

Democratic Rural Conference of New York State

Lieutenant Governor of New York State 2022 CANDIDATE QUESTIONNAIRE DEMOCRATIC RURAL CONFERENCE

CANDIDATE'S NAME and ADDRESS:

Brian Benjamin
420 Lexington Avenue, Suite 2150
New York, NY

Position for which you are a candidate: **Lieutenant Governor of the State of New York**

Candidate's Address for All DRC Correspondence:

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THE ANSWERS TO THESE QUESTIONS WILL BE POSTED ON THE DRC WEB SITE.

Name, cell phone number and e-mail address for the person on your staff who will be your liaison with the DRC.

Vedika Gopal, Deputy Campaign Manager, 914-482-8437, vedika@brianbenjamin.org

List your qualifications for this office including but not limited to other offices you have held, educational background, etc:

- Appointed as the 78th Lieutenant Governor of New York in September 2021.
- Previously served as the New York State Senator for District 30 from 2017-2021, which encompasses Harlem, East Harlem, and the Upper West Side,
- Served Chair of the Budget and Revenue Committee, Acting President Officer and as the Senior Assistant Majority Leader in the State Senate.
- Earned an undergraduate degree in Public Policy from Brown University and MBA from Harvard Business School
- Prior to serving in the State Senate, worked in investment banking, and then returned to Harlem to build affordable housing, creating over a thousand units of environmentally sustainable, affordable housing at an M/WBE.

Please address these questions, but make your answers brief so the entire questionnaire does not exceed 4 pages.

1. **ABILITY TO LEAD THE ENTIRE STATE** – What contact and experiences have you had with parts of the state, other than where you currently reside, which

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demonstrate your recognition of the geographic, demographic and economic diversity of the state and your ability to provide leadership on behalf of all New Yorkers?

As Lieutenant Governor of New York, I have had the opportunity to travel across New York State and directly experience the diversity of our state. For example, in September of last year I visited Greene and Columbia counties and spent the day visiting local farms and agricultural businesses. It is important to me to actually be in our state, to get around to all parts of the state and see specifically how I can help with small town economics, improve workforce development, and support rural communities. I will continue to visit every corner of our state and build relationships with New Yorkers so that I am representing all of us.

As the chair of the Regional Economic Development Councils, I am leading the delivery of New York State's Downtown Revitalization Initiative funds to invest in diverse downtowns across our state. In this capacity, I have traveled throughout the state to visit our varied downtowns and advocate on behalf of all New Yorkers.

Additionally, I lead the COVID-19 Equity Task Force, and as part of this, I am working closely with local governments and stakeholders from a variety of localities across the state - especially rural communities - to ensure equitable access of resources to combat COVID-19. Through this work, I have been working directly with rural communities and prioritizing their access to COVID-19 recovery.

2. KNOWLEDGE OF THE ISSUES – What issues do you believe are of most concern to voters in rural counties, and what will be your message in addressing those issues?

I believe some of the most pressing issues affecting rural voters are broadband access, COVID-19 recovery, and workforce development. These are some of my top priorities, and our administration has committed to addressing these issues. We will address these issues in the following ways:

- Broadband access is key to closing the digital divide, especially in rural communities, and allowing for equitable access to job opportunities, as well as education and even healthcare. Our administration will use over \$1 billion in public and private investments to connect New Yorkers to broadband.
- As chair of the COVID-19 Equity Task Force, I am focused on ensuring that the resources the state provides New Yorkers are delivered equitably to every community, especially our rural communities. The Governor and I are purchasing 10 million more free, at-home tests, launching an online portal for ordering free at-home PCR tests, sending out 3.4 million texts and robocalls to remind NYers to finish their vaccine series, and

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expanding testing sites into areas of particular need. I am committed to ensuring equitable distribution of these resources.

- Workforce development is one of my top priorities, and is also an issue of concern to many rural communities. In order to ensure that I have the input of rural communities on how best to implement workforce development opportunities, I have been travelling to local organizations that are doing this work across the state. This includes the Northland Workforce Training Center in Buffalo and YMTEP in Rochester. So far, we have been awarded \$7 billion for workforce development projects, and created and preserved 240,000 jobs, and I am focused on ensuring that every community, including rural communities, continues to get strong investment and access to workforce development opportunities.

3. PARTY BUILDING – How have you expressed and demonstrated a commitment toward building our party statewide and what are your ideas for future party building, specific to rural counties?

As part of both my official and campaign capacities, I have been meeting with party members and Democratic clubs across the state to hear their concerns and ideas for how both I and the Governor can support party building in rural counties, and I am committed to continuing to build relationships with our party statewide. The Governor and I are building a strong coalition of support from across the state and will continue to collaborate and foster partnerships with our colleagues from every corner of New York.

4. In the event of a primary for the office you are seeking, will you support the winner of the Democratic primary? (This calls for a YES or NO answer ONLY.)

Yes.

5. FAIRNESS IN SHARING POLITICAL POWER - How have you and how will you defend and further the rights of small counties to be represented in the decision making process and in governmental and political positions?

One of the most important ways to defend the rights of all New Yorkers in the Democratic process, including those of rural and small counties, is to protect and expand voting access. This issue is one of my top priorities and I will continue to support increased access to voting, including absentee voting.

I look forward to continuing to work with my running mate, Governor Kathy Hochul, to support small and rural counties across the state.

6. INCLUSION – If elected, how would your administration include the people from DRC counties and address the issues of concern in those counties?

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As Governor Hochul and I continue to build our administration, we are making it a priority to have conversations with diverse stakeholders, including those from DRC counties. Both the Governor and I are intentional about visiting counties throughout the state and hearing directly from people from different geographic areas to ensure that we are addressing the concerns of all New Yorkers.

7. VOTER APPEAL – What qualities or experiences do you have that would attract support from voters in DRC counties, not just from Democrats but also from non-enrolled voters and cross-over Republicans?

I am proud to have a record of working with legislators and voters from both sides of the aisle, and am committed to continue to do so as Lieutenant Governor. While I was in the Senate, I was Chair of the Budget and Revenue Committee, Acting President Officer, and Senior Assistant Majority Leader. All of these positions required me to work with Democrats, Independents, and Republicans alike. As a pragmatic, solutions-driven Democrat, I believe that we need to work alongside members of varied ideological backgrounds in order to get New York State on the right track and I have a track record of doing so.

8. CAMPAIGN IN DRC COUNTIES – How would you campaign in DRC counties? Will you personally appear with local candidates?

I will personally travel to counties across the State and appear with local candidates during my campaign. I am also committed to addressing issues of concern to DRC counties during my campaign and remaining open to dialogue with people from DRC counties to ensure that their voices and concerns are reflected in my campaign.

9. OTHER CRITERIA – Please set forth anything else you want us to consider.

1/24/22
Date

Brian Benjamin
Signature of the Candidate

Please return THE COMPLETED QUESTIONNAIRE at your earliest convenience but no later than **January 24, 2022** to Judith Hunter, DRC Chair via e- mail at **judith.hunter@gmail.com.** Ms. Hunter can also be contacted at (585) 615-2986