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: *Tracy Rushing, MD*
Position Sought: *State Representative, LD-14, pos 1*
Campaign Manager: *Felipe Rodriguez-Flores*
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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 support raising both state and federal minimum wages to a base of $15/hr. There are areas of our state and country that, due to cost of living and other burdens, still require more than this amount, so I believe the minimum wage is simply a starting point for working to ensure a true living wage.

What legislation would you support to make organizing unions easier?
The pandemic has magnified the fine line between essential and expendable, and workers should be empowered with the tools to effectively advocate for themselves. As a start, we need policies and legislation that restrict or eliminate right-to-work laws, that allow litigation against employers for tampering with unionizing efforts, and that oppose Republican plans to create "Covid-waivers", which shield employers from accountability for work environments.

Education

What is your opinion of high stakes testing? How would you change the way students and teachers are evaluated?
High stakes testing implements a reward and punishment scheme that fails both our students and our teachers. While we do require a data-driven approach to education, the purpose should be to identify areas where support should be optimized. Our approach should not result in restricting opportunity or resources. Testing should be utilized as a tool to identify where more resources are needed. It should be

used to identify both where we are falling short and where we are excelling, so that strategies that are working well can be carried across our school districts.

What is your opinion of charter schools?
Although Washington State appears to have been more thoughtful with its approach than many states, I believe charter schools are an effort to bypass dealing with the chronic issues of our public education system. Across the country, they contribute to an unreliable system that potentiates inequality due to poor accountability, inadequate labor practices, and segregation of students by socioeconomic class. They do, however, reflect enthusiasm for a community's involvement in their children's education, and we need to direct this energy to inspire investment in all our children.

Environment

How would you promote development of alternative energy and prevent privatization of natural resources?
Alternative energy is already proving it can pay for itself and grow jobs, although the advancement of policies that support it are helpful for continued uptake and infrastructure investment. Given the variety of forms of alternative energy, each with certain strengths and limitations, perhaps the most fundamental shift is how we invest in our grid and energy storage. If energy storage and distribution become more comprehensive, then we could, for example, allow the supported market to drift towards solar if it's the most efficient total energy producer, rather than worrying about night and cloudy days.
Privatization often gets credit for innovation, but the privatization of natural resources potentiates them being treated as a frank commodity. Living among the Columbia River and Yakima Valley, perhaps the most obvious example is water. When viewed as a privatized commodity, the ways it is used or allocated are different than when we discuss it in terms of a valuable or limited resource, which we depend on for our lives and livelihoods. As seen in the Yakima Basin Integrated Plan, there can be a compromise between these competing demands, but having public ownership and the goal of long term sustainability must be starting points.

What are your plans for increasing investments in renewable forms of energy production? What types of renewable energy do you favor most?
In looking for outside examples, Germany's rapid growth to nearly 50% of energy from renewable sources (and nearly one million jobs in the environmental energy sector) is worth consideration. Subsidization and investments can rapidly increase deployment, and public messaging will be an important tool for facilitating general support for these investments. On the flip-side, we still inadequately message the environmental costs of fossil fuel use and production, and optimizing this would also facilitate more support for renewable sources. In general, I favor renewable energy that is accessible locally, compatible with energy storage, and that has the least secondary environmental impacts. While renewable sources are generally favorable, we must maintain data-driven approaches that recognize secondary impacts (such as ecosystem disruption) and choose our investments thoughtfully.

Finance/Taxation

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

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Public banking, if done thoughtfully, has the potential to right some of the wrongs of the current banking system, and it could facilitate a "public-good" sort of return on investment. The current (often over-leveraged and bailed-out requiring) banking system tends to lend when it shouldn't and tighten up when money is most needed in communities. And it disenfranchises clients, businesses, or organizations that don't fit a specific rubric. I think implementation will be most manageable and successful if initially targeting specific purposes, such as student loans, then building from there as public understanding and support grows.

What solutions do you propose to fix WA State's highly regressive tax system?
To gain support in historically red areas like my district, it is important for voters to be empowered with an alternative choice and incentive. While the goal might be to increase net revenue, an example could be the income/wealth taxes on high earners or capital gains, coupled with a decrease in certain sales tax. For more progressively-minded voters, I think that optimally highlighting the built-in inequalities associated with our current tax system will be most compelling.

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 single payer health care (I think Medicare for All is poor terminology). As a physician, I see that unequal access to healthcare, especially primary care, directly contributes to chronic diseases and mental health issues that start in childhood. Privatized and free-market healthcare ultimately aims for profit, not community health, even when run by theoretical "non-profits". As taxpayers, our government should ensure we all have access to the care and resources to stay as healthy as we can for as long as we can. And this should not be determined by our job, our city, or our socioeconomic status. Having worked and trained in both pediatrics and emergency medicine on multiple continents, there are a couple of truths that continue to echo for me:
- Healthcare is a human right. Communities function better when this is so. It's not only the right thing to do, but it costs less to do so.
- Mental healthcare is important for each of us, and is something we pay for as a society in one way or another. And in broken/poorly funded systems, the fall back options, namely the emergency room and prisons, are the most expensive and least effective.
- Healthcare is only a piece of the puzzle in constructing community's health. My pediatrics training showed me that addressing issues early in life–food security, education funding, physical activity, cycles of poverty & trauma–can be both the right and cost-effective approach to healthier communities.
The pandemic has revealed the cracks in our healthcare system, but we have been given the opportunity to make it better and stronger for the generations to come.

What policies do you oppose and what polices would you promote with respect to Social Security and Medicare?
Generally speaking, I oppose policies that restrict Social Security and Medicare, and I support policies that grow them. That said, I do believe our Medicare system especially requires improvement, as it reflects a hybrid model of government-provided healthcare that in many ways caters to or is deferential to corporate healthcare systems, insurance companies, and the pharmaceutical industry.

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Security/Public Safety

How would you act to stop the militarization of local police forces and establish civilian oversight of law enforcement?
Civilian oversight is necessary for both our police forces and our sheriff departments, and it is needed more consistently than every election cycle. A community's goals and priorities, specified in public measures, should structure expectations and accountability for these groups. Through such measures, a community should be empowered to decide budget allocation, allowable purchases, and allowable tactics. Our law enforcement might truly act as public servants and for public safety with clearer expectations and less reliance on militarized tactics. The trust must be that the purposes of the police and the needs of the community align.

How would you preserve national security while protecting American's right to privacy?
By being specific and transparent. Threats inevitably surface and, even at times of calm, we need to speak in a language like we expect them, like we are practicing for them. So that when they do arise, we can ask from a calm space what the extent is, what specific tools are needed, and what are the possible downsides to using them. We must be surgical in our approach and continuously reevaluate when a tool has outlived its intended purpose.

General

- Do you consider yourself a Democrat? Do you consider yourself a progressive? Why?
  I consider myself primarily a progressive, secondarily a Democrat. I have identified myself as a Democrat since 2008, but my commitment to progressive values, especially related to human rights and environmental stewardship, has been lifelong.

- What parts, if any, of the Washington State Democratic Party Platform (← click link to view) do you disagree with? Why?
  I agree with the 2020 WSDCC Platform and have not identified areas I disagree with.

- 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 and the first I have really participated in. Running for public office was never an aspiration for me until the pandemic. Having cared for many patients who have suffered or died from the same respiratory distress syndrome caused by Covid-19, I was shocked and appalled by Representative Chris Corry's decision to file a frivolous lawsuit against the governor's emergency proclamation. His own county has suffered more than most others on the west coast and, instead of advocating for those workers and families disparately affected – his own constituents and neighbors – he chose a lawsuit and cavalier messaging, which have undoubtedly abetted the spread of disease. When I saw that he (and all of District 14's legislators) remained unopposed on the final filing day, I felt compelled to run. We've tried to teach our kids that when something is broken, we should try to fix it, and I decided I needed to model that.

- Have you ever been a precinct committee officer or held other Democratic organization offices?
  No

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- What single issue is the most important motivator for your run for office? What proposals do you have for dealing with it?
  I feel I understand how to serve my community as a physician, and I'm now learning how to help as a public servant. The pandemic prompted me to enter this race, but its impacts here are bound to the chronic issues in our policies and social system. I believe we have the heart and the strength to make things better. My hope is that my campaign serves to amplify the voices throughout our district working towards a more fair, loving, and just society. For many, Washington is already a wonderful place to live, work, and raise a family. It should be this way for everyone.

- Are there also important secondary issues? Describe your approach to implementing solutions?
  As a mother of three, local ER doctor, and small farmer, I've been witness to the extreme disparities in health, happiness, and opportunity at play in my district. Leaders have the potential to help and the responsibility to try. Our district needs leaders who recognize that our economy is dependent on the well-being of both our people and our environment. I have the perspective and compassion to represent diverse viewpoints across the district, while advocating for policies that protect our people, our businesses, and our planet. I believe our approach must be to love our neighbors as ourselves and grow the gifts we're blessed with by living here. To reject the false choice of environment or economy, and to help our local industries to help us. To unite in curiosity and collaboration to give our children their best possible future.

- 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?
  While my district has a long history of Republican representation, our demographics reflect a diverse and progressive community. I do believe my chance of winning is very good, if voter turnout is optimized. Community outreach and amplifying GOTV efforts are the premise of my campaign, such that all people here are empowered with the ability to speak up and advocate for themselves.