

Response by Former Governor Roy Barnes Democratic Candidate for Governor

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Life sciences economic development:

What is the role of state government in supporting life sciences economic development?

State government can play an important role in supporting and expanding life science economic development. First, the state must embrace the necessity of stem cell and other types of research as being essential to the development of a vibrant bio economy. Additionally, we need to expand the Georgia Cancer Coalition, which I created during my first term as Governor to bring eminent scholars to the state to conduct cutting edge cancer research. Expansion of this valuable program – as well as its duplication in other bioscience fields – will lead to revolutionary advances in research, attract new business to our state, and create high-paying, quality jobs for Georgians.

Georgia's next Governor must be willing to work with policy makers to create incentives for medical research initiatives based in Georgia. If we act now, Georgia can be at the forefront of the medical breakthroughs of the future. Further, we can take advantage of our state's existing educational infrastructure – our public and private research universities – and create a physical biotech hub right here in Georgia, similar to the Research Triangle Park in North Carolina.

Lastly, in partnership with universities, research institutions, and private sector partners, we can create a Georgia Biotech Jobs Cabinet, which will focus on ways that the state can bolster life sciences economic development efforts in Georgia.

K-16 science education:

How can Georgia ensure that its students will be able to compete for 21st century advanced technology jobs and that our state will have the skilled work force to support life sciences industry growth?

We must equip Georgians to take advantage of the advanced technology job opportunities of the future by making high-tech skills training an educational priority. Biotech companies need capable workers, and they are more likely to move to Georgia if we can provide them with a qualified workforce. Over the past several years, budget cuts in our technical and community college systems, as well as in our higher education system, have significantly reduced the field of highly skilled workers in our state. I will reinvest in our higher education and vocational training systems and create a partnership of research universities and technical colleges to ensure that Georgia has the highly skilled workforce that the life sciences industry is looking for.

Federal health care reform:

What, if anything, is the most critical need for Georgians when it comes to health care reform?

Eighteen percent of Georgians are uninsured, and even more are underinsured. Those individuals that are inadequately insured are less likely to receive preventive and primary care services and ultimately face worse health outcomes; further, they are forced to rely on emergency health care services, driving up health costs for taxpayers and putting undue strain on hospitals and health care providers. A majority of Georgians receive health care benefits through their employer; however, as unemployment has risen in Georgia, so has the number of uninsured individuals. When it comes to health care needs, first and foremost, we need to make it as easy as possible for every Georgian, regardless of age, race, or socioeconomic status, to receive health insurance.

Additionally, we need to improve access to health care services – no matter where you live in Georgia, every individual in this state should be able to find affordable, quality health care services in their community. We must also ensure that Georgians are able to make their own choices when it comes to health care, as we should all be able to choose our own physicians and hospitals. Lastly, in order to serve Georgia's ever-growing population, we must ensure that we have a highly skilled health care workforce and a finely tuned health care infrastructure in place in our state.