

Washington State Progressive Caucus Questionnaire 2019

Submission Note: The submission deadline for this questionnaire is 12:01 PM PT, ten days prior to the membership meeting where the candidate's endorsement will be considered. Please refer to the questionnaire deadline and meeting date here: <https://waprogressives.org/endorsements/endorsement-policy-and-timeline/>.

- This questionnaire must be submitted to waprogressives@gmail.com to be considered.

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: Helen Wheatley

Position Sought: Port of Olympia Commissioner, Pos. No. 1

Campaign Manager: Arielle Simmons

Consultant:

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Do you request the endorsement of the Progressive Caucus?

Yes

Questions:

Labor

Do you support raising the minimum wage in your local jurisdiction if state and federal action continues to be stalled? To what level?

Yes. According to the Thurston Regional Planning Council, average rent in the county in 2018 was \$1087. The minimum wage should be at least \$17 an hour to meet the cost of living.

Education

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

Back in the 1990s, when I was a professor at Seattle University specializing in modern world history, I wrote an editorial for the Seattle Post-Intelligencer opposing the imposition of national history standards. Slade Gorton wrote a counter-editorial, and Lynne Cheney chimed in with a letter to the editor. I must have struck a nerve.

I have a child with learning disabilities, and despite access to accommodation, we understand very well the penalizing impact of testing, both for the individual and in how it shapes the school system. At the same time, I personally benefitted as a young person from my ability to test well, which levelled the playing field and gave me access to higher education opportunities that I would otherwise never have dreamt of. If testing were designed

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to, and actually served the purpose of, pointing to schools that are not performing because they are under-resourced -- and if that led to providing more resources to those schools, that would be great. But that is not how testing has been done, and that is not how testing is used.

I believe that we should invest in well-trained teachers, not standards and tests. I also know from personal experience that the narrative evaluation system for students can be powerful, if teachers are afforded the time to do it. As a college teacher, I received regular peer evaluation, and our program was also subject to outside evaluation by an expert panel for accreditation. These approaches to feedback are more time- and labor-intensive, and support experts in education rather than the testing industry, but yield more effective and immediate results if the goal is to actually improve education. At the same time, we must also consider how testing can also sometimes serve the purpose of drawing attention to individual students, or to schools, that are statistical outliers.

Environment

What can be accomplished at the local level to promote development of alternative energy and prevent privatization of natural resources?

One reason I am running to be Commissioner of the Port of Olympia is to be sure that a majority is in place to oppose pressure to use our public port to support extraction and the export of fossil fuels to Asia and the Pacific, such as the recent import through Olympia of ceramic proppants to support fracking – which, on the face of it, had looked like the most lucrative contract our marine terminal had seen in some time.

At the state level, we need to form a caucus of climate-conscious Commissioners who can push back against the immense influence of the fossil fuel industry in the public port system. Ultimately, we need to rethink our global transportation system in order to get to energy sustainability, and that is a conversation that has barely begun for maritime trade. In the very long term, I can imagine that we must switch to much greater reliance on land transportation, using some version of Solutionary Rail. We should encourage a reversal of the current trends toward giantism in ocean shipping, toward smaller ships utilizing renewable energy (sails, wind, solar). Such changes could provide a significant boost for American industry, as well as for smaller, local ports that can't compete with the mega-ports.

Another reason that I am running, is that we need to have a serious conversation about the costs and benefits of subsidized forestry and the role that the Port plays. Olympia grew up as a mill port. There is now not a single sawmill in Thurston County. Does the Port best serve our local forest industry by exporting raw logs? How much does the community benefit from current Port contracts? We need a Commission willing to ask the questions and seek factual and verifiable answers, before we can even begin to have a fruitful community conversation.

Finally, I believe that we need to take a very long-term public benefit perspective on what we do with our shoreline and our streams. It is unfortunate that Washington has a history of privatizing its shorelines and tidelands, in comparison to Oregon and California. This makes the role of public ports that much more critical.

Finance/Taxation

What will you do to support public banking at the local level?

I do not have any specific recommendations on this, but one of my platforms is better integration of the Port with community development, so community banking could be an element.

Health Care/Retirement

Explain your position (for or against) Medicare for All (aka single payer health care) in terms of the

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effect on local citizens, service providers, and government.

I support public health care. I have lived in Australia, where there is national health care. I was also the primary caregiver for my sister, who was an Australian citizen and died of ovarian cancer. She was able to stay in hospital as often, and for as long as, she needed or wanted. There was always a bed available. She also received home nursing care, which included a social worker. She had access to the same doctors as those who paid for private insurance. The main difference was that facilities were more basic, and waits could sometimes be longer. But my sister never faced the potential loss of her home. She was able to die at home. Even as a foreigner, I was told by a social worker that I was eligible for a caregiver stipend from the government.

Security/Public Safety

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

This is related to another reason why I decided to run for Port Commissioner. In the past, Port cargos have caused protest leading to police actions. The first solution is to avoid the provocative cargos, and this is the preferred policy alternative of the City of Olympia and the Olympia police department. The Port commission's position on controversial cargos remains a key campaign issue, however.

When conflict happens, as it did with the occupation of the rail line, the response should be one of communication and transparency. The incumbent attempted to censure the one Commissioner who responded to the situation in this way. That attempted censure in November 2016, described accurately by two members of the public as a "witch hunt" in public comment, was the first key event that caused me to become a core team member on the Bill Fishburn campaign in 2017, and to consider running against the incumbent myself in 2019 even though I have never held elected office.

General

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

Yes, I have been an active Democrat since the 1990s, when I joined at the encouragement of a progressive labor leader. In short, I was a progressive before I was a Democrat, and it has informed my activism within the Party.

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

I see the Platform as a fundamentally progressive document, and it would be great if the Party followed it. I might question some things, like "strengthen the Growth Management Act," mostly on the grounds that while I may agree with the intent, the execution and/or enforcement leave something to be desired and/or there might be a better way, and I might call for stronger measures in some instances, such as the target date for net-zero carbon emissions.

- 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?

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This is my first campaign as a candidate. The most significant relevant campaign for me would be Fishburn in 2017, because I am building directly off of it, and that is a big part of my advantage as a candidate. I see it as a movement campaign, not as an individual campaign.

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

Yes. PCO on and off since thr 1990s. Issues Chair (36th), campaign services, secretary, treasurer.

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

I have addressed that somewhat in previous questions. We need a Port that promotes environmental restoration, a Port that supports the community, a Port that does not waste public dollars and that can help bridge the gaps created by our regressive tax system. Good governance and transparency are key to any solutions. The Port needs to pivot from a central focus on certain business operations, to a focus on economic development of the county as a community, in partnership with other entities including the tribes. The Port is literally in the front line of sea level rise and can set an example for good climate change policies. We urgently need to restore the health of Puget Sound, and for the Port this includes taking a hard and realistic look at legacy pollution as well as the Port's role in supporting infrastructure.

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

The key point with the Port is that it has a three member commission that sets policy and minds the budget. With my election, the Port of Olympia will have a progressive majority. That is critically important as the Port moves forward on overdue strategic planning for the next 20 years. The Port is also an important voice in issues such as restoration of the Deschutes River. It should have a place at the table in a number of county-wide community initiatives now underway, from addressing homelessness to climate change policies.

- 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?

County wide races are Purple races in Thurston County. The margin is razor thin, either way. That is exactly why county races must be approached as movement building.