

## CANDIDATE QUESTIONNAIRE

Candidate Name: Carrie Koelker

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Position Seeking: Iowa Senate-District 33

Candidate signature: Carrie R. Koelker Date: September 19, 2022

**Please limit your response to 50 words per question**

1. Do you have any previous legislative experience? If so, please explain.

Yes  No

**Explain:**

- I have served in the Iowa Senate since January 2019. It was an honor to complete my first term and I am running for a second, four year term.
- Prior to being elected my legislative experience consisted of working with the elected officials from the industry side. I visited, hosted, and attended many legislative events and Capitol visits serving as an advocate for economic development, tourism, and pro-growth Iowa agendas and policies. I enjoyed my time garnering and establishing relationships with bi-partiship officials from city, county, state, and federal delegates.

2. Do you/have you ever owned a business? If yes, please explain.

Yes No

**Explain:**

- I personally have never owned and operated a business as my sole income.
  - In 1995, Barry, started a company on the side for feed and forage testing. We both worked full time and he started it on the side as a hobby/business opportunity. The overhead was too high to invest time and talent and leave our occupations to pursue it full time.
  - I learned through that process the value of having a back up income and the expense and overhead of business dealings. With raising and growing our family we knew it wasn't a viable option to endure at the time.

3. If elected, what would be your top three legislative priorities & why?

- 1) My first and foremost priority is to fight inflation. It's real concern and real fear for every single person I visit with. How do we go about that-is to control spending, keep a balanced budget, and look at implementing solid tax bills and policy.
- 2) Growing Iowa. Pro-growth agenda. Iowa's population is stagnant. It all boils down to Quality of Life issues and making our state and its programming appealing. Our historic tax bill last year was a great start.

- 3) Continue to increase marketing Iowa as a great place to live, work, travel, raise a family, and retire. Iowa is leading.

4. What is your position on the use of Tax Increment Financing?

Support  Oppose

**Explain:**

TIF is a tool to maintain and most of all an alluring tool to help our municipalities promote economic development. Being in economic development since 1994, I have seen first hand the benefits of this in the development of the Dubuque area—as well as statewide communities that prospered and grew from this. Many states offer this program, although there are many versions utilized.

**For the following questions, please keep your answers to 200 words or less.**

5. Workforce is the number one issue facing the business community. Whether that's retaining current talent, attracting new talent to the area, or developing the pipeline businesses are struggling in Iowa. How do you plan to invest in talent attraction, development, and retention in your role if (re)elected?
- Every industry is facing a workforce crisis and shortage. It isn't just Iowa suffering, it is unfortunately a national issue. It is going to take many steps and not just one solution. It is going to take partnerships, collaborations and discussions of many united fronts.
  - Throwing money at something doesn't fix a problem. I think we took a good first step by implementing our tax plan and making Iowa an appealing place. The cost of living in Iowa is about 8.5% less expensive than the national average. Pro-growth policies will assist with this.
  - We have implemented many tools to assist with this. Examples include expanding rural broadband, workforce housing tax credits to address housing shortages, child care center funding streams, workers compensation reform that limits abuse through fraudulent claims, workers comp insurance.
  - I look at continuing to support Future Ready Iowa. This encourages education of all sizes in trades and community colleges, Apprenticeships, volunteer mentors, and the employer innovation fund. All great tools to evaluate and expand upon after success is measured.

6. Higher education, whether a four year degree, two year degree, or a certificate program can help professionals meet the needs of employers and attain higher wages. Developing talent and connecting that talent to local jobs is critical – but we must provide high quality educational opportunities for that pipeline to exist and grow. How will you support higher education, including the private colleges, in Dubuque County?
- Education comes in all sizes. I am a huge supporter of trades and community colleges. As I mentioned in the above question, Future Ready Iowa is a program we are seeing much success with. Higher education is a solid path for many but not the only option. I feel strongly we need to get younger kids encouraged and involved at a younger age so they can explore many options and opportunities.
  - The endowments and CARES Act funds our colleges have is at a level high. We have been reviewing those in the past year. We need to make sure colleges are not pricing themselves out and students are solidly educated on their tuition and student loan processes as well.
  - Our system of private and public colleges showcase a pattern of being successful. Without the array of opportunity we have in our area—we showcase a strong pattern of uniting, options, and working together. A collaboration of our area students –college and high school surely has room for growth, potential, and expansion.
7. Transportation, Childcare, and Housing are significant barriers to employment. How in your role would you seek to address issues in access to childcare, attainable housing, and effective/efficient transportation?
- Unfortunately, I agree we are seeing significant barriers that a simple light switch approach won't cure.
  - This is an area I focused on as the Economic Development Budget Chair as well as the Vice Chair of Commerce.. This also unfortunately isn't just a problem we are seeing in our state, it's a national situation. It can't be a role just the state can cure, to fund, or fix to address the issues. Local governments and businesses will have to be part of the solution and discussions. We have seen many opportunities arise from the local awards we saw in the county for the three funded childcare centers in Dubuque County. Affordable and available housing is a growing trend, especially now with the inflation increases we are seeing in the supply chain.
  - These solutions are going to take partnerships and innovative ideas and programs to try to get ahead of the curve.

**8.** Air service is crucial to maintaining the Dubuque regions access to the global marketplace. Air service assists in attraction and retention of businesses and employees to our area. How do you see the State playing a role in restoring and protecting air service in Dubuque?

- This really is a federal issue—we now more than ever need to unite and orchestrate a shared message with our federal delegation. I communicate with the area airports and understand the situation they are in. Fortunately, we were able to fund the airports significantly with recent CARES act money but that isn't an ongoing funding stream to rely on. It is my understanding that it is pricing, policy, and passenger counts that went into this decision. The workforce situation most definitely isn't helping the flight patterns and schedules either. The state doesn't have a policy to mandate an airline to stay and service specific airports in our state.
- A bill that we did pass this past year that will significantly assist Iowa airports especially Dubuque is the taxing on repair and service fees. Planes were being flown to other states to be serviced due to our taxing system that was passed and implemented this past year with lots of pressure.
- Air service is critical to our commerce and businesses—especially serving the tri-state area. I first and foremost understand the impact of this, serving in the travel and tourism industry.

**9.** Tax increment financing is one of the most important, and valuable tools for local governments to partner with private business to create economic growth and development. What is your philosophy on TIF and will you actively work to protect TIF in its current form?

- This is a great tool in the economic development tool box. As good stewards of taxpayer dollars every program will be evaluated. It is important to share your success stories statewide. We need to continue to focus on items such as this that make Iowa's redeveloped or needed diminishing areas to be considered into this program.
- Also, as in many programs there are good actors and bad actors. Unfortunately these programs are used and are success stories, and few small handful that are not. We need to stay focused on the positives of this program and always use it as it is meant to be used, not abused.

**10.** Incentives are a key piece of the puzzle when it comes to attracting new business investment into the state. What can we do to protect current incentives and is there anything you would like to change or see expanded beyond what currently exists?

- My rule of thumb has always been to visit and listen to the experienced who are out working with businesses looking at Iowa. The Iowa Department of Economic Development usually has a pretty tight gauge on the needs—and programming – or honestly the ones that we need to strengthen or rid of.
- Tax credits and incentives are key in luring and landing businesses but at the end of the day it has to be solid as it is on the backs of the Iowa taxpayer.

**11.** The state of Iowa recently passed changes to Iowa’s tax law, lowering the individual and pass-through rate to 3.9% by 2026 and the corporate tax rate to 5.5% over an undefined period of time. What is your opinion of the tax reform package and will you fight to protect it?

- Absolutely, I will fight for it—and better yet strengthen it. It was an honor to be a part of this bold legislation and offer input within the development of it. I assure you we will continue to improve our tax reform in the coming year. This was a big win all the way around, and I can’t believe that we had legislators that voted against it. It is a sound move for Iowa.

**12.** What is your approach to regulation? The Chamber advocates for the government to approach business with a light-touch, focused on regulating bad actors while holding others harmless.

- Regulation is always discussed. I am a believer in local control. There are times where the state has been forced to step in and take care of situations because they aren’t controlled locally. Unfortunately bad actors do exist.
- An example is the mental health/property tax levy removal. We passed the policy to assist the Iowa taxpayer. 48 of the 99 counties withheld the savings from their citizens and it turned into a shell game. Taxes are an example –difficult taxes when they involve local and county governments. Endless concerns are on the rise—and they are growing at an outrageous rate, and frankly many Iowans can’t keep up. The property tax evaluations are going through the roof—values are driving up—causing fear and real concern among Iowans reaching out to the elected officials.

**13.** What would you like to see the Chamber working on over the coming years?

- The Chamber hears first hand from their businesses—their hurdles and successes. I ask that you continue to communicate in a unified fashion. Dubuque is growing—Dubuque County is a success story being shared all over the state. You are a model example of partnership—great people working together. We may not always agree on every language and the specifics of a bill but we are professional enough to have those honest conversations and have the respect to hear the other side of the issue.
  
- Keep up the great work and being ambassadors to your business community,