

Regents District 11 – Sparks, north Reno, northern Washoe County, Pershing County, Humboldt County (Jason Geddes, incumbent, termed out)

2022 Candidates: Jeffrey Downs, John Gwaltney, Steve Laden

Question	Jeffrey Downs	John Gwaltney	Steve Laden
Campaign Website	downs4district11.com	“soon”	SteveLadenforRegent.com
Email address	downsfordistrict11@gmail.com	DrGwalt49@gmail.com	steve@steveldenforregent.com
City address	Reno	Sparks	Reno
Educational background	Downs: BS Mathematics CSU San Bernardino, MA Applied Math CSU Fullerton, PhD Education- Instructional Design and Technology Liberty University	Gwaltney: BS, MS and PHD . Twenty years of teaching at a community college and eighteen years as President of a total of three community colleges	Laden: University of California, Santa Barbara, BA Business Economics
Current profession/employment	Downs: Community College Professor, Western Nevada College	Gwaltney: Teaching one class at TMCC	Laden: Retired
Professional/employment background	Downs: 18 years- Western Nevada College, 2.5 years as an Interim Vice President of Student Success and Support Services 3 year Visiting Lecturer UNR 1 year Emergency Hire Lake Tahoe Community College Math Instructor 5 years High School instructor	Gwaltney: I will be happy to send a full resume.	Laden: I worked in the financial services industry for 32 years, all for the same firm (and its legacy firms). My last title was Senior Vice President – Investment Officer. I retired January 1, 2021. Prior to commencing my financial services career, I held two different positions centered on higher education: The Grand Chapter of Phi Sigma Kappa Fraternity, Director of Expansion (1982-83) and Cogswell Polytechnical College, Assistant Director of Admissions (1986-87). Today, Cogswell is University of Silicon Valley. In the 1980’s, I also held positions in wine sales (Luce and Son, Almaden Vineyards) and advertising sales (Reno Gazette-Journal). While a student at UCSB, I also served as an executive officer on the Associated Students Legislative Council, and was employed by the off-campus student housing office.

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<p>Past elected offices or other public service</p>	<p>Downs: WNC NFA Chapter President Scoutmaster and Assistant Scoutmaster, Scouts BSA Ward 5 Old Northwest NAB member/chair</p>	<p>Gwaltney: Served eight years on the Nevada State Board of Education and served on the Reno/Sparks Chamber of Commerce.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Past Board Member and Past President, Education Alliance of Washoe County/Education Collaborative. (11 years). The Ed Alliance brings together the entire spectrum of Pre-K through university educators, Reno/Sparks business leaders, elected officials, and parents to address issues facing all levels of public education in our community. It was the first organization in Northern Nevada to bring all of these stakeholders together at the same table for a common purpose. During my time on the Board and as President, we managed the Partner in Education (PiE) program, the Teachers' Warehouse and founded the Run for Education. We published the WCSD Data Profile, and advocated locally and in Carson City for issues impacting pre-K to higher education. We were deeply involved in discussions focused on graduation rates, high school to college articulation, remediation, Read by 3, public education budgets and more. • Past Board Member, State of Nevada Council to Establish Academic Standards. (8 years). The Council's role is to establish rigorous, measurable standards in English language arts, mathematics, science, social studies, computer and technology education, health and physical education, and the arts. The goal is to improve the academic achievement of Nevada's students. During my tenure on the Board, we dealt with No Child Left Behind, Race to The Top and Common Core, plus a recession with its accompanying budget cuts. Through it all, we successfully raised the bar of expectations in our public schools. • Past Mentor/Reader/Soccer Coach, Partners in Education at Roger Corbett Elementary School. Through my Lions club,

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			<p>we teamed with Roger Corbett Elementary School as a Partner in Education. I mentored three different K-6 students, read to classes and, for 9 seasons, coached their Great Basin soccer team.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Past Task Force Member, Nevada Department of Education. Through the Office of Career, Technical and Adult Education, the task force studied and reported on developing standards for workplace readiness. This work led to a set of well-defined standards aimed at guiding the preparedness of students for any career. • Current Trustee of Lions Eye Foundation of California-Nevada, Inc., and Past President (27 years and counting). We provide free eye surgery to uninsured, low-income residents of Northern California and Nevada. Each year the retail value of our services is approximately \$6 million. • Current member of Reno Host Lions Club, and Past President (34 years and counting). Our role is to provide service to our community with a focus on youth and the visually impaired.
<p>Briefly, why are you running for the Board of Regents at this time?</p>	<p>Downs: Now, more than ever, it is important that we have a more diverse representation on the Board of Regents. The last time a faculty member was on the BoR was over a decade ago. The lack of representation of faculty concerns has impacted board policy to the detriment of faculty. While this is one seat on the board, it is a start to changing the composition of this governing body. My hope is to remind the other members about Academic Freedom and the struggles faculty face trying to afford the cost of living in Nevada.</p>	<p>Gwaltney: The current situation on the Board of Regents is unstable, presenting an appearance of confusion, misuse of funds, and weakening support by the Legislature for Higher Education.</p>	<p>Laden: I’m running for the University Board of Regents because I believe all of our young people have the right to dream big. One of the greatest pathways to achieving dreams in America is being able to pursue a quality, public higher education. Our colleges and universities must be accessible, affordable, shining stars that breathe life into those dreams.</p> <p>I am also running because I will bring an over 30 years of business experience to the position. I am not a professional educator. I am an education advocate. I am also a team builder, goal setter, communicator, budgeter and community networker. I do not have</p>

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			any predisposed biases other than to support students who want to learn and the people who want to teach and support that endeavor. I do not come to the table with any known baggage, burned bridges or conflicts of interest.
What are your three highest priorities for the Board of Regents and the Nevada System of Higher Education?	<p>Downs:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1) Create and encourage policies that enable institutions to create programs to better serve the needs of students and industry. 2) Represent the people of District 11, and Nevada as a whole, and their values to the Board of Regents on upcoming policies taken by NSHE. 3) Represent the values of the people of District 11, again and Nevada as a whole, as we search for a new chancellor, one whose values reflect that of the people of Nevada. 	<p>Gwaltney:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1) Grow state funding for higher education 2) Employee system leadership with a greater understanding of the full range of education offered by the system. 3) Work to improve relations with the legislature 	<p>Laden: 1) Leadership. I wish I didn't have to cite leadership as my number one priority. However, with the recent departure of the Chancellor, the Board clearly needs to focus on finding the right leader to take the Nevada System of Higher Education forward. Before moving forward, however, leadership must first emerge within the Board itself. The sooner, the better. The Board will experience significant turn-over after the election. It will lose some highly informed, thoughtful Regents. The new Board must coalesce quickly, either to finish the Chancellor search, or to help embrace and acclimate the new system head. Leadership within the Board will also be called upon to develop goals and lead the system into critical discussions with the Legislature, Governor, faculty and staff, students, foundation supporters and many other stakeholders. Fumbling the leadership challenge is not an option.</p> <p>2) Education. At its very core, the Nevada System of Higher Education is there to educate students. We must honor this mission. This means providing safe, accessible, diversified, affordable, enlightened campuses where our students can learn. It also means honoring the faculty and staff who make learning on our campuses engaging and fruitful. In a perfect world, the passing down of knowledge from one generation to the next would forever be</p>

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			<p>my number one priority for the system of higher education.</p> <p>3) Money. The buck seems to always push its way into the spotlight. I would rather prioritize the recruitment, retention and graduation of first-generation, low income and diverse students. I would also prefer to highlight the social and economic benefits of higher education. However, our current time and place requires we think about money. To provide the education our students want and our economy requires, to offer forth the best and brightest faculty and staff, to build and nurture great campuses takes money. Unfortunately, the recent turmoil in the state’s revenue stream, lower systemwide enrollments due to COVID, student indebtedness and legislative priorities that usurp spending on higher education have all conspired to make appropriate levels of funding in the higher education system a necessary priority.</p>
<p>The NSHE state budget was cut in 2020 and 2021 versus pre-pandemic levels. As a regent, how would you address budget shortfalls?</p>	<p>Downs: I will work to restore funding to pre-pandemic levels. This may require utilizing the reserves NSHE holds. As an alternative, I would focus on the programs and faculty impacted by the cuts and work to redirect funding from administrative services to these areas. The primary mission of NSHE is to offer instruction and research.</p>	<p>Gwaltney: The Regents need to do a better job selling education to the legislature.</p>	<p>Laden: When I first read this question, I thought it was asking how I would go about patching the budget hole left by the 2020-21 pandemic. I now read it as a more generic question about short-term budget shortfalls, using the pandemic spurred cuts as an example. Hopefully, I am understanding the question correctly. I am also going to assume this discussion is intended to focus on the state-funded operations budget, and not the self-funded portions of the budget. As with any budget, there are both income and expense questions to consider when trying to create a balance.</p> <p>The natural place to start when faced with a budget shortfall is to ask the question, “where do we cut expenses?” I’m going to start from a different angle...</p>

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			<p>“We need to do a better job telling our story.”</p> <p>Much ink has been spilled over the issue of the Board’s communication with the governor, the legislature and the community at large. Much has been written, too, about transparency, accountability and decision-making. If these stories help paint the public perception of the system, then when it comes to allocating state funds, NSHE starts far behind the rest of the pack.</p> <p>Our story needs to be one of education, human growth and development, a productive workforce, a catalyst for economic diversification, productivity and cultural advancement. With these images, our lawmakers might see fit to raise NSHE to a higher pedestal when it comes to budgets or unexpected state-funding cuts.</p> <p>Getting to this point will take time and effort on the part of the Board and Chancellor’s office. As I used to tell my business clients, “This is a process, not an event.” To begin the process, we must first have a plan to raise the image of the system.</p> <p>Now, let’s look at the expenses...</p> <p>To capably address the question of cutting expenses, the Board must be aligned and clear about its strategic plan and priorities. For me, priority number one is to remain focused on protecting the core mission of the institutions: to educate our students. Hard on the heels of that, we must secure the faculty and staff who enable and support that mission.</p> <p>Temporary measures to reduce expenses are clearly preferable to permanent cuts. The challenge is to NOT let what starts as “temporary” become permanent. This has happened far too often with both student</p>

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			<p>fee increases and salary, merit and benefit alterations.</p> <p>We further must evaluate the “return on investment” of every endeavor undertaken by the system. Students pursue higher education to pave the way to a better personal future. Many faculty and staff dedicate their careers to educating and empowering students. Communities count on workforce development, informed voters, contributing members of society and productive taxpayers. All of these represent a return on investment from higher education. These outcomes are not easy to quantify; nonetheless, we have to carefully, objectively measure the potential value lost by students, faculty, staff, institutions and communities if programs and services are cut, frozen or eliminated.</p> <p>With an eye on the “business” of higher education, a prudent manager must allow for all options for balancing the budget to be on the table. The final decisions must align with the system’s strategic plan and priorities.</p>
<p>In the face of declining state support for higher education, should student fees and tuition be increased to maintain programs? If not, what alternatives would you advocate?</p>	<p>Downs: This is the big question, and I would like to address the premise. I think we should look at changing that level of support we have been getting from the state. We offer high quality programs in Nevada and the legislature needs to be made aware of it. As with all things, yes, tuition can go up. However, I would like to see more effort be made to educate the legislature about the opportunities we have to give to Nevada. Another funding alternative that I would support is to work with industry to form public-private partnerships in which the industry contributes to the cost given the benefits they will receive.</p>	<p>Gwaltney: No. We need industry to step up.</p>	<p>Laden: I see this as a question more about long-term budget challenges.</p> <p>In my campaign, I have stated my desire to control the costs borne by students in the higher education system. While I firmly believe students should meaningfully participate in financing their educations, we cannot ignore the emerging national debate about student debt and the impact of that debt on families, communities and our economy in general. Moreover, student fees in our system have nearly tripled since 2002. The question becomes, how hard can we push on that string?</p>

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			<p>That said, I recognize the reality of the waning support offered by the state. As a businessman, I also know all options need to be on the table.</p> <p>Annual student fee increases are already tied to HEPI. If any discussion of raising tuition and fees beyond HEPI were pursued, I would want to do it cooperatively with student and administration leaders. This has been done in the past, and I would want to use those experiences as a framework for discussing such hikes again in the future.</p> <p>As a regent, I believe it would be fiscally irresponsible not to evaluate all options for balancing the budget. As mentioned [above], this means the regents must have their vision and priorities in order.</p> <p>As we saw during the Great Recession, long-term cuts to budgets can have a permanent impact on the programs and culture of a campus. As I stated [above], whatever the chosen course of action, it must tie into the system’s strategic plan and priorities. It must also pass the litmus test for what is best for the most stakeholders.</p>
<p>The Board of Regents oversees two universities, a state college, four community colleges, and a research institute. Given limited resources, how would you balance the needs and allocate resources for the various institutions of NSHE?</p>	<p>Downs: This is a challenging balancing act. NSHE needs to serve the needs of Nevada as a provider of workforce training, a critical element in overcoming unemployment in the state. NSHE also needs to grow its brand as a research region with UNR, UNLV, and DRI. So, funding must be available to make all of this happen. Does the current funding formula work, some say no. This should be reexamined to determine how to best serve Nevada. Working with the legislature will also help to alleviate this struggle.</p>	<p>Gwaltney: It is time to look at the system formula again.</p>	<p>Laden: From a fiscal perspective, most of the system’s heavy lifting occurs during the budgeting process prior to the creation of the Governor’s Biennial Executive Budget. This process must begin with and flow from the clear expression of vision, goals and priorities set by the Board and reflected in each unique institution within the system. The Chancellor’s office must work closely with the leadership of each institution to identify and address their particular needs, and communicate these needs to the Board. I do believe the regents should undertake a study to evaluate the particular needs of community colleges, with a focus on the</p>

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			<p>workforce development and CTE programs they offer. Many of these programs are specialized and expensive, and the funding formula may not equitably recognize their unique needs.</p> <p>Generally, we need to focus more of a spotlight on our community colleges. We should raise-up and celebrate the educational opportunities they provide, whether that be for university bound students, or those following workforce development tracks. Students need to be recognized for their achievements. More and deeper community development opportunities need to be fostered for our community colleges.</p>
<p>The Board of Regents and Nevada System of Higher Education have been in the news lately and over many years for conflicts among regents and administrators and between NSHE and the Legislature. How would you address those issues?</p>	<p>Downs: First, we need to bring in a Chancellor who will be able to work within the framework we have, while bringing NSHE into the national stage. Next, we need to improve and strengthen the relationship between the regents and the legislature. We also need to improve morale of employees by creating better working conditions for the employees. All these together will create a system that can grow and not be playing defense.</p>	<p>Gwaltney: People to people. I know a number of folks in the legislature and like working with them.</p>	<p>Laden: As I mentioned [above], we must have a strong focus on Board leadership. Strong leadership does not mean domineering, unilateral leadership. Strong leadership means building a cohesive, cooperative, informed team. The team must build consensus around common goals and create a supportive, education-centric culture. It's only from this platform that conflicts can be resolved and open, constructive lines of communications established with all stakeholders.</p>
<p>As a Regent, how would you address issues with the recruitment and retention of faculty and staff?</p>	<p>Downs: This is a crucial issue for us at WNC. NSHE needs to fund its faculty and staff better. Living in Nevada is great, but it is becoming more and more challenging to afford this life. NSHE needs to make it a priority to increase all faculty and staff (below executive level) salaries to retain our current employees and consequently attract</p>	<p>Gwaltney: Place good leadership on each campus and let them do their job.</p>	<p>Laden: Regents should not be involved directly with the recruitment and retention of faculty and staff beyond the hiring of key NSHE personnel and campus presidents. The Board, however, must be intimately concerned with establishing the vision and culture in which all faculty and staff work. This must start with upholding the core</p>

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	<p>new faculty and staff to our institutions. A new faculty member in Carson City cannot live on \$52,000 a year.</p>		<p>mission of our institutions, which is to educate our students. In this vein, we must, then, support those who most directly enable student learning: our faculty and staff. We need to be competitive nationally with salary and benefits. We must have a culture that values education and respects those that dedicate their careers to that mission. We must offer safe, welcoming environments. We must stabilize our fiscal house. We must also continue to enhance the reputation of our institutions in order to attract the best candidates for open positions. We must promote the hiring, retaining and advancing of faculty and staff from diverse backgrounds, cultures, races and ethnicities.</p>
<p>What are your thoughts about collective bargaining for NSHE professional employees? Specifically, would you support or oppose legislation for collective bargaining rights for NSHE professional employees in statute?</p>	<p>Downs: I support legislation to have collective bargaining rights for NSHE professional employees in statute. Those who know me know that I am an avid supporter of collective bargaining. I am, in fact, the lead negotiator for the WNC chapter of the NFA and we are currently in negotiations for a new contract. Having a collective bargaining agreement helps create a work environment in which the employees have some input. This can result in increased morale and more committed employees. My hope is that more institutions within NSHE seek this relationship to have more say in their working conditions. I also would like to see NSHE become more supportive of collective bargaining.</p>	<p>Gwaltney: Collective bargaining should be a right of the faculty but the student should not be damaged as an outcome.</p>	<p>Laden: I believe in the right of our professional employees to earn competitive wages and benefits. I believe merit should be rewarded. I prefer promoting qualified, proven candidates from within, rather than hiring from outside. I believe in a safe, welcoming, professional work environment. I do not have enough information at this time to pass judgement on collective bargaining for professional employees.</p>
<p>If Nevada is faced with another pandemic, what considerations do you believe regents should apply to decisions</p>	<p>Downs: If it is warranted to return to remote learning, I support doing so. However, this should only be done in extreme circumstances. As we have seen with the Omicron variant, cases have dropped</p>	<p>Gwaltney: Regents should use the best medical information at the time.</p>	<p>Laden: In a pandemic situation, the health and safety of our student, faculty and staff must be the first priority. While I am a proponent of in-person learning, I do believe our institutions are better equipped to shift</p>

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associated with public health mandates for employee and students?	significantly and many people have been vaccinated or have natural immunity, or both. The Board of Regents will need to weigh the diminished level of education that has occurred in the past (and that we faculty have experienced with students coming to us now), with the actual threat and likelihood of on campus transmissions. At WNC, we could never point to an on-campus transmission vector throughout the pandemic. Procedures on campus were in place to minimize this possibility.		to online learning temporarily. If what you really want to know is my stand on mask and vaccine mandates, during COVID I have been a supporter of those directives. Any future pandemics may not look the same as the coronavirus and may require different actions by the Board and campuses. In these situations, I put science above politics and emotions.
Do you support or oppose allowing the concealed or open carry of firearms on NSHE campuses?	Seeing the successes and low crime rates for concealed carry in institutions in other states, I support concealed carry on campus. This would act as a deterrent to crime on campus, especially sexual assaults. Those choosing to carry concealed would need to understand the responsibility of what they are choosing to do, though.	Gwaltney: Only by police officers.	Laden: Oppose.
Would you support or oppose a policy to regulate discussion of or teaching about divisive topics such as Critical Race Theory on NSHE campuses?	Downs: As a proponent of Academic Freedom, I do not support the regulating of topics taught. However, Academic Freedom has limits. In a math class, I cannot teach English topics, unless there is a unit on the language of math in literature. From my understanding, though, most courses already contain content that needs to be covered. If a department chooses to offer a course on Critical Race Theory, I support making the syllabus available for students prior to enrollment, if possible, so they can know what to expect.	Gwaltney: This is a campus question. Regents should look at programs not material within the programs. Faculty are a much better judge of subject matter.	Laden: Oppose. These are university and college campuses. They are places meant for the free exchange of knowledge and ideas. These are places to explore new and different areas of human thought and experience. Our students want and need to think for themselves and arrive at their own conclusions. Stifling opinion and regulating the dissemination of information is not what our system should be about.
What is your view of NSHE governance? Should the Board of Regents concern itself with the internal	Downs: The Board of Regents needs to hire an effective Chancellor who will take charge of the leadership of the eight institutions. College and University presidents do not need to worry about pleasing one Chancellor	Gwaltney: Regents should stay out of the campus matters. If the president is failing at the job the Regents need to look for new leadership.	Laden: On a micro level, the Board should NOT “concern itself” with day-to-day operations or micromanagement of the institutions. Presidents and their campus administrators must clearly be in charge of

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<p>operations of the eight NSHE institutions, or else should the Board simply hire the Presidents and let them run the institutions?</p>	<p>and 13 Regents. Instead, they should work with the Chancellor who will manage the presidents. The key here is, though, that the Chancellor show leadership in this area.</p>		<p>the internal operations of their respective institutions. On a macro level, the Board must “concern itself” with the operations of the institutions. The Board must be aware of each institution’s uniqueness and needs in order to fulfill its function as a steward of the state’s higher education system. The Board must “concern itself” in issues of state funding, capital improvement projects and other issues involving the future vision of an institution. The Board must also know enough to judge the performance of current campus leadership, or measure the suitability of a new leadership hire. But, micromanagement...No.</p>
<p>What are your top criteria for choosing a Chancellor?</p>	<p>Downs: A Chancellor serving in Nevada needs to be able to represent the system well. During the legislative session, the Chancellor should have some visibility with the legislature. The Chancellor should also take control of the leadership within NSHE and be sure the presidents of the respective institutions have a positive relationship with their faculty and staff. Too many chancellors that I have seen focus on maintain the campus leadership despite issues that are ongoing. The Chancellor should also be innovative and forward thinking. It is important to seize opportunities when they become available and help bring Nevada Higher Education to the forefront. Instead of playing catch-up, Nevada can be seen as the leader.</p>	<p>Gwaltney: Truth and openness</p>	<p>Laden: A strong personal adherence to the system’s primary function of educating our students, and supporting those who enable that process. Strong leadership, team building and communications skills. A demonstrated high-level work ethic. Vision. An expressed commitment to NSHE, rather than using us as a stepping stone.</p>
<p>A proposed constitutional amendment to remove the Board of Regents from the Nevada</p>	<p>Downs: I am opposed to removing the Board of Regents from the Nevada State Constitution. The existence of the Board of Regents allows the people of Nevada better access to the direction that NSHE takes.</p>	<p>Gwaltney: I don't fear this action as do a number of people. If the public were to pass this, it would put the Regents on the same footing as higher education systems in other states. It works in other states. Legislative</p>	<p>Laden: At this time, I am not in favor of removing the Board of Regents from the Nevada Constitution. My interpretation of the “sub-plot” to this story is that 1) it may lead to some or all of the Board being</p>

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<p>Constitution is under consideration by the Legislature and may go to the voters in 2024. What is your position on the proposed amendment?</p>	<p>Removing this governing body will negatively impact Nevadans and create an even more insulated body. We have the opportunity to affect the board makeup every two years, we need to retain this level of impact.</p>	<p>overview of the Regents could improve the behavior.</p>	<p>appointed rather than elected in the future and 2) proponents of the measure seem to be leaning towards dividing the system into two parts, the universities and the community colleges. Briefly, I do not at this time see the benefit in potentially removing Nevada's constitutional right to vote for a governing board that oversees more than 13% of the state's general fund appropriations. (Page 46 of the 2023-2025 Executive Budget "Kickoff," dated March 9, 2022.) Moreover, by dividing the system into two parts, I only see more administrative costs, along with more acrimony in Carson City when it comes to state funding debates. Proponents of Question 1 try making the case that passage will bring more transparency and accountability to NSHE. Their arguments fall flat in my eyes. The Legislature is accountable directly to the voters. The Board of Regents is accountable directly to the voters. I don't see how inserting the Legislature in between the voters and the Board of Regents will enhance accountability and transparency. It also assumes the Legislature has its own infallible record of transparency and accountability that should be superimposed on the Board of Regents.</p>
<p>If elected to the Board of Regents, do you pledge to uphold the principles of academic freedom and tenure as expressed in the AAUP/AACU 1940 Statement of Principles of Academic Freedom and Tenure?</p>	<p>Downs: Yes. This is a core issue for me.</p>	<p>Gwaltney: Yes</p>	<p>Laden: I answer "yes" to this question, but with an asterisk. I think I made my position on academic freedom clear in my answer to [the question on CRT]. My asterisk is because I readily admit I do not fully understand all of the issues involved with tenure. I see its relationship to enabling and advancing academic freedom, and I agree. As a layperson, however, I am also stamped with the impression that tenure</p>

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			<p>may act as an unwitting shield for those who may no longer be performing a valuable service as teacher or researcher. I am absolutely open to enhancing my understanding of this important issue, but, again, I know enough to know I can't take a permanent stand on the question at this time.</p>