



CANDIDATE SPOTLIGHT

MATT LETOURNEAU

DULLES DISTRICT SUPERVISOR

CANDIDATE: **MATT LETOURNEAU**

OFFICE: **BOARD OF SUPERVISORS – DULLES DISTRICT (*Incumbent*)**

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What would you like voters to know about you?

I ran for office because I was a resident in the southern part of Loudoun County and I was frustrated at the time about the lack of progress in the basic functions of government, keeping up with infrastructure, and traffic congestion. I had a background in the U.S. Senate and politics, and I was at the point in my life where I was looking to get involved in the community, so I ran for the Board of Supervisors 12 years ago. At the time I was elected I was the youngest member on the board, and 12 years have flown by.

We have made a lot of progress in the Dulles district and the southern part of the county with road projects that have improved the traffic situation in our area such as widening Route 606, the expansion of Loudoun County Parkway, Braddock Road improvements, as well as bringing amenities that other parts of the county had and we did not (the Dulles South Recreation Center and Senior Center, the Gum Spring Library, and several schools).

When I joined the board in 2011, a lot of things were out of balance. We were not attracting businesses the way we should be and we were not effectively working toward that goal, so I worked hard on improving the economic development department. We now have one of the best economic development departments in the country and our projects have brought thousands of jobs into the county to give people a chance to work where they live.

How long have you lived in Loudoun County?

I moved to Loudoun County in 2006. I am originally from Massachusetts and I went to Catholic University in Washington, DC. While there I interned in the House, Senate, and White House.

One thing that had a big impact on me was that I started my internship at the White House on September 19, 2001, a week after 9/11. I wasn't sure if they were even going to allow interns, but the office I worked in was for the senior advisor to the President, Karl Rove, and our attention was on rebuilding New York City and preparing for the war on terror. As an intern we were limited in what we could do, but for instance I would answer the phone and the New York City Mayor would be on the line asking for federal assistance. It was quite an experience, and I was asked to stay on for the second semester when one of the employees in the office left, so I actually worked almost full time while taking classes. We all understood the threat the country was facing and in the years since perhaps have forgotten what that was like when we were attacked on our own soil and had to take the steps to make sure that never happened again.

I went on to work in the Senate and I lived in Alexandria then, but when I got married, we moved to Loudoun County to start a family. That is when I became more interested in focusing on my community.

In addition to being a supervisor you have a full-time job. What do you do?

I work for the U.S. Chamber of Commerce focusing specifically on energy issues. I believe strongly in a balanced energy policy, and I work on communications around different issues such as the environment, energy and climate change. A lot of folks don't really understand how it all works as far as where the energy comes from when pumping gas or using electricity. From a policy perspective the work I do gets to how all that happens. I see how government helps or hinders the delivery of affordable and reliable energy. Prior to the Chamber, I was Communications Director on the Senate Committee on Energy and Natural Resources. When the gas prices were high in 2006 - 2007, I helped lead the Republican strategy on that issue to highlight the need to produce more domestic energy because we are one of the only countries that limits production of a valuable resource that we have and that we produce more cleanly than countries that we buy from.

Speaking of the environment, what are your thoughts on the solar panels being placed on the Dulles Airport property?

It's a good place to do that. The Metropolitan Washington Airports Authority is excited about it and the Board approved the application from Dominion to build the facility. The solar panels would provide energy for about 37,000 homes or about two data centers.

Of course there are pros and cons to data centers and that is a conversation we are having as a community, but they have been a positive source of revenue, bringing in about \$600 million. Compared to taxes in neighboring counties, Loudoun has lower tax rates. Some data centers were built in areas where they probably shouldn't have been, but that was a result of legacy

zoning and mixing business with residential. Also, there is a strain on the power grid and that is a statewide issue that we work on with Dominion and other providers. That is something that we do need to work on, but this project will help.

You have done a lot during your terms on the BOS. Are there other projects you would like to see?

Southern Loudoun is still having the most growth and there are still road projects that need to be built. It took about 20 years to get the traffic lights off Route 7 and we haven't done that for Route 50 yet. If you don't live in South Riding, Stone Bridge, or even Brambleton, not that many people have a need to come down to this part of the county, so I try to be an advocate for this area. There are multiple supervisors that represent Ashburn and only one that is focused entirely on the southern part of the county, so I've tried to bring our issues to the forefront. The intersection at Loudoun County Parkway and Route 50 is one of the busiest intersections in Loudoun with a high volume of accidents. We are planning to take out traffic lights and add an interchange like we did for Belmont Ridge and Route 7, which is a huge project.

One of the main reasons I'm running again is because we need balance on the Board of Supervisors. We need some folks who will ask questions and really scrutinize the budget, and we can always do things better and more efficiently. I've been concerned about some of the overly political actions that have happened during this term that are outside of our scope, especially with our legislative program which has grown to include a variety of issues that we don't directly impact. We are a county board, and we have plenty to do in Loudoun County and we don't need to take positions on all sorts of divisive national issues. I have said often and repeatedly when we are going beyond our scope as Supervisors.

On that note, a lot of people think the Board of Supervisors controls the school budget. Can you talk about that?

Yes. It is a challenge and there is a lot of frustration in the school system for a variety of reasons including special education, gifted and talented programs, and lowering of academic standards. I have four kids in Loudoun County Public Schools, so I am personally invested in the quality of education. I know there are frustrations but we should also make sure to recognize that there are many great teachers, faculty and administrators at LCPS. What we have seen is a lack of leadership from the previous superintendent who clearly mishandled some cases that are very serious, as well as a divisive School Board that has not worked well together.

From a budget standpoint, you're right that we give an overall amount to the school district. We do not have line-item authority, and while some have suggested that we should cut the

school budget because of various issues, the reality is that we have no control over what the impacts would be and I don't want to punish teachers and students for decisions they didn't make. It is a tough environment for teachers and harder to hire them now than in the past. That doesn't mean there shouldn't be accountability, and every year during the budget process I'm known for asking tough questions and seeking answers on details within the school budget.

Some years, we are not able to "fully fund" the school budget. Schools make a request, but like with other departments we can't always fund everything that is requested. We try to be fair and reasonable and prioritize. For instance, this year we added 36 more field deputies to the patrol division of the Sheriff's Office at his request based on a study that had been done about the function of our Sheriff's Office. It's really important to maintain the safe community we enjoy in Loudoun. They were underfunded, so we made the decision to provide funding to hire more field deputies.

What is your favorite thing about Loudoun County?

There is something for everyone here. We are close to the nation's capital as well as cultural things to do and we are connected by Metro. We are close to a huge international airport, and we have wonderful neighborhoods. If you go 20 minutes west, we have rolling countryside, wineries and breweries, outdoor activities, and the nature is beautiful.

What's the one-word people who know you best would use to describe you?

Thorough. I am someone who tries to do my homework and figure out the right way to do things. I like to understand how things work and make decisions. I can say that I am one of the people on the board to do their homework and focus on what needs to happen.

Any final thoughts?

It is an honor to serve my community at this level because it is closest to the people. I see the impact of decisions that we make. For instance, early in my first term I focused on fire and rescue operations. Station 19 in South Riding was staffed with an ambulance but not a medic with advanced life support (ALS) training. We had a tight budget, but I worked with the staff and my colleagues and got approval to get an ALS unit. During the first week it was stood up, a friend's father was having a serious stroke and was saved by the ALS medic who got him to the hospital in time. He told me that the ALS unit helped improve his chances. It just demonstrates that that decisions we make in local government can have an impact on people's lives and I have never forgotten that lesson.