



STEVEN G. PARSONS

State Representative, District 3

Prior to running for office, Steven Gene Parsons has worked as an economist.

What is the biggest issue facing the state of Arkansas and how would you address this problem if elected?

Decriminalize Marijuana use. For the last year with verifiable data, over 10k marijuana arrests were made in AR, disproportionately in minority communities. AR should decriminalize marijuana and reduce regulations around existing medical supply.

What would be your top 3 priorities for utilizing the surplus budget in Arkansas, if you had full power over the surplus?

I would reduce taxes. I am a Libertarian; this is a rare opportunity to at least temporarily slow the growth of state government.

How do you define public safety and what changes would you make to keep all communities safe?

There are likely methods to employ psychologists or social workers to help police with domestic disputes.

What (if any) changes do you believe are needed to the criminal legal system in Arkansas?

- 1) Reduce or eliminate criminal drug laws and increase drug treatment.
- 2) Reduce or modify qualified immunity.
- 3) Tort reform to reduce non-criminal demands on the legal system.

The Arkansas Public Defenders Commission has been underfunded for many years. Would you support increasing funding to help bring the department in line with American Bar Association recommendations which cap caseloads at 150 felony cases per attorney? Why or why not?

I don't have any knowledge in this regard.

It has become common knowledge across the state of Arkansas that those facing health conditions concerning addiction and mental health are located at an increasing rate in the state prisons and local county jails. What solutions do you feel should be explored in this area?

See my answers to #s 1 and 4 above. The U.S. has the highest incarceration rate in the world. As long ago as 1984 the conservative think tank Rand calculated that to deal with drugs, incarceration was over ten times more costly than treatment.

Research indicates that juveniles that encounter the justice system in their youth will have a higher likelihood of entanglement with the adult criminal justice system. What strategies do you support to decrease this likelihood?

See my answers above.

Neuroscience research has indicated that the human brain is not fully formed until approximately age 25, meaning that impulse control and long-term thinking can be impaired. Would you consider reclassifying how Arkansas young adults are treated in the adult system? Are there specific adjustments that should/could be made?

I don't have specific knowledge in this area, but see my answers above.

Do you think we have a “parole problem” and how would you address it?

Recidivism rates are high in AR, as in all other states. If dollars are redeployed from incarceration to: 1) treatment; 2) training the state, and its population will be far better served.

The Arkansas Department of Corrections identified reducing solitary confinement —a practice labeled torture under international law— as a major objective in their 2021-2022 Strategic Plan, however the number of people held in isolation continues to grow. Do you agree with the need to reduce solitary confinement in our state? Why or why not?

I don't have specific knowledge, but see my answers above. My expectation is that solitary confinement is more expensive and less effective in the long run.

Additional Comments

AR's 2017 drug paraphernalia law includes language regarding equipment for "testing" and "analysis". The U.S. is on track for 70,000 deaths per year from fentanyl overdose. It is likely that approximately 40,000 deaths could be avoided with by simply legalizing fentanyl test strips. Regarding whether Marijuana (as well as other drugs) should be legalized, consider the following questions: 1) who is the victim (and did the victim file a complaint); 2) would a drug gang vote to keep drugs illegal (are we perpetuating a policy drug gangs prefer); 3) are current policies winning the war on drugs?