

ALASKA: SENATE CANDIDATES' VOTER GUIDE RESPONSES AND BIOS

1. Al Gross, Non-partisan, running in the Democratic Primary

Website: DRALGROSSAK.CCOM

Biographical Information: born and raised in Alaska; father Avrum Gross was Attorney General under Governor Hammond; Al is an orthopedic surgeon; his wife Monica is a pediatrician; Al has commercial fished; panned for gold; founded the Juneau Bone and Joint Center, served as President of the Bartlett Regional Hospital medical staff.

Responses to Voter's Guide Questions:

1. The Equal Rights Amendment (ERA) to the Constitution was passed by Congress in 1972 with an arbitrary deadline for ratification that other amendments have not had to meet. The ERA Amendment has finally been ratified by the required number of states and now Congress must vote to remove the deadline added to the 1972 Congressional approval. S. J. Res 6 will do that to allow the ERA to become part of the Constitution. Please discuss whether or not you support this bill and explain why.

I would support this for two reasons: first, I agree that the deadline is unprecedented and arbitrary, and second, and I can't believe this has to be said in the 21st century, but women deserve to have equal rights codified into our constitution. This is an inalienable right that must be recognized.

2. Many citizens see the country as very divided along partisan lines. In contrast, bipartisan effort in the creation of strong public policy is essential in our democracy. Please explain the opportunities you see for Democrats and Republicans to find common ground on the very serious issues facing our country.

I grew up seeing firsthand what bipartisanship looked like and what it could get done. My dad was a liberal Democrat, and was appointed Attorney General by a Republican governor. Listening to them discuss their vision for Alaska was a formative experience for me. I think relationships are the foundation of bipartisan cooperation, and as an independent who will be caucusing with the Democrats, coming from a conservative leaning state with a senior Senator who is a moderate Republican, I will be well-positioned to help find opportunities to advance bipartisan solutions.

3. The Voting Rights Advancement Act (VRAA S.561) is a bill that supports the right of every eligible citizen to have access to the voting process. Since 2013 when the Supreme Court of the United States (SCOTUS) removed the pre-clearance process of the 1965 Voting Rights Act in Shelby vs Holder, the incidents of voter suppression have increased. The VRAA would modernize the pre-clearance process. Please discuss whether or not you support this bill and explain why.

Without free and fair elections, we do not have a Democracy. Core to that is removing all barriers and obstacles to casting a legal ballot. I would absolutely support the VRAA.

4. Many citizens are concerned about the growing role of money in U. S. elections. In addition, transparency in the identification of donors has been lacking. What policies would you support to reduce the role of money in American elections and provide better transparency about donors?

I am proud to have committed not to accept corporate PAC money, as well as earning the endorsement of End Citizens United. We need comprehensive campaign finance reform, in particular

donor disclosure requirements for the many “dark money” outfits that allow millions of dollars to be funneled anonymously into our election system. I also strongly support a constitutional amendment overruling the Citizens United case and restoring Congress to its proper role overseeing how money is spent in elections.

5. The SCOTUS recently ruled that the Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals (DACA) policy protecting residents brought here as children may remain in place for now. What, if any, steps would you take to reform current immigration policies?

We need to begin by immediately passing legislation that provides relief for all DACA recipients. Many of these people have no connection to their countries of origin and are American in all ways but their paperwork. At the same time, we need to streamline our immigration system to make it less burdensome to come here legally, reform the system to ensure that we're attracting the kind of workers our economy needs, and find a path to legal status for the millions of undocumented people who are currently living in the shadows.

**2. Christopher C. Cumings, Non-Partisan, running in the Democratic Primary
WEBSITE: CCC4SENATE.COM**

Biographical Information:

My name is Christopher Cumings. I am 35 years old, from Ketchikan, born and raised in Alaska. My dad was a cop and my mom was a nurse. Growing up, we moved frequently; I've lived up on the Slope, in the Interior, Anchorage, out in Bristol Bay, on Prince of Wales Island. My wife, Jamie, and I, have a 7-year-old son, Charlie.

I went to college at the University of Oklahoma, where I graduated with a B.A. in Political Science, *summa cum laude*. I also went to law school, but ended up dropping out 3 credits short of my J.D., as a combination of addiction, undiagnosed mental illness, and the Great Recession sent me on a complete breakdown.

Mental illness, addiction, and disability are not just important planks on my platform. They shape how I experience life, every day. In the last few years, I have finally been able to connect with the resources I've been screaming out for over the last 15 years. I was officially diagnosed with Schizoaffective Disorder (a combination of Schizophrenia and Bipolar Disorder). I got on psychiatric medications, which changed my life and unlocked a person I always knew was inside me, but who was imprisoned behind bars of fear and self loathing, and thoughts of suicide.

I've struggled with addiction all of my adult life... At the end of the day, I was just trying to do the best I could to medicate myself, with the resources I had available. The drugs worked -- but only for so long before my life began to fall apart. After my third trip to rehab, I was able to get on a Suboxone treatment program, and I've been sober ever since.

My son and I are both on the Autism Spectrum. Learning to get him the help I never received has been a bittersweet experience. The system is not set up to make it easy for families like us to get the help we need -- and that's a problem. On the flip side, going through the process has taught me how to advocate, very effectively.

My life today is simple. I work at a local nonprofit, where I provide services to individuals with disabilities, and elders. I live paycheck to paycheck. I have an embarrassingly large student loan. My truck is 16 years old, my clothes from the thrift store, my hair cut by my own hand.

I'm just some guy down the street. I'm smart and I've been around. I understand the problems we face - you face - because they're the same ones I'm dealing with. I'm open, genuine, unpretentious. I'm progressive. I'm different. I've got the kind of perspective that always goes unheard when decisions are being made. I'm here to speak up and make that change.

Responses to Voter's Guide Questions:

1. The Equal Rights Amendment (ERA) to the Constitution was passed by Congress in 1972 with an arbitrary deadline for ratification that other amendments have not had to meet. The ERA has finally been ratified by the required number of states and now Congress must vote to remove the deadline added to the 1972 Congressional approval. S. J. Res 6 will do that to allow the ERA to become part of the Constitution. Please discuss whether or not you support this bill and explain why.

I strongly support ratification of the ERA amendment. To me, it seems such a simple issue. The premise of our democracy is that we are all equal. Rejecting a simple statement of equality – like the ERA – is un-American. Further, passage would have little impact on the day to day lives of American women; through state and local legislation and judicial decisions, the equality of women and men is enshrined in our law. The problem in America is that we are not always good at “doing” equality. The biggest benefit of the ERA, to me, is that it is a powerful enforcement tool. The fundamental basis of civil society is that government is the referee between otherwise self-interested individuals.

2. Many citizens see the country as very divided along partisan lines. In contrast, bipartisan effort in the creation of strong public policy is essential in our democracy. Please explain the opportunities you see for Democrats and Republicans to find common ground on the very serious issues facing our country.

- a. To me, the Coronavirus Pandemic is an incredible opportunity to “reset” the level of division and partisanship that, with which Congress is currently infected. This is because, quite simply, that we will not turn around the trajectory of our outbreak until the parties collaborate on a response. America doesn’t need to wait around until the president decides/learns to lead with compassion and empathy, or be a leader at all. Congress, as a body, is a coequal branch of government, and – again, acting together – has the power to fill the leadership void we currently face.
- b. The movement for racial equality/police reform/social justice is another area for bipartisan collaboration. In fact, Congressional action is crucial to the movement’s success. Instead, each side, predictably, puts together their own packages, without the give and take the topic needs.
- c. Finally, the banning of earmarks is a direct cause of the partisanship problem in Congress. While earmarks can sometimes be the epitome of government bloat and waste, they provided bargaining chips that could form the basis of larger, bipartisan deals. Also, by negotiating in this manner, lawmakers were able to build not just relationships with one another, but genuine, across-the-aisle partnerships, too.

3. The Voting Rights Advancement Act (VRAA, S.561) is a bill that supports the right of every eligible citizen to have access to the voting process. Since 2013 when the Supreme Court of the United States (SCOTUS) removed the pre-clearance process of the 1965 Voting Rights Act in Shelby vs Holder, the incidents of voter suppression have increased. The VRAA would modernize the pre-clearance process. Please discuss whether or not you support this bill and explain why.

- d. I strongly support the VRAA. The ability to vote is the bedrock to America’s political, and social health. A reason for the civil rights protests of this summer, is because too many Black and Latino people have been denied their right to participate in our democracy, and so don’t have representatives who look or live, like they do. I am a staunch opponent of any attempt to deny or inhibit the ability of another American, to vote. On an ethical level, it seems it would be better to let 2 people vote falsely, than deny any of us our right to vote. Realistically, voter fraud is a nonexistent issue

(perhaps a few hundred ballots a decade), but voter suppression is depressingly real. It is another one of those issues, similar to the ERA, where opposition to VRAA is un-American. It is, undeniably, stealing millions of Americans' votes, so that a certain party can gain an electoral advantage, it's incredibly disgusting legislating. That we've tolerated it so long as a nation is unacceptable.

3. Many citizens are concerned about the growing role of money in U. S. elections. In addition, transparency in the identification of donors has been lacking. What policies would you support to reduce the role of money in American elections and provide better transparency about donors?

- e. Repeal of the Citizen's United decision would be a good start. At this point, it seems the most effective way to reduce the role of money would be through a constitutional amendment, something the courts couldn't throw out. Without that, it seems exceedingly difficult to reform campaign finance, with the current makeup of the Supreme Court.
- f. Another aspect of this problem lies with candidates, and the voters themselves. At the end of the day, corporate and wealthy individual donations are irrelevant. Corporations can't vote, and rich people can't buy, or steal, votes. As long as the voting public continues to judge candidates on their electability, and the D/R, next to their name, we will get the same results, because we will continue to elect the same kind of people. Elections have become little more than fundraising and voter turnout contests. The policies candidates propose are meaningless, and little consideration is given to the quality of a candidate's character and abilities. Everyday leaders, from among us regular people must step forward... We can't change our system, without an alternative model to turn to. I'm running as a nontraditional candidate, with the goal of figuring out what "different" looks like in our politics.

5. The SCOTUS recently ruled that the Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals (DACA) policy protecting residents brought here as children may remain in place for now. What, if any, steps would you take to reform current immigration policies?

- g. I support a path to citizenship for all immigrants to America.
 - g.i. Including those in the U.S. without authorization.
 - g.ii. Immediate citizenship for DACA recipients.
- h. I support loosely limited immigration policies as a whole, welcome all those who come with open arms.
 - h.i. Immigrants are vital to the success of our economy. They are often incredibly "essential" workers.

3. Dan Sullivan, Incumbent, Republican running in the Republican Primary
Website: DANSULLIVANFORALASKA.COM

Biographical Information: Dan Sullivan was elected in 2014 and sworn in as Alaska's eighth United States Senator on January 6, 2015. Recognized as one of the Senate's most effective lawmakers, Sullivan serves on committees critical to Alaska: Armed Services, Commerce, Veterans Affairs, and Environment and Public Works. Senator Sullivan has a distinguished record of military and national security service. He is currently an infantry officer and Colonel in the U.S. Marine Corps Reserve. Over the past 25 years, Sullivan has served in a variety of command and staff billets on active duty and in the reserves. He is the only member of the U.S. Senate still serving in the military.

Responses to Voter's Guide Questions: Responses have not arrived yet

4. John Howe, Alaskan Independence, running in the Alaska Independence Primary

WEBSITE: howees-machine.com (business website)

Biographical Information: Currently living in Fairbanks.

Responses to Voter's Guide: Responses have not arrived yet.

5. Edgar Blatchford, Democrat running in the Democratic Primary

WEBSITE: None available

Biographical Information: Currently lives in Fairbanks

Responses to Voter's Guide Questions: Responses have not arrived yet.