

Congresswoman Kiggans named Vice Chair of the Congressional Nursing Caucus



Congresswoman Jen Kiggans (VA-02) has been named Vice Chair of the Congressional Nursing Caucus. The Caucus is a bipartisan group of legislators dedicated to advancing policies to support the nation's 4.2 million registered nurses. The Caucus is Chaired by Reps. Dave Joyce (OH-14) and Congresswoman Suzanne Bonamici (OR-01); Congresswoman Kiggans serves as Vice Chair alongside Congresswoman Lauren Underwood (IL-14).

"As the professional organization representing the interests of the commonwealth's more than 118,000 registered nurses, we are so excited to congratulate Congresswoman Kiggans on her new role as Vice Chair of the Congressional Nursing Caucus," said Virginia Nurses Association, President, Sherri Wilson, DNP, MPA, RN, CDP.

"Since her first year in office, Congresswoman Kiggans has been a strong advocate for nursing and those individuals and communities we serve. We look forward to our continuing collaboration and are confident that this strong and insightful leader will bring about significant positive change during her tenure on The Hill!"

Nurses Running for Office Share Their Vision

In the upcoming June 20 primary, two nurses will be on the ballot for state office. The Virginia Nurses Association asked each of them to share their vision for the future of nursing and healthcare in Virginia. While VNA does not endorse candidates at any level, our role as an advocacy organization is to help ensure that nurses are educated about the issues and the candidates so that they are able to make informed decisions.



Kellen Squire, BSN, RN
55th District Candidate, Virginia House of Delegates
Campaign Website: www.squireforyou.com

Kellen is running in the 55th House of Delegates District, which includes Albemarle, Louisa, Nelson, and Fluvanna counties.

Q: Tell me about your professional background.

I've been an ER Nurse for 12 years now. I also worked for almost three years as an Albemarle County Public School nurse and spent time as a triage nurse at the University of Virginia's Student Health center. While I was in nursing school, I worked as a patient care technician at the University of Virginia Children's Hospital in Pediatric Acute Care. I started

nursing school at Virginia Western Community College in Roanoke, Virginia and then transferred in order to obtain my bachelor's degree from the University of Virginia School of Nursing, which I did in 2011.

Q: Many in nursing describe it as a calling. Was there a certain instance where you felt called to run for office?

I think the calling I felt to become a nurse and to run for office was very similar. The call I felt to pursue a career in nursing came when I deployed to Mississippi after Hurricane Katrina. I knew nothing about nurses at the time, save any stereotype you might imagine, but I was attached to a team of nurses that did, just... everything. And after spending time with them, after seeing how much they did to help everyone, I knew I wanted to be a nurse.

Near the end of the COVID Delta surge, a patient came into the ER in respiratory distress from COVID, who we had to intubate rapidly. This patient was young- had a family with kids in school- and had been fed a steady diet of disinformation about COVID, about the vaccines, etc. Before we intubated them, they seemed to realize the disinformation they'd been fed was all lies, and the anguish in this patient's last words will stay with me as long as I live

I knew then, especially with the way that nurses and other healthcare providers were being demonized, that someone needed to stand up - not just for nurses, but for the patients we serve day in and day out – and push directly back against that. And that I needed to go to Richmond, to the state legislature, to be able to have the biggest impact in getting that done.

Q: How do you feel your nursing practice will benefit you as a legislator?

I know I'm biased from being a nurse, but I truly believe that everything that nurses do is patient centric, evidence based practice. We see an unfiltered view of what goes on in our patients' lives, and we are the ones generally tasked with trying to fix it. Particularly in the ER, where we are the safety net for all of society, the glue that connects patients to the healthcare they need, and were asked to hold the line to keep the healthcare system from collapsing under the weight of the COVID pandemic. We get to see everything that is broken, and how it impacts every single Virginian.

That's the kind of viewpoint nurses bring to the table and why it is so essential we have it in the General Assembly building in Richmond.

Q: What is your vision for the future of healthcare in Virginia?

My vision for the future of healthcare in Virginia is primary-care focused, but includes lots of reforms aimed at the things we, as nurses, see that are broken, every single day. I love being an ER Nurse, but I can fully admit that we are the least efficient place to deliver care to people. I want to enact reforms, both easy and complex. I'd like to exempt clinicians — nurses, APPs, doctors, dentists, psychiatrists, etc- working in critical clinical specialties and/or geographic

areas from state income taxes – that would be nothing more than a rounding error in the state budget, but would make a huge difference to those providers, and to the people of the commonwealth. I would like to enact safe staffing ratios and work to re-open or keep open critical access hospitals across the commonwealth. I want to enact community paramedicine statewide.

There is much more work that needs to be done to reform our healthcare system- and I intend to get started on as much of it as we can in Virginia.

Q: What do you want to make sure Virginia's nurses know about you?

I'm just like so many of you reading this... a floor nurse, working at the bedside, seeing firsthand where our communities are hurting. I got so sick and tired of pulling people out of the river, that I decided to go "upstream" to keep people from being pushed in the river in the first place. I know it's tough for "pink collar" workers like us to run for office. When I approached the folks who were responsible for helping candidates run for office, the first question they asked me was "Can you write yourself a \$200,000 check?" No, of course not. My wife (also an ER Nurse and former Louisa County firefighter) and I are from rural Virginia with working class backgrounds. When I said that, I was encouraged to NOT run.

But I'm a nurse. We're not easily discouraged. One in every 40 voters is a nurse. We have enormous power, and a perspective that needs to be represented in the corridors of power. We need to be advocating for ourselves. But as I write this, our campaign has the most individual donations and small dollar support of any candidate in Virginia, out of hundreds of candidates running across the state. And the only secret I have for getting there, after being told it was pointless to run for office, is from unapologetically telling people what we go through as nurses, day in and day out.

We need your voices out there, too. Don't be afraid to get involved, to run for office, to make sure people know where you stand.

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Susanna Gibson, APRN
57th District Candidate, Virginia House of Delegates
Campaign Website: www.susannagibson.com

Susanna is running in the 57th House of Delegates District, which includes parts of Charlottesville and Albemarle County.

Q: Tell me about your professional background.

I have worked as a nurse and a Nurse Practitioner in the Richmond area for the past 15 years. I worked on the MRICU step-down unit at VCU for three years while simultaneously earning my MSN at UVA. Once I graduated from NP school, I then started working for the VCU Division of Geriatrics, where after two years I became the Lead NP for the Division. I primarily saw patients in the Home-Based Primary Care program, where I did primary care for complex adult patients who were homebound. This experience taught me that being a Nurse Practitioner is about so much more than just providing health care. It means that sometimes you are the only person in a position to advocate for food assistance, or getting the power restored, or heat for patients in their homes.

I also worked as the site lead for a CMS demonstration project called Independence at Home and worked as the clinical lead with MCD and VCC Insurance to design and implement a medical home model called the VCU Center for Advanced Health Management. After I left Geriatrics, I went on to work in Emergency Medicine and outpatient Internal Medicine before eventually ending up where I am now in outpatient Obesity Medicine.

Q: Many in nursing describe it as a calling. Was there a certain instance where you felt called to run for office?

While I have been an advocate for women's rights and for women to be able to make their own decisions about their healthcare for much of my life, the overturning of *Roe v. Wade* made me realize that simply lobbying legislators at the General Assembly, volunteering at women's health clinics and attending rallies, didn't feel like the most that I could do or what I was meant to do. I realized I needed to take my knowledge and experience as a Nurse Practitioner and my passion for women's issues to the next level and run for office.

Q: How do you feel your nursing practice will benefit you as a legislator?

My 15+ years of experience in providing care in a variety of circumstances, from working in a clinic to going into homes, means I will bring a unique perspective and knowledge to the General Assembly. In a legislature with few health care providers, I will be unique in having personally witnessed and experienced so many different health care settings and experiences, and I can use that knowledge to inform debates and to advocate more effectively for my constituents.

Q: What is your vision for the future of healthcare in Virginia?

Healthcare must be affordable and accessible to all, no matter your zip code, income, or skin color, and this includes mental health care and prescription drugs. No one should ever have to choose between paying the rent or feeding their family and a visit to the doctor's office or filling a prescription. Moreover, no one should have to drive hundreds of miles to get routine health care and medical testing. We can and must do better on all these fronts.

Q: What do you want to make sure Virginia's nurses know about you?

I am a relentless advocate for causes I believe in. Right now that #1 issue is reproductive health and women's rights, which is under attack in Virginia. I will do everything in my personal power as a Delegate to make sure that these rights are codified into law, not chipped away. I would also emphasize that my door will always be open, and I am eager to hear from nurses so I can best advocate for our needs and perspective.