

Washington State Progressive Caucus Questionnaire 2020

Submission Note: The submission deadline for this questionnaire is 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: Jani Hitchen

Position Sought: Pierce County Council ~ District 6

Campaign Manager: Hiring one, but have not finalized yet.

Consultant: Argo Industries with Jessica Gavre as the point person

Campaign Email: jhitchen@electjanihitchen.com

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Campaign Address: P.O. Box 45457. Tacoma, WA. 98448

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, however it should not be done all at one time. I believe that when the minimum wage makes huge jumps, companies increase prices in a way that is overcompensating for the increased cost. I would also like to look at levels based on age. Youth workers (16-18) are doing part time work, and I hope would not need a living wage job. The reason for raising the minimum wage is that people that are working in positions that are paid the state minimum wage for a full-time job cannot live on that wage. In Pierce County, a gradual increase in minimum wage could be implemented, but at this time I believe that we will be putting all resources towards recovery after the COVID-19 pandemic.

Education

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

As a high school science teacher I have witnessed how high stakes testing has driven the "how" we teach and "what" we teach. High stakes testing is being driven by test writing, scoring and curriculum writing companies. The reason for testing should have always been to assess whether or not students learned the state or national standards, but that is not what it is being used for now. In addition to comparing students to each other, creating arbitrary benchmarks for teachers to reach for, and causing anxiety for students and educators across the state. It costs millions of dollars and wastes hundreds of hours.

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Student evaluation should be based on growth in ALL areas. We need to look at the whole student, where they started and where the end. We need to account for things like their ACES (Adverse Childhood Experiences Score) when it comes to growth, if they have any special needs and any barriers to keep them from being successful. We need to support the process and growth over the school year.

Teacher evaluation should be about the direct work they do in the classroom (or wherever the work is happening). The current teacher evaluation process depends on how each district interprets the rules, and it puts an undue pressure on our first- and second-year teachers. Teachers do not come into the classroom as experts, and must work to grow as educators, just like they want their students to grow.

Environment

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

We need to look at moving our union labor groups towards green energy. I would like Pierce County to explore creating new green energy jobs. The county should be doing everything it can as new construction goes in to require and incentivize easy access to renewable energy such as solar panels and plug-ins for electric cars. When it comes to the privatization of natural resources, this is something that needs to be looked at carefully. If an industry controls a product or resource it can then gouge, it is therefore the job of the local government to make this process difficult and be looking out for ways to protect consumers and the environment.

Finance/Taxation

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

I believe the idea is good and could be implemented, but I am not sure that Pierce County alone is the right place for it, meaning it seems more like a state wide venture. My one concern is our credit unions and how this new banking system might impact those organizations that are able to offer things at the local level.

I think one of the things that having a public banking or state-owned bank might have been able to do is in the current situation, to pause all payments to homes and businesses as an entire group, and then provide relief to local residents. With our current business model of large national banks (chains), they seem to be able to choose which ever rules leave the most money in their hands, no matter the situation in each area. A public banking option would have provided the public here in Washington more control over our own money.

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.

Whether Medicare for all or some other single payer system, our health care system is broken and needs a major overhaul. I believe that healthcare should be provided for all and that those (through unions) that can bargain different levels of care, or individuals that have the funds should have the ability to purchase additional options, but that basic and lifesaving care should be accessible for all.

Our system is controlled by pharmaceutical and insurance companies that are in the business to make money at the cost of the patient. It is not the doctors, nurses or even sometimes the providers, but the people behind the scenes that are putting a person into a computer algorithm to decide if they get the care, get the medicine or get the treatment. There are so many different ways to stream-line processes and make things more affordable for all,

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but first and foremost, giving all access to preventative and emergency health care for all. Your families' future should not be wiped out by a broken leg, or someone getting sick. The healthcare system should be there to work as part of the team to care for and release a healed or healing patient that is ready to go back to the life they had before this happened.

Security/Public Safety

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

I believe that training is one of the best options for the police forces that currently serve our population. One area of concern is work with the mentally ill and youth. Police often are trained one way, and the mentally ill and youth often don't have the understanding of the unfortunate threat that the police can pose. We need to work on training these officers to deal with these groups with non-deadly weapons and de-escalation tactics.

This is where fully funding mental health services in Pierce County would be a great help. The funds could help work with the mentally ill before they become dangerous, it could provide training to the Sheriffs that respond and could hopefully keep the mentally ill out of our jail and prison system. Public safety is important to all, I do not believe that reducing our police force will help this, but instead provide them with the tools to work with the communities they serve with compassion and the skills to manage the many different situations they are put in daily.

General

- Do you consider yourself a Democrat? Do you consider yourself a progressive? Why?
 - Yes I do consider myself a Democrat. I believe that the Democratic Party, though sometimes views are vast, there is a common thread of thinking about the people. We may not agree on the how to get there, but I love the values of thinking about people first, working towards improving the lives and livelihood for all.
 - I consider myself as progressive because I look for new ways of doing things. I look at "the way things have always been done" and see if there is a better way to do it. I plan with the future in mind, and that is why I consider myself a progressive.
- What parts, if any, of the [Washington State Democratic Party Platform](#) (← click link to view) do you disagree with? Why?
 - Though I could not find the one that is being proposed right now for 2020, the current platform as it stands but based on prior years, I believe that the platform speaks for a state that would serve the people well.
- 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?
 - This is my first campaign as a candidate. I have, however, volunteered for several campaigns over the years including Kilduff, Leavitt, Morgan, Heck, Reeves and Schrier. I have also volunteered for several school Levy and Bond issues and education related initiatives. What I learned from all of this is that people love to be heard. They want to share their ideas and thoughts, they want to be part of the process but often are never asked. That voter contact is KEY to winning a race. The more doors you knock, the more calls you make and the more money you make to increase your name getting into the hands and ears of voters is what wins a campaign.

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- Have you ever been a precinct committee officer or held other Democratic organization offices?
 - I am currently and plan to file again for precinct 29-651. I am also on the Executive board of the 29th LD.
- What single issue is the most important motivator for your run for office? What proposals do you have for dealing with it?
 - People need to come first in Pierce County. I believe that the needs of the people NOW and in the future are being pushed aside because it is easier for our current elected officials to get re-elected if they don't make changes. But we need to make changes. The people of the county are not getting their needs met. It is actually the vision statement for our county to build "a vibrant Pierce County where people choose to live, work and raise a family." 40% of our population leave our county to work elsewhere, so making living here better for all should be our top priority. I would like to work with local labor groups to increase our apprenticeship programs, build our re-training work that can be done by local groups and community colleges, and work on transitioning to greener jobs. I believe that if we increase our local work force, the money they spend locally will pay back into the county to improve our community.
- Are there also important secondary issues? Describe your approach to implementing solutions?
 - I would like to see us enter in to the Puget Sound Clean Air agreement, as we should have to begin with.
 - I would like to see us fund the much-needed mental health system in our county through the 1/10th of 1% sales tax. No one likes to talk about increased taxes, but this population needs our help, and in addition, they cost tax payer money when they are not treated either through emergency hospital stays or incarceration.
- 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 live and am running in a district that is changing. I believe that I am running in the most flippable seat on the council. I believe the area that I would be representing is ready for leadership that works with logic and compassion. As a classroom teacher and union member for over 20 years I understand that people are the important part in all of this. I want the people of Pierce County to come first. I want the voice of the county members to be heard. The 6th County District serves the great communities of Anderson & Ketrion Islands, DuPont, JBLM, Lakewood, Parkland and Steilacoom. The communities may not all agree on everything, but I do not believe any of them would argue that the people should not come first. That is what I plan to bring to the council table.