

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: Joe Nguyen

Position Sought: State Senate 34th LD

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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?

I believe that the minimum wage should be raised automatically to adjust with inflation or COLA. \$15 is a good start but want to ensure regional factors are being taken into consideration when setting the amount.

What legislation would you support to make organizing unions easier?

We can help implement innovative reforms to create new avenues for workers to organize. In fact, I think it is imperative. The dynamic of our economy is changing and solutions to support workers' rights should be able to adjust as well. A third of workers are freelance or part of the 'gig' economy which will grow over-time. These workers will need a way to organize to protect their rights.

According to [national polls](#) the public and especially millennials, are highly supportive of organized labor. What our generation needs but has lacked is stability and economic security. As income inequality gets worse more and more people are looking for help. Naturally, they are turning to Unions who have lead the fight for working families.

Despite high approvals, only about 10% of millennials belong to unions and it's partly because a lot don't know they are available to them. Part of innovative reform should be efforts to raise awareness directly to the next generation of workers to let them know these services are available. One example is what [Unionbase.org](#) is doing to connect millennials with organized labor.

Also, the average worker now goes through 7-10 job transitions throughout their career. New lifetime membership models could be created to help workers stay engaged and provide them with the education, training and skills needed to stay marketable.

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Another avenue for innovation would be to engage small businesses that employ less than 4 people which accounts for 87% of business licenses in Washington State. They would certainly benefit from organizing through access to collective healthcare or other services.

Education

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

We should be encouraging students to learn and grow in an environment that gives them an opportunity to thrive. High stakes or standardized testing is not a positive or equitable solution to supporting our students and teachers.

There are a few ideas but we should consider portfolio-based assessment. The teacher and student collect work to show a student's progress and achievement. We should measure students based on their growth (instead of proficiency) to ensure the system is providing the quality education and care all students deserve.

What is your opinion of charter schools?

Our public schools are underfunded. I'm opposed to anything that takes away funding from quality public education.

Environment

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

I support I-1631 and believe we need to invest in renewable energy. This includes providing job training and resources for green jobs, community education, incentives for energy efficiency and partner with organizations already doing this work.

One of the hardest parts of transitioning to green energy is ensuring workers aren't displaced. We can provide supplemental income and healthcare for workers in industries that are being phased out. We also need to be mindful of creating jobs where workers already live. So there needs to be targeted investments in communities that will be impacted when a fossil fuel plant goes offline.

Privatization of natural resources should be stopped and randomly increasing fees to our parks is a sad attempt to exclude people from enjoying our natural resources. To alleviate economic pressures that might lead to privatization, the state should fund the upkeep and repairs to keep our parks accessible. This will preemptively stop conversations about natural resources becoming privatized.

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

The type of renewable energy depends a lot of what is available in a given area. Solar and wind are great but intermittent and requires large production facilities to meet high demands. Hydro and geothermal are great but not available in most places. Bio can be good but also requires significant processing.

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I had a friend who was making breakthroughs in hydrogen fuel cells with very promising results. I believe the state should fund research and development in many areas so our scientist can advance the field.

Finance/Taxation

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

I 100% support a public bank. The challenges here will be overcoming misconceptions spread by the banking lobbyists. I know Senator Hasegawa has been introducing legislation for years and will look to his guidance for how to proceed.

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

State bank to harvest some of the \$2.2 billion we send to Wall St. each year, review the 664 tax exemptions on the books and sunset those that are no longer necessary, work toward a capital gains and income tax. We should also lower property taxes for households that make under 500k a year and get rid of the B&O tax for small and medium sized businesses.

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.

We need this badly and we need this now. My father was in a car accident when I was younger and the cost of his care decimated our family finances. I know firsthand the hardship associated with a healthcare crisis. Nobody should have to choose between quality care and bankruptcy.

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

Increase the percent of earnings currently going into these services. Also, increase or eliminate the tax cap, currently around \$127k so more funds can go to social security. These are probably the biggest ways to help fund both programs.

Security/Public Safety

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

As a member of the community advisory committee for the office of law enforcement oversight in King County, this is something I care a great deal about. We need programs to recruit diverse candidates into law enforcement so officers reflect the community. This also means we need intentional training and a change in culture internally so officers have the right training given the dynamics of policing today, which is why I support I-940. Along those lines, officers need to be held accountable. I understand and appreciate the tough work officers face on a daily basis, but that doesn't exempt them implicit bias or bad judgement.

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

As citizens we have a right to privacy which goes hand in hand with transparency. Agencies who protect us at minimum should work to educate and build trust with the American people so consumers are in the driver's seat. Also, prevent bulk collection of user data since that isn't effective, and we need to regulate how the tech industry collects and uses our data.

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General

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

Yes. I want progressive tax reform, healthcare for all, state bank and to fully fund education. I care passionately about immigrant/refugee rights and believe we need police accountability.

Progressive is being used loosely now but I am proud to have the endorsements of Senators Hasegawa and Chase.

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

I agree and support the 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 never been an official staff member of a campaign until now, but have volunteered on many. From Senator Cantwell's election while I was in college through pushing for I-940 and I-1631 today.

The biggest thing I've learned about state politics is that mobilizing a small group of people is enough to win elections. This is a relationship driven effort and focusing on people and putting the community first is what all candidates need to do. Also, yard signs are incredibly expensive and ineffective :-)

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

I am a current PCO in the 34th.

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

Representation matters. I believe our leaders need to have the lived experiences and shared values of the people they are trying to represent. Despite having two of the most diverse communities in the 34th, there has never been a person of color ever elected to the House or Senate.

There are a lot of policy issues I care about, but the main reason I want to run is so other young people of color know they belong in leadership and their voices are worthy of being heard.

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

Fully funding education, healthcare for all, tackling affordability issues including mass transit. The only way I see these can be implemented is through progressive tax reform including reviewing the 664 tax exemptions on the books that don't expire, and make sure our state is allocating funds equitably.

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'm in a district that votes 80% for Democrats. It's a safe district, but what that means is whoever leads here has the responsibility to be bold and push for progressive values.

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In addition to the relationships and connections within the party I've devoted a lot of time and resources to connecting with parts of the 34th that doesn't normally get attention. I have literature and walk pieces in Vietnamese and will include other languages as well.

Also, I was born and raised in the White Center and Burien community along with live with my family in West Seattle. These ongoing connections are something I've been building over my lifetime and not just on the campaign. Working in the community and building relationships in White Center and Burien, areas that have been historically neglected, is a lot easier when they are with people I've grown up with.