

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: Tarra Simmons

Position Sought: Washington State House of Representatives, LD 23, Pos. 1

Campaign Manager: Erin Phillips

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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?

Absolutely, to the level necessary to ensure ALL workers are able to provide for the basic needs of their families. We made some progress getting Washington State to \$15/hr, but it is not enough considering the rising costs of housing, healthcare, childcare and our regressive tax system.

What legislation would you support to make organizing unions easier?

I am not an expert on this, but I would resist against any right to work legislation and support any legislation that makes it mandatory for certain industries to unionize. I will look to union leaders to tell me how to strengthen our unions.

Education

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

Standardized testing increases racial disparities and we should put an end to these. I would offer a variety of performance based tests including verbal modes of evaluation.

What is your opinion of charter schools?

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They siphon off resources that lead to increased inequities. We need equitable education for EVERY child in a fully funded public education system.

Environment

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

I would incentive the purchasing of electric vehicles, solar panels, and wind mills to ensure they are affordable for our most impacted communities.

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

I hope to develop a program for incarcerated men and women to be paid while learning to manufacture solar panels, and be released to unionized jobs to continue manufacturing solar panels and install them on communities most impacted by poverty.

Finance/Taxation

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

I will support the creation of a public bank and follow the leadership of people like Senator Hasegawa on this.

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

Reduce or eliminate sales tax. Pass capital gains, excessive compensation, close corporate loopholes, and promote a state income tax with working families tax credit.

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 Medicare for All as sponsored by Rep. Jayapal & Senator Sanders. I will continue to work to push for WA state universal healthcare until all people are covered.

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

I oppose any policies that threaten Social Security or Medicare. I support policies that expand both of these safety nets by both increased coverage and decreased age requirements.

Security/Public Safety

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

As a criminal justice reform advocate, I work in an organization with national leaders on these issues. Our office handles inquests, serves on the community police commission in Seattle, and was part of the De-escalate

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campaign. I would work to make these efforts statewide by establishing a council and potentially an Executive Branch office which includes people who have experienced police violence firsthand.

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

I am not an expert in this area. However, I have a lot of reservations about the role of government in obtaining information which can then be used to further our nation's problem with mass incarceration. I would fiercely defend any government intrusion into our homes and personal lives that could be used in prosecutions.

General

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

Yes, I consider myself a Democrat because in this country there are only two viable parties and the Republican party is proud to push a racist platform. However, I do struggle with the big tent of people who consider themselves Democrats, so I am glad that we have differentiating characteristics to be considered Progressives. I consider myself a progressive because I come from an organizing background and value intersectional movement building. I also center racial equity in my values and policies, refuse Corporate PAC money, and push for progressive revenue to strengthen our safety net.

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

I disagree with many portions of the platform. For example, if housing is a human need and a human right; then why are people of color disproportionately and routinely denied housing due to a criminal record and the Democratic platform makes no mention of this? Why are people with felony convictions not included in the voting rights platform? The Washington State Democratic Party has a long ways to go to become progressive, and I want to be involved to keep pushing them.

- 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 worked on several legislative campaigns to pass progressive criminal justice reform. I also volunteered on Senator Emily Randall's campaign in 2018. However, I do not have a lot of experience in political campaigns. Most of my learning has come from my own campaign which I launched in October 2019.

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

Yes, I am currently a PCO and sit on the E-Board for the 23rd LD Dems.

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

Criminal Justice reform. I will work to expand alternatives to incarceration, reduce sentence lengths, and reinvest resources into reentry to drive down recidivism.

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

Investment in behavioral healthcare and early childhood education. We must prevent adverse childhood experiences through prevention and interrupt generational cycles of poverty. I plan to serve on the Finance Committee to champion progressive revenue and tax reform so we no longer have to pit our need for healthcare against education, paid family medical leave, and other racial, economic, environment or social justice needs.

- 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 am in a safe Democratic district or I wouldn't try to run this historical campaign to be the first formerly incarcerated legislator in our state's history (and most likely the nation). I have wide support from elected officials and community. I am the only candidate endorsed by labor. I unionized my campaign and believe I am the first WA State leg race to do so. My race is of national significance and we have raised \$130K without taking a single dollar from Corporations. I am also endorsed by both of the tribes in my district.