

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: Jeff Sprung

Position Sought: State Auditor

Campaign Manager: Kristina Brown

Consultant: Northwest Passage Consulting

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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. I believe that a living wage is necessary to a healthy economy as well as social and economic justice. I support efforts to increase the minimum wage and have personally pledged to collect signatures on I-1433. I support raising the minimum wage to \$15/hour. I would use the State Auditor's role to ensure that state and local governments have controls in place to ensure that companies doing business with the government comply with our State and local government's minimum wage laws.

What legislation would you support to make organizing unions easier?

N/A to State Auditor position, although I would support collective bargaining by the employees of the State Auditor's Office.

Education

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

While this may not be applicable to the State Auditor's position, as a parent I believe holistic testing is necessary to fully understand children's learning and teacher's effectiveness. I would be interested in your thoughts as to how the State Auditor's office could play a role in affecting this policy.

What is your opinion of charter schools?

N/A to State Auditor's position, although I believe that the severely limited public funds we currently have for our children's education must be devoted to improving our public schools.

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Environment

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

I have two young children, and I'm angry that we're leaving them a world with a worsening climate. I strongly support an aggressive, and progressive, carbon pricing policy that help communities transition to cleaner energy jobs and better health outcomes for kids and families. In 2014, I wrote an article on Crosscut.com on how our property insurance industry is falling short in requiring carbon polluters to internalize the costs they impose on all of us, and laying out a "green insurance plan" for Washington. As a member of the Hanford Challenge's Advisory Board, I'm involved in ensuring that we don't leave the next generation with a toxic nuclear dump in eastern Washington, and that we clean up the Hanford Nuclear Reservation. I plan to continue my advocacy for a green future for our State's children when in public life.

I oppose privatization of government functions. I would consider using the auditing powers of the State Auditor to show that privatization efforts cost the public more in the long run than government management of public resources.

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

N/A to State Auditor's position.

Finance/Taxation

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

I would be interested in exploring the use of the State Auditor's fact-finding authority to examine where other states, such as North Dakota, have succeeded in analogous circumstances. As a lawyer for whistleblowers who has helped to recover of \$750 million back to state and federal governments, in significant part from the big banks, I don't have confidence that the big banks have depositors' best interests in mind. I have sued Bank of America and Countrywide for selling loans to borrowers they knew could not afford them during the run-up to the mortgage crisis. They did this because the loans were backed by federal mortgage insurance, so the banks had no skin in the game. Bank of America acquired Countrywide, and ultimately it was forced to repay \$16.5 billion to the United States because of its fraudulent conduct.

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

The State Auditor's Office has an important role in tax reform, because it can play a critical part in changing voters' attitudes about government. I want to use this office to help restore people's confidence in government. I believe a big contributor to voter apathy is the conservative narrative that government is wasteful and inefficient and fails at whatever it does. This narrative has caused people to lose faith in government and believe that the taxes they pay are a waste of money. We have to play a long-game of changing voters' attitudes about government in order to convince them to support paying the taxes needed to fund government. I have participated in an effort to change people's attitudes about government as a member of the Washington Progress Alliance, which has a working group tackling this problem. This goal is at the foundation of my campaign for State Auditor. As State Auditor, I plan to talk to the public and the media not only about where our state and local agencies have fallen short, but

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also where they have succeeded in bettering our communities. I believe this will help make citizens of Washington not only more engaged but more amenable to funding a vibrant government.

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 a single payer health care system. Much of my law practice has involved trying to make sure corporate ownership of health care providers does not increase risks to patients and costs for the public and patients. For the past 25 years, I have been a lawyer for whistleblowers who team up with the government to return money stolen by companies that are not dealing fairly with the government and taxpayers. In this role, I have helped contain the growth of health care costs by recouping hundreds of millions of dollars wrongfully paid to drug companies and corporate medicine providers by Medicare, Medicaid, and other government-funded insurers.

Examples of my cases include one where a drug company was forced to repay state and federal governments \$762 million for promoting a drug for use on cancer patients that turned out to accelerate the growth of tumor cells. In another case, I represented an employee of one of the largest group purchasing agents for hospitals in the country that was demanding kickbacks from medical equipment suppliers to sell their products to hospitals, and thereby increasing health care prices for the elderly (and Medicare) throughout the country.

In legislative work, I led the coalition in 2012 that achieved passage of the Washington Medicaid Fraud False Claims Act, which recruits whistleblowers to protect our State's \$9 billion investment in Medicaid. Thankfully, this law (which was due to sunset) was extended in the most recent legislative session. In this capacity, I worked closely with the Attorney General's Office, and I am grateful to have received the sole endorsement of Attorney General Bob Ferguson in my race to become State Auditor.

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

As State Auditor, I would continue to be vigilant in ensuring that health care providers and drug companies place patient safety, safe staffing practices, and innovative ways to manage health care costs ahead of corporate profits. I am particularly interested in ensuring that the money we spend on prescription drugs for Medicaid patients – roughly \$1 billion/year – is not paid to pharmaceutical companies that are engaged in price-gouging or unlawful marketing practices.

I support the efforts of Senator Ranker to increase transparency in our drug pricing. We need to understand much better than we currently do the underpinnings of drug pricing. I also think efforts by Senator Habib to cap the prices paid by consumers for deductibles and copays for particularly expensive

I have been interviewed by the website State of Reform on these issues, and the interview is available here: <http://stateofreform.com/news/states/washington/2016/04/jeff-sprung-on-rx-pricing-transparency-and-health-care-whistleblowers/>

Security/Public Safety

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

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I am concerned with local police forces' ease of access to military equipment. I would be interested in learning more about this problem and possibly exploring whether the State Auditor's investigative authority could be used to examine the militarization of local police forces.

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

Washington State received a D+ in the latest State Integrity Investigation by the Center for Public Integrity and Global Integrity. We earned our worst category score, an F, for access to information. Improving government transparency in Washington requires a dedicated effort, and the State Auditor should lead on this issue. While we work to make government operations open to the public, we must scrupulously protect personal privacy in the Internet age. As Governor Inslee has said, we must "improve the security protecting the data the state collects while also building upon our strong tradition of transparency and open government." The State Auditor should work with Governor Inslee's Chief Information Officer to ensure that private information held by our State agencies is secure. The Auditor also should help our local governments, port districts, and other government agencies protect their electronic information from theft and hacking.

General

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

I am a Democrat and a progressive. My parents were persecuted and driven from the country of their birth because of their religion. My family's escape and immigrant legacy led me to become a fighter for people who don't have a voice in the system. My parents were Democrats and the beliefs I formed through my family's history are consistent with the Democratic Party's beliefs. As a lawyer I became an advocate for working people, consumers, and whistleblowers. A core belief for me is that individuals, consumers, and workers need aggressive advocates in dealings with corporations – whether from lawyers like me or unions.

My fight for individual rights also led me to serve as immediate past president of the advocacy arm of Planned Parenthood for our four-state region. I learned during my years with Planned Parenthood Votes that denying women access to reproductive health care and abortion can condemn them to poverty and preclude them from contributing their full abilities to our economy. Our economy grows when our middle class is strong, and when our workers earn a living wage. The trickle-down theory has led to the highest level of income inequality our country has ever seen. Not only is this damaging to our economy, but it denies justice when people are locked in a cycle of poverty because they lack access to reproductive care and abortion, education, health care, equal school discipline, nutrition, etc.

I am a member of the Washington Progress Alliance. In that capacity, I have helped incubate several organizations critically important to the progressive ecosystem in Washington, including the Washington Bus, Win-Win, Fuse, and Honest Elections Seattle.

As I said, as a father of two young children, as a member of the environmental group The Hanford Challenge, and as someone who has publicly advocated progressive carbon pricing policy, I represent the democratic value that is environmental stewardship.

My beliefs align with the principles of the Democratic Party, and I would be honored to receive the endorsement of the Washington State Progressive Caucus.

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

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None.

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 worked on a presidential campaign in 1988 full-time as a young lawyer. Since then, while engaged in a full-time legal practice, I have volunteered during GOTV on every Democratic presidential campaign. These experiences taught me that field work is the most important element of a political campaign.

Have you ever been a precinct committee officer or held other Democratic organization offices?
No.

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

As Auditor, I plan to take on the false Eymann-fueled narrative that government is wasteful and ineffective, by talking not only about where government falls short but where it succeeds in improving our lives and communities. By taking on this myth about government failure, we can start to restore the public's faith in government and justify young people's fantastic hope for the future.

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

I am running for three reasons. First, our current State Auditor faced trial for federal crimes, and I want to use my skills, record, and independence to restore the outstanding reputation the agency deserves. Second, I plan to use my experience as a lawyer for whistleblowers who has recovered over \$750 million stolen government dollars to protect Washington citizens' investment in our government. Third, I want to fulfill the reason we have a State Auditor: to inspire confidence in our government.

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?

My race is statewide, and Washington's population is majority Democratic.