



2020 Georgia Federal Candidate Questionnaire

Dr. Val Almonord

*Background Information*

**Education:** AA from LaGuardia Community College | BA from Hunter College | DPM from Ohio College of Podiatric Medicine (now Kent State University College of Podiatric Medicine) | Certificate in Sustaining Base Leadership and Management from Army Management Staff College | MS in Healthcare Management from Troy University

**Where is home?** Columbus, Georgia

**Do you currently hold a public office? If so, how long have you held your current office?** No

**Past public offices held:** NA

**Additional background information you'd like to share:** Val Almonord has served as the Vice Chair of the Muscogee County Democratic Committee, Chair of the Outreach Committee of Muscogee County, and as the Muscogee County delegate to the Democratic Party of Georgia. He continues to channel his military and civilian service into activism for his brothers and sisters who work in federal government service. Val currently serves as the legislative and political coordinator for the American Federation of Government Employees (AFGE ) Local 54 in Fort Benning, GA.

*Georgia in General*

**Briefly share your qualifications for the office.**

A born servant, I have served my community ever since I emigrated from Haiti to Brooklyn, New York in 1969. Falling in love with American democratic values, I felt the urge to serve, protect, and defend the people of my new country and joined the U.S. Army Active Duty. I later transferred to the U.S. Army Reserves and continued to serve for 9 years while attending medical school. With the National Health Service

Corps, I practiced in medically under-served areas for 4 years. Later joining the Military Health Care System, I continued to serve for 35 years before I retired from Martin Army Community Hospital in Fort Benning, Georgia. I have seen just how difficult it is for Georgia residents and families to survive in today's economy. Service has been my way of life and I want to continue serving Georgians by fighting for them in Congress.

***Please indicate the reasons you are seeking election and your priorities, overarching policy interests, and any solutions for district-specific challenges.***

Service has been my way of life, from serving in the U.S. Army to National Health Service Corps to ultimately the Military Health Care System. When I look around and see the level of devastation in Georgia communities stemming from unprecedented levels of injustices and inequality, I know that I must step up and do something about it as I have done many times before in my career. I decided to forgo my retirement for the opportunity to serve again. My background in medicine, the U.S. Army, and civil service have provided me insight into enduring solutions to some of the prevailing challenges and issues in Georgia's 3rd Congressional District.

As your candidate for Georgia's 3rd Congressional District, I will fight for and put Georgians first. As your member of Congress, I have three priorities that I will prioritize immediately: healthcare, economic inequality, and education. Georgia is ranked third in the nation in the highest number of people without health insurance. Incorporating my medical expertise, I will fight to enhance the Affordable Care Act and expand Medicaid. This fight means more affordable healthcare coverage, healthcare coverage for anyone who currently doesn't already have it, and the ability for Georgians to change jobs without losing coverage. I also prioritize working to enhance healthcare options in rural communities. Secondly, Georgia, like the rest of the country, has been devastated by COVID-19 and the Trump administration's mismanagement of the attendant health and economic consequences. I will support legislation that provides financial assistance to Georgians who have waited long enough for relief and to small businesses. Lastly, Georgians deserve a champion who'll fight the deep-seated problems of economic inequalities and social injustice. A zip code should not determine the quality of education a student receives or their life chances. The gap in resources goes beyond qualified personnel, access to services, and public investment. Disparities have further pushed the divide between the "haves" and the "have nots." I will fight for equal protection under the law and fight to build a reality that makes sure all Georgians can thrive, regardless of race, gender, sexual orientation, disability status, age, or zip code.

Georgians in the 3rd Congressional District deserve a true public servant who will represent them in Congress. I want to fight for those who may feel that their voice no longer matters in Washington, DC. With your vote, Congress won't just hear us, they will listen. Join our team. Together we will succeed!

## *Farm Bill*

***With commodity prices still hovering at historically low levels and so much uncertainty in the agriculture industry, the farm bill – and the safety net it provides – is as vital as it***

***has ever been for Georgia farmers. While the current farm bill runs through 2023, what do you see as the biggest priorities for Georgia in the next reauthorization? Are there specific programs or policies that you believe should be improved?***

As Georgia's oldest and largest industry, agriculture is a vital sector in the state. Agriculture contributes approximately \$73.7 billion to our economy and provides more than 392,400 jobs. The industry is especially important to the 3rd Congressional District where thousands of residents are employed in agribusiness. However, Georgia agriculture is in trouble. Recent trade policies and tariffs have disrupted international markets and supply chains, causing tremendous harm to farmers.

The first thing that must be done is to reverse the damage these policies have inflicted on Georgia's agricultural sector. We must reject policies that hurt our farmers. Secondly, I will work with agricultural leaders and necessary stakeholders to strengthen and modernize rural communities. This much-needed investment will ensure Georgia's hardworking farmers have access to 21st century infrastructure enabling them to preserve their quality way of life while making a living. This includes, but is not limited to, schools, broadband, hospitals and health care centers, transportation, and other investments in infrastructure. Lastly, I would support legislation to expand new sectors within the agricultural economy, such as the expansion of urban farming and the development of new cash crops.

*Trade*

***It is no secret that farmers have been negatively impacted by the recent trade disputes with many of our closest trading partners, though trade mitigation efforts like the Market Facilitation Program have helped many weather the tough times. With the finalization of several new trade deals, many Georgia farmers are breathing a sigh of relief. However, the deals must be enforced and our trading partners must be held accountable for the promises they've made. How do you plan to play a role going forward in ensuring that countries like China and Japan follow through with their free trade and agricultural purchases commitments?***

The current administration's policies have waged damage to Georgia farmers. President Trump's recent trade deal with China has failed to protect Georgia farmers and secured very little concessions from China. The Phase One trade deal promised

a Chinese commitment to purchase \$50 billion in U.S. agricultural products. However, the current administration has acknowledged that China isn't even close to fulfilling the terms of the agreement. With US-China relations at a low point, the U.S. has very little recourse to prevent China from shirking its agricultural promise. On top of this, recent trade policies and tariffs have already done so much damage and farmers across the state are hurting.

I believe it is time for the United States to work with our allies to stand up to the bad behavior from China. The United States can no longer afford to abdicate global leadership and allow China to further erode international rule of law. Working with our allies allows the United States to negotiate from the strongest possible position. Secondly, as a member of Congress, I plan to sponsor legislation that articulates a tougher response to China and takes retaliatory measures against countries like China that fail to uphold their side of the deal. The United States must demonstrate that a history of bad-faith negotiations and degradation for the international rule of law will not go unpunished.

***The USMCA agreement was welcome news for many Georgia farmers. However, as you know, certain Georgia growers remain concerned about the lack of an enforceable remedy in the deal for seasonal and perishable products in antidumping and countervailing duty proceedings. We know that the Georgia congressional delegation worked very hard to extract a commitment from the Trump Administration to address the issue, and we are grateful for those efforts. But work remains on this issue. What is your goal moving forward to deal with the dumping of fresh fruits and vegetables during Georgia growing seasons?***

There were many issues with NAFTA that hurt many working-class Georgians, especially farmers. The USMCA agreement made improvements but it did not nearly go far enough to protect Georgia farmers. The USMCA negotiation process failed to generate the necessary concessions out of Mexico and Canada, particularly the absence of seasonality provisions and weak enforcement of unfair price-distorting activities. Because of these issues, there is the problem of dumping of fresh fruits and vegetables during Georgia growing seasons.

As your member of Congress, I will fight for adequate seasonal protections for perishable products so that Georgia fruit and vegetable growers are not harmed through unfair competition from Mexican imports. Additionally, I will ensure that Georgian farmers are not forced to adhere by one set rules that their counterparts can choose to ignore. I will work to institute stricter enforcement for environmental and labor regulations. As a proud member of a union, I respect that Georgia farmers hold high standards in the workplace. However, it is unfair if import prices are distorted because foreign companies are not applying the same respect to workers' rights and fair wages that Georgians apply here.

## *Ag Labor*

***Agriculture jobs are difficult and undesired by many. The working conditions and seasonality of the jobs are not what most Georgians prefer, and agriculture relies heavily on a reliable migrant labor workforce, such as H-2A. How do you intend to balance the enforcement of immigration laws while helping provide access to the workers agriculture needs?***



Because of the nature of jobs in the agricultural industry, Georgia, like many states, has experienced a longstanding shortage of farm labor. To supplement the domestic labor supply, many farms rely on the H-2A program to hire seasonal agricultural workers from other countries. However, the current administration announced earlier in the year that it would cease processing visas in Mexico, severely hampering immigrant labor needed to meet seasonal agricultural needs. Fortunately, the decision to reverse the announcement and resume H-2A visa processing was welcome news to the agricultural sector.

As your member of Congress, I will protect the necessary flow of migrant labor and fight to reverse the pause on the processing of new immigrant visas. I will protect the H2-A guest worker program to ensure Georgia farmers have access to much-needed skilled and reliable workforce. As an immigrant who has served this country and fought to protect our democracy, I know the hard work and sacrifices that immigrants make to earn an honest living and sustain industries. Congress must balance the enforcement of immigration laws while helping provide access to the workers agriculture needs.