

Washington State Progressive Caucus Questionnaire

Explanatory Note: Our endorsements (and sometimes donations) are generally made to people running for the state legislature, municipal and county offices, public utility commissioners, etc. If you are running for such an office, you may wonder why we are asking questions about state-wide or national issues. The reason is that local officeholders are tomorrow's senators, representatives and governors. Even if you have nothing of the sort in mind now, you may easily feel differently in a few years. We want to put people into the pipeline from, as Howard Dean once put it, "the Democratic wing of the party." We are old fashioned enough to think that the New Deal and the Great Society were good ideas and modern enough to be up to speed on all the latest organizing methods and apps. If you have reservations about answering any of these questions, please explain why.

Candidate Name: Rhenda Iris Strub

Position Sought: State Representative, District 22, Position 1

Campaign Manager: Joe Hyer

Consultant: Joe Hyer

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Website: www.rhenda.com

Campaign Address: 120 State Ave NE #256, Olympia, WA 98501

Do you request the endorsement of the Progressive Caucus? YES

Labor

Do you support raising state and federal minimum wages? To what level?

Yes, I support raising it to at least \$15/hour with inflation adjusters that actually keep up with the cost of living.

What legislation would you support to make organizing unions easier?

I will support worker privacy laws to keep employers from interfering in union organizing, binding arbitration for all state employees, and bargaining rights for state employees who do not currently have it, such as some higher education employees.

I would oppose every effort by the Freedom Foundation aimed at eroding the power of collective bargaining. This includes bills aimed at eliminating union security clauses, expanding the decertification process and the basis for a religious exemption, prolonging bargaining sessions, prohibiting shop stewards and bargaining committee members from taking paid time off for negotiations, and requiring a taxpayer-funded web portal of collective bargaining agreements.

Education

What is your opinion of high stakes testing? How would you change the way students and teachers are evaluated?

I dislike it intensely. My 10 year old granddaughter was suffering from anxiety for several days last week, unable to sleep through the night, unable to sit still at family meals, all because she felt tremendous pressure to perform on an upcoming standardized test. She is a very responsible child, always wants to do her best and it broke my heart to see what this testing pressure put her through. This is my emotional reaction to high stakes testing: BAD FOR KIDS. My intellectual reaction is it does not really gather the data it is aimed to gather. As a trained

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scientist and engineer, I know that data collected from a test is only as good as the test. If the measuring tool is flawed, the data is unreliable. If there are variables you have not accounted for the data is unreliable. How can we treat a child like a static object which can be weighed and measured for precise data? We cannot and we need to stop trying.

What is your opinion of charter schools?

I oppose charter schools, vouchers, and any effort to privatize public education. Public money is for public education.

Environment

How would you promote development of alternative energy and prevent privatization of natural resources?

By holding strong against attempted revisions to the requirements of I-937 requiring utilities to invest in renewable sources. I support a complete review of B&O tax credits to evaluate the merits of each against standards for energy consumption and job creation.

What are your plans for increasing investments in renewable forms of energy production? What types of renewable energy do you favor most?

I support creation of a state bank modeled after the Bank of North Dakota. When the state invests our tax money in our own bank we can use it to invest in infrastructure for renewable energy. I support solar first as it is the most practical for dense urban areas, then wind, geothermal, ocean energy. Really anything that works I support.

Finance/Taxation

What would you do to facilitate implementation of public banking and monetary reform?

I support a state bank modeled after the Bank of North Dakota.

What solutions do you propose to fix WA State's highly regressive tax system?

I support a personal income tax on high earners, a capital gains tax on receipts over \$25,000, and retooling the B&O tax to shift the burden away from small business. I would lower the sales tax when we have replaced it with progressive taxes.

The cities of Olympia, Lacey and Tumwater make up most of my district. As I write this, I am the only person in this five candidate race who has endorsed the Opportunity for Olympia Initiative to create the first municipal income tax in Washington. It will be a 1.5% tax on household income in excess of \$200,000 (<http://opportunityforolympia.com/endorsements.html>). I am taking a public position on this issue because it is critical that we reform our tax system. The Representative from District 22, a very safe Democratic seat, should be a leader on creating a state income tax. At our first forum in this race, held May 18, 2016 by the Young Democrats of Thurston County, I spoke of my support for an income tax and said I would take on the job of tax reform by speaking around the state in support of it. One of my opponents, the top fundraiser in this race, responded "It is naïve to think that a lone Representative in Olympia can get an income tax passed. You can say that here, but you cannot go to Spokane and say it. We will get

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an income tax when you” (the audience) “go to your friends and neighbors and convince them we should have it. Then the legislature can act.”

That is not leadership. I am the kind of leader needed in the State House of Representatives if we are to advance the cause of justice against regressive taxation. *A seat in District 22 should not be held by a person who will not lead on this critical progressive issue.*

Health Care/Retirement

Explain your position (for or against) Medicare for All (aka single payer health care) in terms of the effect on local citizens, service providers, and government.

I support single payer health care for all. The Affordable Care Act was a start toward the changes we need, but we must continue the work until every American has access to basic healthcare, which is a human right.

What policies do you oppose and what polices would you promote with respect to Social Security and Medicare?

I oppose any attempt to privatize Social Security and Medicare. I support removing the earnings cap on Social Security payments and expanding Medicare for all citizens.

Security/Public Safety

How would you act to stop the militarization of local police forces and establish civilian oversight of law enforcement?

I would prohibit cities in Washington from accepting military equipment donated by the federal government. We do not need tanks patrolling our city streets. I support changing the legal defense available to a police officer who shoots someone in the line of duty from “probable cause” to “imminent harm or threat”.

How would you preserve national security while protecting American’s right to privacy?

Congress should create a Civil Liberties and Privacy Protection Board to review government activity impacting civil liberties and privacy and report back with legal changes needed. We should prohibit non-government agencies from collecting social security numbers (my dentist asked for mine on a health care form, one of my children’s sports leagues asked for theirs on a parent permission form) to better protect us from identity theft.

General

Do you consider yourself a Democrat? Do you consider yourself a progressive? Why?

Yes. I am a progressive Democrat because I believe in social and economic justice, environmental preservation and public education. I am a Lifetime Member of the Thurston County Democratic Party.

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What parts, if any, of the [Washington State Democratic Party Platform](#) (← click link to view) do you disagree with? Why?

I support all of it.

If this is not your first election, what other offices have you run for? If it is your first campaign, what other campaigns (candidate or issue) have you participated in? What did you learn from those campaigns?

I am the only person in this race who has served in public office. I was elected to the Olympia City Council in 2007 and ran unsuccessfully for re-election in 2011. My council dealt with a very divisive zoning issue which was about increasing height limits on the waterfront to accommodate density in the urban core. Every member of that council was either defeated or chose not to run for re-election.

I learned that serving in elected office is very different from campaigning or serving in a senior staff position (which I have also done, I had a presidential appointment in the Clinton administration). Elected officials have to make decisions with constituents arguing passionately on both sides of the issue. People are not shy about telling their elected officials exactly what they think of them. Sometimes it gets personal. Before I was elected I believed that public policy decisions should be made based on what people thought, not on how they feel. The hard truth is people will remember how you made them feel long after they forget what you said or did. It helped me understand why people in politics sometimes say one thing and do another. Speaking the truth and disagreeing with someone can trigger an emotional reaction in them, so some people just avoid the difficult conversations by avoiding the truth. I think I have learned to speak the truth while being mindful of the reaction I might trigger in the listener. I hope so, because I will not become someone who avoids the difficult truth and I want to be effective.

Have you ever been a precinct committee officer or held other Democratic organization offices?

When I lived in South Dakota I was the State Democratic Party Treasurer. Since I moved to Olympia in 2002, I have been very active in my community working to elect progressive candidates, serving the Democratic party in every capacity I could from canvassing to running the Burger Booth (our chief fund raiser) for 3 years, to serving as Vice Chair of Legislative District 22, then Vice Chair of Thurston County Democrats. In all that time, I never met any of my opponents. The other Democrats in this race began attending party functions after announcing their candidacy. I think that speaks to the difference in our priorities. I have been and will remain a part of a team working for progressive values. When you look at this difference between Democratic candidates in this race, please ask yourself: Which one of us is most likely to honor a commitment to expand the progressive movement beyond District 22?

What single issue is the most important motivator for your run for office? What proposals do you have for dealing with it?

I want to work to fix our structural budget deficit. It impacts every area of state government as money has been moved to meet the constitutional requirement to fully fund education. Not only has every account been swept of money to fund education, we are not even close to fulfilling the Supreme Court order to comply. We need more revenue.

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Washington is the most regressive tax state in the nation. Our taxation policy contributes to income inequality and creates the structural budget deficit. Personal income in growing in our state faster than the national average, but that growth is all happening at the top of the income bracket. We need to restructure our tax system so that it keeps up with the changes in the way wealth is growing in our state.

Are there also important secondary issues? Describe your approach to implementing solutions?

Other issues are advancing social justice, protecting the environment and fully funding education.

If you are running in a heavily Republican area, do you have a reasonable chance at winning? If not, how do you plan to use your candidacy to build ongoing connections among local people who share progressive values?

I am not in a Republican District, but there is a well funded more moderate Democrat in my race who has a good chance of winning because she is endorsed and helped by former Governor Christine Gregoire. She ran unsuccessfully in Spokane with the help of many big labor unions based on this side of the state. She was able to leverage those relationships to secure their early endorsements before I entered the race. I have been successful in securing smaller union endorsements and I received the recommendation for sole endorsement from the Thurston Lewis Mason Central Labor Council to the Washington State Labor Council. But that recommendation could not overcome the big union voting block at the weighted vote in Seattle and she received the sole WSLC COPE endorsement.

Win or lose I plan to join your efforts to recruit and train more progressives to move this state toward progressive taxation. I have a passion and a talent for public service and it is unlikely I will give it up after this race.