

## **Washington State Progressive Caucus Questionnaire**

**Candidate Name: Pramila Jayapal**

**Position Sought: US House Representative, District 7**

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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 we should have a \$15 minimum wage at the federal level. Higher wages build strong communities and a stronger economy. That's why I played a lead role in the coalition to pass paid sick and safe days in Seattle, and helped organize immigrants for raising the minimum wage. It's also why the Seattle Mayor appointed me to the committee that developed the proposal that successfully raised Seattle's minimum wage to \$15. Then, on my third day in the State Senate, I introduced legislation to increase the statewide minimum wage to \$12. I am a strong supporter of I-1433. In Congress, I will fight to increase the federal minimum wage to ensure all working people earn the wages they deserve, and to ensure that there are no tip penalties that particularly hurt women and workers of color working in service industries.

#### **What legislation would you support to make organizing unions easier?**

I will proudly support legislation to strengthen and support our unions. I support the right of workers to form a union through a card check neutrality agreement, to obtain information regarding unions during orientations and to access employee lists in order to begin organizing efforts. Workers in our country deserve to have their labor respected, to be paid a living wage with benefits and to be treated fairly in the workplace. Unions provide workers with that kind of support and their efforts to work with employers willing to unionize should not be impeded. I also agree with the Third and Fourth Circuit Court rulings that neutrality agreements do not violate anti-corruption laws. The Supreme Court's decision to hear *Unite Here Local 355 v. Martin Mulhall and Mardi Gras Gaming* but to decline to issue a clarifying response to the Circuit Court split is more positive proof that neutrality agreements are a valid labor-organizing tool.

Washington has relatively high wages, reliable safety nets and an excellent standard of living because of the strength of our unions. Any attempt to weaken unions will only ensure a quick race to the bottom. I will help lead the fight to oppose so-called “Right to Work” legislation and other union weakening mechanisms because unions protect workers and the values we all esteem. Paying one’s fair share once there has been a democratic decision to establish a union is fully consistent with our American values. I will proudly support legislation to strengthen and support our unions. My support of Unions is why I’ve also received the endorsement of nearly every labor union that has endorsed in this race, over twenty in total, including the UFCW, UAW, and the sole endorsement of the largest labor union in the state, the Washington State Labor Council, AFL-CIO.

## **Education**

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

I believe that standardized testing is too prevalent in our public schools, and I am against high stakes testing. In the state legislature, I have co-sponsored and voted for legislation to eliminate unnecessary and excessive testing. I served on the Equity and Opportunity Gap Oversight and Accountability Committee, where I led critical conversations about equity in all education policies. I pushed for reforms that take into account the individual student rather than just aggregate data points. We need to stop teaching to the tests, and let teachers do their jobs.

Data and accountability are important, but understanding the context and complexity of each school is important too. Any system of accountability must rely on two-way communication between administration and district leaders and teachers and their union.

I support a more holistic approach to measuring growth within schools, looking at multiple measures that consider multiple factors, including students’ social and emotional skills.

### **What is your opinion of charter schools?**

I oppose charter schools. I believe that Washington State’s public education system should be fully funded. We are still under contempt of court due to the McCleary decision, which is extremely problematic. The issue at the foundation of that decision is more alarming, though. We are not prioritizing the quality education of our children.

As the mother of a graduate of the public school system (from Garfield High School), I recognize how important it is that we fully fund our schools and teachers. Janak, my son, would come home telling me that he needed to bring a ream of paper with him to school, because his teacher was running out and he didn't want her to have to pay out of pocket for more supplies. This should not be the position our educators are in.

Some legislators favor charter schools as an alternative. I disagree. We should not be diverting taxpayer dollars to privatize education, because we don't want to fix our public education system. Many people believe that charter schools are necessary because our public schools are failing. We need to be addressing that issue, rather than rolling the dice on charter schools. If a charter school fails, where do those children go? Back to a failed public school? We must find a solution at the root. We need to pay teachers fairly for the important work that they do, and we must fix failed infrastructure.

My strong support of education is why my campaign has been endorsed by each of the education unions in this race, the WEA, the NEA, and the American Federation of Teachers.

## **Environment**

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

I would stand up to the big oil and coal lobbyists that are preventing us from moving forward when it comes to investing in alternative forms of energy. I would push to eliminate fossil fuel subsidies and take back oil and gas leases on public lands. I would invest in infrastructure and push for transit that actively reduces the carbon footprint, and I will push for tax incentives and affordable financing for alternative energy sources like solar and wind power.

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

The time to act on climate is now. In Congress, I would push for a clean energy economy that invests in alternative energies, like solar and wind power, and put an end to toxic fracking and deepwater drilling that threaten our environment. I would support research and development of next-generation technologies that curb greenhouse gas emissions and improve our health while promoting economic growth and protecting our most vulnerable communities.

Our approach toward this needs to be from two angles. We need to both incentivize investments in renewable energy *and* disincentivize bad actors who continue to cause

harm to our planet. We must curb emissions by passing laws like the carbon tax, so that the big polluters are paying for the damage they are causing. We can then invest in clean energy infrastructure to reduce our reliance on fossil fuels. To achieve buy-in, we must make sure that the movement for climate justice includes everyone, including workers.

Environmentally, I believe that we are at a turning point. We need to be implementing environmental protections to help fight against climate change. However, we need to do this while balancing the rights of our workforce. My political and personal philosophy is that progress can be made when we find points of intersection and common ground.

To accomplish this, we need to pursue things like a carbon tax to make sure that workers aren't the ones footing the bill to pay for the pollution being created. These funds could help fund retraining programs or allow older people in the workforce to get healthcare or retirement funds after their service in the workforce. We can put an emphasis on apprenticeship and training programs within a green economy, but we must make sure that there are good union jobs within this new economy. We also need to make sure that deferred maintenance programs are being worked on. There is a substantial amount of infrastructure that needs to be fixed and maintained, and there are plenty of skilled workers who can take this on. Our transition to a clean economy must be done with workers in mind.

## **Finance/Taxation**

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

We need to push to ensure that all parts of the Dodd-Frank legislation are fully implemented and continue to push back on the deregulation of our banking system. I support going back to Glass-Steagall, which would require commercial and investment banking to be split up. We need to ensure that big banks cannot take us back into a recession with risky practices and that there is proper oversight of their activities.

We must also make sure that people have options when it comes to banking. I support Postal Banking, because it provides millions of people a viable alternative to predatory lenders and payday loans. We need to also ensure that credit unions receive some regulatory relief, so that they can provide competitive services as member-owned, cooperative alternatives to the "too big to fail" banks.

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

We have a great deal of work to do to fix our taxation system. There are many loopholes that benefit the wealthy and corporations, while low-income and middle class Americans are paying much higher tax rates. We need to close loopholes for corporations that send jobs overseas, and increase the taxes on the 1%. Many people feel like they are paying too much in taxes. The reality is that most people are, and it is because our system is skewed to benefit the wealthy, while the burden falls on the rest of us to fill that gap.

## **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 have been a long-time advocate for a “single-payer” model that creates comprehensive coverage for all Americans, including preventive care, long-term care, prescription medications, and mental health services. This model will ensure that fair prices from drug companies and strategic healthcare investments in communities across this country are based on accountability and outcomes, not profits. While the Affordable Care Act has made great improvements to access to health care for most Americans, many are still not covered or are underinsured. In Congress, I will support efforts to streamline our health care system by reducing the overhead and administrative costs that hinder innovation in the healthcare space, cutting the costs of copays, and capping costs of prescription drugs.

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

In Congress, I will work to strengthen Social Security by supporting legislation to lift the income cap on Social Security so that everyone is paying their fair share. In addition, I believe that we need to invest where there is the greatest need and support reducing benefits for high-income earners who have greater financial security and do not often rely on Social Security benefits in retirement. We need to fight efforts to privatize or cut these programs, and instead work to expand them.

In Washington, nearly 20% of the people will be 65 or older by 2030 and by 2060, the population of people who are 85 or older will more than triple. That’s why in the State Senate, I worked with colleagues to fund a study to look at long-term care solutions for Washington’s growing senior population. I’ll continue that work in Congress to ensure we are properly investing in the programs that will take care of America’s seniors for generations to come. I’ll also work to reform the funding formula for Social Security

benefits so that the annual cost of living adjustments are more reflective of senior spending patterns rather than simply inflation.

Social Security and Medicare really represent the best parts of our society. We must continue to take care of each other and invest in the programs that allow us to live dignified lives well past our working years.

## **Security/Public Safety**

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

This is an issue I have been working on for over a decade. I have served on Police Accountability panels, and I co-chaired the Seattle Police Chief Search Committee. We need to ensure our police are subject to the appropriate oversight. I am committed to ensuring that our police force is reflective, responsible and respectful to the communities they are serving. We need to ensure that the policies and practices that I have been a part of in Seattle are established and expanded everywhere.

We must reevaluate Civil Asset Forfeiture laws that allow police to seize property and money, and we need to stop the practice of giving our police forces military-grade vehicles and weapons. Most importantly, we need to rebuild trust between the police and the communities they serve.

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

Citizens deserve the right to privacy. This conversation has become more challenging with technological advancements, but I firmly believe that we must uphold this right. The recent case in San Bernardino challenged many people on this issue, because information contained on the iPhone of the San Bernardino shooter could be valuable for public safety. However, I was glad that Apple stood its ground and did not unlock the phone for the FBI. Our laws have not caught up with technology, so it is important that developers, the public, and lawmakers stand on the side of privacy. We need to continue to develop and invest in lawful technological solutions to address our national security needs.

## **General**

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

Yes to both. 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 State Democratic 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?**

My first campaign was the one in which I ran, successfully, for State Senate in the 37<sup>th</sup> legislative district. During my race for Senate, my volunteers and I knocked on 25,000 doors. We didn't just talk to "likely voters." We talked to *everyone*, and they voted. My campaign for Congress has been and will be an opportunity to do the same thing. We need to expand our democracy and make government relevant to the people again, and having these conversations with people is so important to making that happen. As such, we will be focused on voter contact and outreach. We have 6 organizers who are actively engaging our team of over 1,000 volunteers who have signed up so far. I am a movement builder, and this will be a movement.

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

No. I never thought I'd be someone who ran for office. I've been an activist and organizer on the outside for over 20 years, but after not seeing the change I was hoping to see, I decided that we needed more people from the outside on the inside. We need more movement builders to run for office in order to create the change we hope to see.

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

Inequality, from income inequality to the gender pay gap to the opportunity gap. I'm running for Congress because our system is rigged for corporations and the wealthy, but we can fight back. The time has come to tackle this inequality: we need to raise the minimum wage, expand Social Security and Medicare, and ensure debt-free and tuition-free college for young people across America. With all of these issues, we need to continue to push both from the outside and the inside in order to build a movement to create the political space where progressive policy change can happen.

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

As an immigrant myself, immigration is an issue that is very important to me. In response to the backlash against immigrant communities after 9/11, I created the organization OneAmerica (formerly called Hate Free Zone) to fight back against the civil liberties abuses of the Bush Administration against Arabs, Muslims and South Asians and to protect thousands of people across the country from deportation and illegal detention. As Executive Director for 11 years, I helped organize tens of thousands of diverse immigrants in the fight for immigration reform. I also led efforts to elevate the voices of the immigrant community in Washington state by registering 23,000 New Americans to vote, serving as Vice Chair of the Governor's New Americans Policy Council, and helping to establish the Office of Immigrant and Refugee Affairs in Seattle.

While I served as Executive Director, OneAmerica grew into the largest immigrant advocacy organization in the state and played a key role in passing the 2014 DREAM Act, protecting drivers licenses for all residents regardless of citizenship, and passing a New Americans Executive Order that helped facilitate immigrant integration through citizenship, English Language learning and cross-cultural understanding.

Our immigration policies should reflect our values of human dignity. In Congress, I'll work to establish a federal Office for Immigrant Integration, as well as to pass comprehensive immigration reform. I worked with members of Congress to craft and pass the comprehensive immigration bill through the US Senate with 67 votes. Former Speaker Boehner would not allow it to the Floor of the House. We must pass this bill that will provide a path to citizenship for the 11 million undocumented immigrants who are living in the shadows. We must reunite families, protect immigrant workers on the job, and fully embrace the contributions that immigrants make to our society.

**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 7<sup>th</sup> Congressional District is one of the most liberal in the United States. If elected, I would be in a position to lead in ways other elected leaders are often unwilling or unable to do. I also have plans to use constituency offices in new and unconventional ways -- I want to involve the people of the district to ensure everyone has a voice. The last 25 years of my life have been about building movements -- I wouldn't look at being elected as the end goal, but rather the beginning of a movement where we can create a space for progressive people to come together and lead the way for the rest of the country.

