

Candidate Questionnaire

Michael Bennet

Colorado Primary for US Senate 2010

- 1) Describe your service to the constituents of Colorado to date. Detail how you achieved offices held and your notable accomplishments; particularly your leadership in areas of health care, education, environment, election reform, and civil rights.

I measure my success as a Senator by how my work is making a meaningful, positive difference in the lives of Coloradans across the state, and me and my staff have worked to do that. Since taking office, we have opened over 1,000 cases on behalf of Coloradans looking for help in their dealings with the federal government, and we've resolved over four-fifths of them. We've responded to over 150,000 letters from Coloradans in issues like health care, energy, the economy, agriculture, the environment and homeland security. And I've supported nearly 200 requests for federal grants from communities all across Colorado. Since being appointed to this Seat, I've worked hard to earn the trust and confidence of Coloradans. I've fought for comprehensive health insurance reform, and am deeply disappointed that the public option has been held hostage by the same old Washington politics that stands in the way of progress. As a former public school superintendent, I think I bring a unique set of experiences to the education debate, and I've used that experience to fight for important reforms, from fixing our student loan program and investing in Pell grants, to reforming No Child Left Behind. I've been a strong advocate for conservation, renewable energy, and other important initiatives, and am proud to have earned the endorsement of the League of Conservation Voters. I'm also proud to have cast my first ever vote in support of equal rights, helping pass the Lily Ledbetter Equal Pay for Equal Work Act, as well as the Mathew Shepard Hate Crimes Act. On issues across the board, I've worked hard to make a difference – to get our economy moving again, pass health insurance reform, reform Washington, and put the focus back on Main Street, not Wall Street.

- 2) Please describe your legislative agenda for providing affordable health care to all the citizens of Colorado. Specifically speak to your attitude toward single payer solutions.

I am a strong supporter of health insurance reform. I'm committed to passing a bill that expands and strengthens coverage, reduces costs, and doesn't add to the deficit. The bill we passed out of the senate, though it lacked a public option, did those things. It would have helped over 30 million more Americans get insurance, and ended denials due to preconditions, among a number of important provisions. When we started the process, the President and Congress made a commitment to letting those who like their current coverage keep it, while improving the health insurance system. Single payer would break that promise. Instead, I've been a strong supporter of the Public Option, and I'm deeply disappointed at the old style Washington political games that have held it hostage.

- 3) Please describe how you will address climate change in the US Senate. Include discussion of these measures with specific reference to and impact on ongoing energy policy.

I support climate change legislation, and am working hard for a final bill that recognizes Colorado's worldwide leadership in the New Energy Economy. Colorado's abundant resources like wind and solar, and the leadership it has provided on how to best maximize these resources, are a top priority for me in any climate change legislation

- 4) What have you done to protect and balance the interests of your constituents with the typically more prominent position and influence of lobbyists and corporate special interests?

I've always put Colorado first. I stood up to credit card companies and cast the deciding vote to pass the Credit Card Holders' Bill of Rights, leveling the playing field for Colorado consumers. The bill reigns in credit card company abuses and forces them to treat customers fairly. After the bill passed, credit card companies engaged in a last-ditch effort to jack-up rates before the law went into effect, so I fought to freeze rates until the bill could be implemented. And I fought for reasonable caps on soaring credit card rates, voting to combat excessive interest rates by capping them at 15%.

- 5) Please describe your attitude on corporate personhood and how you propose to address practically and legislatively.

I'm as appalled about the Citizens United decision as anyone. It overturns decades of precedent controlling corporate money in political campaigns, and poses a serious threat to our democracy, allowing corporations to flood our political system with unlimited contributions and drown out any citizen's voice. The important thing isn't to argue about what counts as a person, but to deal with the impacts of this decision immediately. That's why I'm working with Russ Feingold and others in Congress to find solutions and help fix this mess. We are taking a look at various measures, including dramatically increasing the laws around disclosure, and requiring a shareholder vote to approve political activities, including electoral spending and lobbying.

- 6) How have you and will you continue to seek the regular, active input and feedback of your constituents?

I've travelled all across the state, visiting every county, meeting with tens of thousands of Coloradans, listening to them, and taking their stories and their ideas to Washington to fight for better results. In addition, I hold a regular event, called "Conversations with Coloradans" where I talk to constituents about the problems they face.

- 7) Discuss your ideas for accelerating the economic recovery, specifically with generating long term, permanent gains in employment for Coloradans; and what measures you advocate for guarding against this sort of economic crisis in the future.

I've supported President Obama's efforts to get our economy back on track, working hard to jumpstart job creation and lay a new foundation for a stronger, more secure American economy for generations to come. I supported the American Recovery and Reinvestment Act, which has saved thousands of Colorado jobs, while funding critical reinvestments in local infrastructure, education, health care, transportation, clean energy and more. And I stood up for small businesses, fighting to improve access to credit to help small businesses make payroll or expand. And he voted to give small businesses immediate tax relief, cutting taxes to help them invest, grow and create new jobs. I believe we need to ensure that our economic recovery is built on a solid foundation, and helps middle class working families.

I've consistently said we need to create a new set of rules for the road on Wall Street and ensure we're never again put in the position of bailing out banks that are "too big to fail." We're working on the question of systemic risk, so that we don't ever find ourselves in the ridiculous position of determining what banks or bank holding companies are too big to fail – which, if you think about it, is a ridiculous concept on its face and should never have been allowed to happen in the first place. When it comes to regulatory reform, our primary goal is to fix an outdated system that helped contribute to the current crisis. People on Wall Street were doing things that don't even come close to sound lending or investment practices. What they did was ridiculous, it was irresponsible, and the consequences of that was the bailout. We're working to streamline the system, eliminate gaps in regulation, and create a new set of rules for the road that make it so financial firms aren't betting ridiculous amounts money on unregulated instruments like Credit Default Swaps. And we're strengthening consumer protections, and putting the proper safeguards in place to ensure every day Americans who behaved responsibly but still found themselves in jeopardy because of the predatory practices of some in the financial industry. Payday lending, predatory mortgage practices -- those kinds of things need to end.

- 8) Discuss your assessment of the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan and the long term outlook and US presence/responsibility in each.

I opposed the war in Iraq because I believed it was the wrong war at the wrong time, and because it was diverting resources from our efforts in Afghanistan. We are still dealing with the consequences of that decision.

Stability in both countries and our fight against terrorism has been compromised by our failure to ask the hard questions and to hold the last Administration accountable for its lack of focus and planning. We cannot afford to make that mistake again. We must proceed with a new, narrowly defined strategy that can withstand the tough questions and skeptical analysis.

Going forward, our purpose and mission in Afghanistan must be absolutely clear. We need a strategy that stops terrorists from using Afghanistan and Pakistan as a base for their activities. We need to ensure that Pakistan's nuclear weapons don't fall into the hands of terrorists. And we need to bring our troops home to their families as quickly as possible. I support the President's plan, but any time that we commit troops to combat it must be as a last resort. We must continue to closely monitor our efforts, and carefully consider our goals and our mission to ensure that the strategy we embrace is well-defined and can be successful. Things can change quickly and we need to ensure that we're aware of and responsive to those developments.

- 9) Discuss your assessments of Iran, Israel and a Palestinian State in the stability and security of the US and the Middle East.

Security is essential to lasting peace. Israel's goal is peace with its neighbors, but Hamas must stop all violence, including rocket and mortar fire, and cease the smuggling of weapons. I believe that in order to keep faith with a responsible Palestinian leadership to quell violence, Israel should take steps to improve conditions for Palestinians in the West Bank and Gaza, including the easing of check points and border crossings.

As the violence subsides, the United States has a critical role to play in pursuing a two-state solution to the conflict, and advancing peace throughout the region by means of energetic diplomacy. The Bush Administration was largely absent from efforts to forge peace in the region, and its failure to engage was a serious detriment to the progress of the process. I believe that the United States must be part of the solution from the beginning and I support President Obama's efforts to immediately engage in the Middle-East peace process.

Iran would pose an unacceptable threat if it acquired nuclear weapons. A nuclear Iran could profoundly destabilize the region and present a danger to many U.S. allies, including Egypt and Jordan. It would pose a particular danger to Israel, given President Ahmadinejad's vicious anti-Semitic threats against that nation. I support the use of economic sanctions against Iran and have cosponsored legislation that would allow President Obama to implement new economic sanctions against those foreign companies that export refined petroleum products to Iran. We must also aggressively use the tool of diplomacy to build international coalitions, including with moderate Muslim states, to make clear to Iran the consequences of rogue behavior and to draw it into the community of nations. And, we must retain the use of military force as an option.

- 10) Please identify what will be your 5 highest legislative priorities and why they should be at the top of your list.

Turning our economy around and making sure that working families have job opportunities and the support they need is our first priority. We need to get our economy back on track. I believe an important part of that is passing comprehensive health insurance reform. Costs are out of control, choking our economy, and too many Americans lack access to the essential care they need. We also need to make sure this never happens again, which is why I've been a strong

supporter of financial regulatory reform. But we've also got to look to the future, which is why I'm committed to reforming education to ensure a strong future for our children. Finally, I believe we need to tackle the challenge of climate change, protect Colorado's natural heritage, and ensure our new energy future with a comprehensive energy policy that establishes aggressive targets for clean energy and energy efficiency.

11) Explain why you are running and uniquely suited for this US Senate seat.

I've shown, I believe, throughout a career in both the public and private sectors, an ability to tackle difficult issues honestly and effectively, to bring opposing groups together to consensus and to push past politics and division to sensible outcomes that save jobs, make government work better, and improve education for our kids. I am running for Senate to use that experience to tackle the big issues we face – getting our economy moving again, passing health insurance reform, shaking up Washington, and putting the focus back on Main Street, not Wall Street. I'd be honored to serve as your next Senator.

12) Discuss your abilities to work with individuals who disagree with you and how you resolve those differences to achieve your goals.

I'm hoping to a fresh approach to Washington. I know leadership is about listening, solving problems, and getting results. And I have a record of doing that. That's how I got things done at City Hall, working with Mayor Hickenlooper to solve the city's budget crisis, and leading successful negotiations at Denver International Airport by listening to all the different parties and bringing them together to reach an effective result. I did the same thing as superintendent, going out into the schools and getting to know students and teachers and community members to figure out what we needed to do to move forward, and how we could reach agreement. Partisan politics and cynical Washington games have pretty much brought the Senate to a standstill and all but ended bi-partisanship, but I've co-sponsored legislation with Republicans that would help veterans transition into another career serving their country as teachers in schools in need, and I'm confident that despite the partisan gridlock we'll be able to pass this bill this year.