or three public-policy choices facing Minnesota? An interviewer asked that question and Walz began with education. He said Minnesota can continue to choose to lead or choose to go down a road other states have taken and fail to make education a priority. Education must be seen as an important investment in the future, he said.

Walz included health care in his answer, saying he believes that every Minnesotan-regardless of income, location or employment status-deserves comprehensive, high-quality, affordable health care. "We need to move toward a single-payer system and be aspirational in our outlook," he said. "Minnesota is better positioned than other states in this aspect, with its health-care and research institutions. But we need to do something for Minnesotans currently without insurance. I support Governor Dayton's Minnesota Care buy-in plan as a first step in the direction of universal coverage."

Walz continued by noting that Minnesota has a legacy of producing Fortune 500 companies. He said he recognizes the important philanthropic role they have played in our communities. It has been many years, however, since Minnesota has produced such a company, he said. "Are we going to choose to support investments in research, education and innovation necessary to continue this legacy?" he asked. "This will drive how we talk about infrastructure and public/private partnerships. Are we going to choose to be status quo or choose to be exceptional?"

Education.

What about providing support and incentives for not just a college path, but also alternatives, such as vocational-technical education and the Postsecondary Enrollment Options (PSEO) program? An interviewer asked that question and Walz responded that parents, along with educators, need to understand that a whole range of jobs and professions offer good wages, good work and the opportunity to avoid high college debt. Students have different talents and intelligence. Parents and teachers need to see and appreciate all the options and to understand each child, he said.

Walz stated that it is possible to predict high school graduation rates by third grade. Now, he said, it has become possible to predict incarceration rates from kindergarten vocabulary. He stressed the importance of wrap-around services, and noted that parents are most important to a child's education. He said the governor has an important role in changing the culture and communicating the message that education is an investment. As a teacher himself, Walz believes he is well situated to do this.

Walz said when he was teaching, he would see as much as a 16-year reading-skills spread. As a teacher, he said, he could not close that gap alone. "We need to be better at looking ahead," he said. "More resources are needed on the front end, through early childhood education, which has been shown to be very effective."

What actionable steps would you advance as governor to increase educator voice and to empower teachers as professionals? An interviewer asked that question and Walz replied that

having a teacher in the governor's office would be a good step. He said we must figure out how to get and retain the best teachers. He said that's challenging, with student-loan debt, the amount teachers are paid, the unfortunate tendency to demonize teachers and the stresses teachers face due to the challenges students bring with them.

"Teachers need to have a voice, a seat at the table to be empowered," Walz said. "We need to make teachers feel respected as the professionals they are and listen to their ideas on best practices." Walz said he felt empowered when he taught in a blue-ribbon school at Mankato West.

We need to have an honest conversation about the issue of unfunded pensions. That was Walz's response to an interviewer's question about teacher pensions. Walz believes pensions are an important tool to attract and maintain quality people. "A pension is a promise, and we must keep those promises," he said.

The achievement gap is a problem and must be seen holistically. Walz said if a child comes to school hungry, the child is not going to learn. Schools are working in a positive way, Walz said. "It starts with respect and understanding, and it's something the governor needs to talk about," he said. It is increasingly clear that early education is a key.

Transportation.

For too long, we have been thinking we can have it all in transportation without paying for it.

Walz said the gas tax needs to keep pace with inflation and that we should have been bonding when rates were historically low. "Projects need to be completed more quickly," he said. "The public will invest in what they can see. It is the governor's job to build the public will."

An interviewer noted that there is no discussion of the upcoming wave of autonomous vehicles and observed that costs for transportation of the elderly and handicapped are spiraling out of control. Walz said transportation must be seen as a multi-modal system. Pitting urban against rural is not helpful. "Many dollars do flow out of the metro area to Greater Minnesota," he said. "It is also true that even though a road or bridge may serve a small number of rural families, their farms feed many people."

Minnesota's Public-Policy Process.

The single-subject clause in the Minnesota Constitution is an important issue. Walz gave that response to an interviewer's observation that the single-subject clause, which requires that legislative bills include only a single subject, used to have meaning, with the Legislature taking care to craft bills relating to a single subject. The interviewer said the governor has a role in enforcing good practices.

Walz discussed his efforts on this front in Congress. He said the "poster child" at the national level is the farm bill, which combines producers of agricultural products with end users.

Another interviewer asked whether Walz thinks the Minnesota Legislature should be subject to open-data practices and whether Walz would release his tax returns. Walz said he would and that he believes strongly in transparency.

State Planning Agency.

Walz is baffled over why Minnesota does not have a State Planning Agency . "Looking ahead is very important," Walz said in response to an interviewer's question about whether Minnesota should again have a State Planning Agency. The agency was formed in 1965 and abolished in 2003.

The Urban/Rural Divide.

Many in the "rust belt" areas feel that the system has let them down. An interviewer made that observation and Walz responded that his family and the small town in Nebraska where he grew up share much with J. D. Vance's recent book, *Hillbilly Elegy: A Memoir of a Family and Culture in Crisis*. Walz said his district is one of the few that voted both for President Trump and for a Democratic congressional candidate in 2016. "Planning and looking to the future are critical," he said. "People are trying to protect their values."

Walz remarked that, as a Democrat from a rural area of Minnesota, he is one of a few left in America. It is critical to start with respect and a focus on our common goals, he said of dealing with the urban /rural divide. "It will be important for the governor to try to bring people together," he said.

Health Care.

What can we do in Minnesota to achieve truly good health care in a cost-effective manner? An interviewer asked that question and Walz responded that the issue is so much more than just insurance reform. He said health care is a basic human right but also has to be cost effective. It is critical to focus on the "front end," by investing in preventive measures. "There are few places with the potential Minnesota has to be a major player in this area," he said.

Minnesota's Business Climate.

It's very important to listen to those in business. Walz gave that response when an interviewer asked what can be done to improve Minnesota's climate for business. Walz emphasized that we need to make sure Minnesota's workforce has the necessary skill sets and that we must listen to business on the topic of regulation. He said we must practice "regulatory humility." He warned that Democrats need to take care not to demonize business. He said he respects those in business.