

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: Ben Stuckart

Position Sought: U.S. House of Representatives, WA-05

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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?

Yes. While wages are a complicated economic issue, I believe that a \$15 federal minimum wage would provide benefits in many areas. Washington’s minimum wage increase will be good for my district, but it will be undermined to an extent by Idaho’s low wages. A higher federal minimum wage would mitigate those inconsistencies, and put everyone on more level playing field. I was a steadfast supporter of I-1433, and I led Spokane’s move to mandatory Safe and Sick Leave about a year before that. I am especially sensitive to minimum wage issues as they are inextricably linked with minority populations and working mothers. We must provide a way for our marginalized communities to provide for themselves and their families, and a \$15 federal minimum wage would be a good start.

What legislation would you support to make organizing unions easier?

In Congress, I intend to support legislation that preserves and protects unions. As a local elected official, I know firsthand just how important a strong workforce is. As the son of a teacher and a non-profit director, I also know the importance of organizing to achieve progress as a collective whole. I am a staunch supporter of unions, and have always been fortunate to receive strong support from unions as an elected official. It’s because of my deeply held beliefs that I led the effort to build Spokane’s first-ever public works apprenticeship program. Since its passage, that program has been building our skilled workforce, providing workers with new opportunities and training that didn’t exist before, and giving our local unions the chance to recruit and train new members. To date, many unions have already endorsed me, including AFSCME 270, IAFF 29, Building & Trades Council, Boilermakers 242, Ironworkers 14.

Education

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

I am against high stakes testing, as dozens of research studies have now shown that it is not an accurate measurement of individual intelligence, achievement, or capability. I think that our education system needs to be far more innovative and creative in its assessment techniques. Before I ran for elected office, I led Communities in Schools of Spokane County from 2007-2011. My work there taught me so much about the challenges facing our education system, and I became convinced that we need a more creative way to think about student success. I saw incredibly talented and capable students being marginalized by the system's one-size-fits-all approach to assessment. That experience was the catalyst that drove me to run for office, and that drive is still with me today. We must do right by our children, and I intend to fight for their future in Congress. My commitment to education is why the Spokane Education Association has consistently supported my campaigns.

What is your opinion of charter schools?

While some charter schools may be guided by the best of intentions, I oppose charter schools, and will fight for proper investment in our public school system. I believe that our democracy is only as strong as its weakest link, and our public education system is a vital partner in the formation of active, informed citizens. I was educated in Spokane Public Schools, and I consider myself a testament to the power of a quality public education. There will always be a market for private schools in this country, but the government must avoid subsidizing education options that aren't actually options for everyone. We must make education a national priority once again.

Environment

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

I believe that the privatization of natural resources is highway robbery, depriving future generations in exchange for a small short-term gain. In Congress, I would make it a priority to stand against anyone seeking to exploit finite natural resources for their own gain. As I have in the City of Spokane, I will continue to fight back against the powerful big oil and coal lobbies. I will support a tax incentive for alternative energy production, and will fight for smarter mass transportation spending.

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

Climate change has long been a priority issue for me. I will support a carbon tax designed to curb fossil fuel production and incentivize alternative energy sources. I prefer solar and wind power, but being from Eastern Washington I also value hydroelectric power, so long as its negative effects on the environment can be mitigated or avoided. I believe that we need to incentivize alternative forms of energy through tax breaks and attractive financing options, but

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we must also encourage the development of new technologies through innovation and invention. What we cannot do is accept the status quo and continue doing harm to our planet through the consumption of fossil fuels.

Finance/Taxation

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

It's no secret that private banking has driven much of America's current income inequality crisis, and that Wall Street was largely responsible for the Great Recession of 2008. I believe that how we save and spend our money is an expression of our collective values, and for too long those values have clearly been allowing a few to profit over the rest.

I'd love to see Postal Banking become a priority, as I think it could capitalize on existing infrastructure and provide access to millions of rural Americans who have few banking options. I believe that we must implement Dodd-Frank fully. We've seen far too much evidence proving that Reagan's trickle-down economics of deregulation just don't work. I intend to fight for common-sense regulation of the financial sector, and work on making the entire system more transparent and accessible to small investors.

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

I believe we must move to a *progressive* tax system and away from our current *regressive* one. Right now, middle- and low-income Americans are taxed too heavily in proportion to their income, while the top one or two percent of Americans are taxed far too lightly. I will fight to close tax loopholes that enable families to be astronomically wealthy for generation after generation. To borrow a phrase from Senator Sanders, I think that the growth of the "Billionaire Class" is one of the most problematic trends in America over the last few decades.

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 am 100% in support of Medicare for All. I believe that health care is a fundamental human right, and that Americans should all have access. When my wife was diagnosed with Stage 3 breast cancer in 2008, we embarked on a struggle with insurance companies where we had to go to the mat for even the simplest tests and procedures to be covered. That experience opened my eyes to just how broken our for-profit health care system is. The Affordable Care Act was a good start, but the best way to improve patient outcomes and make the entire system more efficient and affordable is to provide universal coverage and back it up with a single payer system.

What policies do you oppose and what policies would you promote with respect to

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Social Security and Medicare?

In Congress I will fight for both Social Security and Medicare. I view them as paid programs, not entitlements. That said, I believe in doing right by the generations of workers who dutifully paid their share. I think we should raise the income cap on Social Security. I believe we must keep both programs 100% public and completely funded, and that will take a lot of work as the Baby Boomer generation ages out of the work force. In Eastern Washington, our Aging and Long Term Care centers tell me they are about to face a crisis of epic proportions with the number of people who will become seniors over the next 25 years. I view these programs as moral imperatives, as they embody my core philosophy that we're all in it together, and that by looking out for each other we create the world we want to live in.

Security/Public Safety

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

In the City of Spokane, I have led efforts to protect citizens from overreach by law enforcement. I believe that communication and transparency are the best tools for preventing unnecessary conflict between civilians and the police. I supported the installation of police body cameras in Spokane, and I will continue to fight for transparency and smart policies for police departments of all sizes. In Spokane, our Police Ombudsman Commission has been an effective tool in establishing civilian oversight. I hope to see similar techniques deployed throughout my district, and will do whatever I can to facilitate that.

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

I believe firmly in the right to privacy, but that right has gradually been eroded with the advancement in technology over the past century. We must stand firm and respect the privacy rights of our citizens. That's why I was particularly disappointed in our Representative when she recently voted to allow Telecom companies to sell our Internet data to the highest bidder. I would unequivocally vote no on such a proposal, and I intend to fight for privacy rights wherever I can.

General

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

I consider myself to be a progressive Democrat.

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

I agree 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

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campaign, what other campaigns (candidate or issue) have you participated in? What did you learn from those campaigns?

I ran for Spokane City Council President in 2011 and 2015, winning both times. In 2015, I increased my share of the vote by over 10 percentage points, to 63%. The biggest thing that I learned from those races was the importance of face-to-face contact with voters. I knocked on over 40,000 doors, and learned something from almost every person I spoke to. I believe in the power of conversation, and I intend to knock on at least 150,000 doors during this election cycle. I am currently holding listening sessions throughout the district, and have had extremely positive feedback from attendees. In order to represent, I must listen.

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

I was a Democratic PCO for four years.

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

I believe that our shrinking middle class is the biggest problem facing Eastern Washington. Smaller cities like Clarkston, Pomeroy, and Newport have skyrocketing poverty rates. We must address this central problem by rebuilding unions, raising the minimum wage, and working with institutions of higher education to improve technology transfer programs that enable us to develop new sustainable industries and create good jobs.

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

Climate change is a crisis that threatens our entire planet. Health Care is eating up a greater share of our GDP than any other industrialized nation. We need to address immigration reform with a path to citizenship. These are all important issues to me.

I have learned much in my 5+ years in the legislative branch. Solutions require listening. Solutions require those affected to be at the table participating in a meaningful way. Solutions require us to have a clear goal in mind. When I led the charge to pass sick leave in Spokane we were fighting the Chamber, the Building Association, the newspaper and the Restaurant Association. We worked for a year with community partners, we held focus groups, we included all those opposed on the working group and we passed an excellent policy in the end. Even though the groups opposed the product they praised our ability to work on issues and have transparency. Many of my supporters for Congress are on board because of how I handled that process. I believe that my track record of implementing solutions to complex problems will carry me to Congress.

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?

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The 5th CD is heavily Republican, but I do have a good chance to win. The district is historically far more moderate than it looks right now, and many of those voters just need to be reminded of that fact. Our current Representative has long since betrayed the best interests of thousands of her constituents, especially with her repeated votes to repeal Obamacare. I plan to be open and forthright about my progressive ideas, and I believe that people will respect and appreciate my honesty. People in the 5th are ready for a change, and I am going to offer that change.