

Washington State Progressive Caucus Questionnaire

Explanatory Note: The Washington State Progressive Caucus supports candidates 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: Joe McDermott

Position Sought: U.S. Congress, Washington’s 7th Congressional District

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Do you request the endorsement of the Progressive Caucus? Yes!

Labor

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

Very importantly, I support a federal minimum wage set to \$15/hour. As a King County Councilmember I was an early endorser of the city of SeaTac’s and Seattle’s fight for \$15 and believe local governments in Washington should maintain the ability to set an appropriate local wage above the state minimum wage, and would highlight the success of that right as a member of Congress to warn against other preemption efforts around the country. Additionally, I am opposed to and would fight efforts to weaken the minimum wage through proposals around a so-called “tip credit,” training, wages, total compensation and others.

What legislation would you support to make organizing unions easier?

I believe that the right of workers to organize is a fundamental right that must be protected from interference. Employer neutrality and card check recognition are essential to fair union organizing campaigns. As a member of Congress I will continue to support employees’ right to organize and form a union. After my election to the State House but before I was sworn into office, I participated in the picket line at the Seattle Times and a rally at the Seattle P-I. As a legislator, I called upon management at the Vashon Community Care Center to support their employee’s efforts to organize with SEIU in my district. I have sponsored legislation and aggressively fought for the passage of the Home Health Care Worker’s contract. ++And I joined with UNITE HERE Local 8 in their calls to organize at the Hyatt Olive 8 and later joined with them in the call for a boycott of the Olive 8 and Grand Hyatt due to management’s refusal to recognize workers. I am proud to have joined AFT-Washington during my legislative tenure as a part-time instructor at South Seattle Community College. I have continued these and similar activities in support of workers organizing in my time in the Washington Senate and King County Council, including sponsoring legislation barring management from holding “captive audience” meetings.

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Education

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

I know the value of having multiple opportunities to demonstrate one's mastery of content – that's why I sponsored and passed legislation in Olympia to provide alternatives for students to get to graduation, rather than being solely tied to the WASL.

The federal government should be a partner and supporter of state and local work to provide a world class education to all children in the United States. From preparation before kindergarten, to drop out and graduation rates, to test scores, to access to advanced studies that can lead to high wage professions, the educational achievement gap for children of color, immigrants, First Americans and students with disabilities is alarming.

Supporting educator development and programs to increase the diversity of the teaching workforce will help ensure children have professional and effective educators who reflect their own community. Doubling funding for Head Start will enhance this proven program's reach into low income communities so all children can start on the same foot as their wealthier friends. And fully funding Title 1 and IDEA formula grants will divert money directly to schools and communities that need it the most. The role of the federal government supporting local communities with needed and targeted resources to ensure equitable access to education was reaffirmed this past year after 14 years of No Child Left Behind, and I will work to strengthen that role as a member of Congress.

What is your opinion of charter schools?

I have a long history of opposing charter schools here in Washington state. Washington's public education system is woefully underfunded, and the state legislature continues to fail to live up to its constitutional responsibilities for our children. As the son of teachers, the husband of a Washington Education Association (WEA) community college instructor, and former community college educator myself – I understand the power of public education to transform a child's life, help adults retool for the economy of the future and generate an equitable economy. Public schools in the United States aren't just institutions, they are a core national value that we must protect and enhance. As a former Senior Budget Analyst for the Seattle Public Schools and ten year member of the Washington State legislative education committees in the House and Senate I know the impact of federal fiscal constraints on a state and local funding system. I take seriously the role Congress can play in ensuring quality public schools for all Americans, and look forward to working on these issues in the coming years.

In Congress, I will work to ensure the federal government plays strong role to support those schools, communities and children most in need. We must fully fund the Title 1 and IDEA formula grants that don't force communities to compete for help, double the funding for head start to reach so many underserved communities so children get to school prepared to learn and I will continue my track record of working against the spread of charter schools and where they unfortunately exist now, hold them to the same standards we do our public schools.

Environment

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

Our planet is perilously close to a point of no return, thus we must take immediate action locally, nationally, and internationally to reduce our carbon and gas emissions that are accelerating global

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warming and climate change. I worked on these issues when I served in the Legislature and most recently championed efforts at the King County Council to adopt our Strategic Climate Action Plan, about which Earth Day founder Dennis Hayes said, "Your plan is the best that I've seen. It has bold interim and bold final targets, and it proposes policies that would move the county powerfully in the right direction."

We must foster a strong Blue-Green Alliance between labor and the environmental community to modernize our energy infrastructure towards clean and efficient energy and ensure a just transition for workers and communities in carbon-intense industries and regions. From retraining programs for workers with new clean-energy technology and developing the smart grid for our energy infrastructure, to investing in our transportation systems that enhance transit and reduce congestion and pollution, I will push the United States to invest in saving our environment and good jobs.

I am particularly proud of the work I have engaged in as a member of the Sound Transit board to bring light rail and other transit options to the region and proposing a new Sound Transit 3 ballot measure for the November 2016 general election.

We must set clear goals for our country and pass legislation reducing carbon pollution in the United States by at least 28% by 2025 and 80% by 2050 to compliment President Obama's Clean Power Plan.

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

I support extension and expansion of clean energy incentives like the wind production tax credit (PTC) and the solar investment tax credit (ITC). And I support federal legislation that would establish renewable energy requirements for utilities, with the requirements being that 40% of electricity is produced from clean, renewable energy sources like wind, solar and geothermal by 2035.

Finance/Taxation

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

We can take a big step in financial reform by reinstating Glass-Steagall and make banking boring again. I am intrigued by the success of the Bank of North Dakota and proposals for a national public bank and would look forward to supporting such proposals in Congress

How would you restructure the federal taxation system to address the growing problem of income inequality in America?

What is truly needed is a progressive revenue stream that taxes corporations as well as individuals and ensures effective performance measures of any tax breaks, to meet the needs of our communities and build an economy that works for all Americans. We must treating money earned from investments similar to money earned from work so that wealthy American's don't pay lower tax rates than middle-class families, we can implement a small but important financial speculation transactions tax and we can raise new revenue by creating new tax brackets for millionaires and billionaires.

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.

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I see the ACA as an intermediate step like domestic partnership legislation was on the way to marriage equality. We must complete the work of ensuring that every single American has health insurance. I support single-payer legislation such as H.R.676, which proposes a “Medicare for all” model and includes guaranteed coverage of critical services, such as mental health and nutrition. This will go significantly farther towards getting all people covered in our state. Additionally, I support increasing the capacity of relevant agencies to crack down on employers misclassifying or cutting hours to avoid the requirement to provide coverage.

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

We must protect and strengthen these important programs. We should scrap the cap on income subjected to Social Security payroll taxes, which will ensure solvency for generations to come and we should never be means testing this vital program. And I will fight to expand Medicare so that the efficiencies and effectiveness we see serving our seniors can be available to more Americans until we achieve a single payer health care system in this country.

Security/Public Safety

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

I am actively involved in this work in the King County Council, and am proud to be spearheading the development of the Office of Law Enforcement Oversight for King County. We must ensure our police are responsive to and reflective of the communities they serve and I will support efforts in Congress to continue this type of work.

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

As I said at a recent debate, when it comes to an issue between technology and the American Civil Liberties Union, I will be with the ACLU every time. In our day and age, many presume personal privacy is gone. But that must not be the case – it is the fundamental right derived from our Constitution that becomes the tenant for many other specific rights and liberties that have already been discussed in this questionnaire, including the right to an abortion as guaranteed by the Roe v. Wade decision and Lawrence v. Texas addressing the right of consenting adults and in doing so striking down laws criminalizing homosexual sex in 13 states.

In a time of fighting terrorism both at home and abroad, we must keep our families safe while protecting and promoting our values.

General

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

I consider myself a Progressive Democrat because I’ve been delivering real progressive results for the families of Washington state over the past 15 years, both in the state legislation and the King County Council. Throughout my tenure in public service, I have consistently been a leader in working within my caucus and across the aisle to advance progressive legislation in Washington State. This includes improving public education, fighting for marriage equality, expanding transit, increasing environmental protection, combating homelessness, enacting campaign finance reform, and addressing the growing income inequality that is tearing apart our working and middle class. No other candidate in this race has

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delivered on progressive values like I have, and those results have mattered for millions of people here in Washington.

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

I do not disagree with the Washington State Democratic Party Platform.

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 have been on the ballot eight times over the past 15 years of my public service career, running for and winning election for the 34th Legislative District House seat, the 34th Legislative District Senate seat and the 8th County Council District seat.

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

From 1998 to 2000, I was Chair of the 34th District Democrats where I remain an active member and PCO today. From 1995 to 1998 I served on the Executive Committee of the Washington State Democratic Party and as State Committeeman for the 34th District Democrats from 1991 through 1998.

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

I am running for Congress to ensure that middle class Washingtonians continue to have a strong voice in Washington, D.C. That's why repealing the Citizens United decision and preventing dark money from destroying our democracy will be my top priority from my first day in office — so we can finally achieve the progressive results our families need. We must pass a constitutional amendment and ensure states have the support they need to ratify the amendment in the years ahead.

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

I will also make cracking down on gun violence a key priority. As Chair of the Seattle King County Board of Health, I have led efforts to classify and treat gun violence as a public health crisis — resulting in programs that have saved lives and become a model for both state and federal governments. For far too long, politicians in Washington, D.C. have kowtowed to the National Rifle Association. It is past time that we pass tough background checks, ban military-style assault weapons plaguing our communities, and once and for all hold gun manufacturers liable for the over thirty thousand deaths their products cause in our country every year.

Higher education is out of reach for too many Americans, predominantly people of color and immigrants, and preventing these valuable members of our communities, young and old, from accessing our institutions of higher learning due simply to financial obstacles perpetuates the economic inequality that has come to define our economy. We must make community colleges tuition free, and I look forward to working with colleagues in Congress on efforts to make public four year colleges and universities free for students as well. Higher education without debt will unleash the creative power of hard working Americans and build an economy that works for everyone.

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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?

The Democratic performance for the 7th Congressional District is D+28.