



Kristiana de Leon Urbanist Questionnaire 2024

State Representative LD5, Position 1

Do you think Washington state should have an income tax (yes/no)? If yes, what is the legislative path? If not, what forms of progressive revenue would you champion?

Yes, on the highest earners in this state. Our tax system is ass-backwards, and only Florida's tax system ranks lower in tax fairness.

It's a contributing factor for why we have people sleeping outside in the shadows of Fortune 500 and why our schools are closing (glad you asked this!). We literally can't afford not to have an income tax, and we must "just transition" away from our overreliance on property, gas, and sales taxes.

I expect a difficult path ahead as pushback isn't just coming from conservatives, but from "progressives" who are not close enough to the pain of what it looks like to see a student struggling from a mental health crisis but can't see a counselor, and definitely not serving in a city where we are at risk of losing our fire services because our revenue streams simply can't keep up with our growing city's demand. I'm tired of legislators telling me the municipal version of "I had it rough and I turned out fine - you should too."

So, in 200 words, all I can say is that having served in Black Diamond since 2019, I know tough fights and how to stay in them.

How would you vote on a transit-oriented development bill without an explicit affordability mandate and why?

I'd vote no, just as I am frustrated that HB 1110 allowed for a large loophole to exempt HOA communities from missing middle housing - essentially choking out not just our cities, but also the people who are moving to communities like mine in the search for the unicorn that is affordable housing. We need to show we are



serious about the housing crisis if by closing loopholes that will make any such legislation a performative slide into gentrification 2.0.

For the record here, this kind of legislation is why I have enjoyed aligning my advocacy alongside that of Futurewise and for years, because I believe in building coalitions that intentionally bring along communities like mine. This is how I hope to engage more holistic policy on TOD and all else.

Do you support the rent stabilization and renter protection bill (HB 2114) that made it through the State House last year? If so, how would you approach ensuring its passage in both chambers?

Yes! I supported this last year, including by signing in PRO. I would be in favor of the very modest limits on rent increases that this bill would have made to help renters be able to plan for their immediate futures and keep them housed. This isn't just morally responsible, this is economically prudent: nobody can build a functioning economy on housing insecurity. As a former public school teacher, I worked with students who experienced homelessness because rent increased and they could no longer afford it. Not only was this tragically preventable - especially in a state like ours - but it meant that we paid for the crisis in other ways. Between this bill and Rep Berg's on a working families tax credit (HB 2418) for renters who are, indeed, paying property taxes, we need to ensure that all people - including lower income workers - can be granted the same dignity and stability that people with mortgages already enjoy. I will rely on advocates and stakeholders to continue to lobby and work alongside lawmakers. Storytelling is powerful, as is constant relationship-building in the halls of power that bring more ethos to these reasonable demands.

What are the highest priority items on your housing agenda?



- Transit-oriented development with affordability, while funding transit through training programs through the state and more firm directives to counties/jurisdictions overseeing transit to prioritize transit in urban growth boundaries that are transit deserts, such as mine
- Removing HOA special treatment in HB 1110. I am the Democrat in the race who is not endorsed by the Democrats who voted against HB 1110, and the sole person on my council to write in support of HB 1110 and lobby for it as a volunteer.
- More funding to communities that are experiencing disproportionate levels of growth to current population - especially in terms of filling gaps in social services due to increased strains on demand and not enough revenue to compensate.
- Due to an increasing number of people working more than one job to get by, we should explore how we calculate AMI to factor in this disturbing reality. Similarly, we need to lower the threshold of AMI to more accurately reflect the realities that a growing number of would-be middle class people still can't afford housing.
- Finally passing the Guaranteed Basic Income pilot, and, using evidence from the pilot, implement for a larger scale of Washingtonians.

What's your roadmap to fixing educational inequities in Washington state? How can Washington state comply with its constitutional duties regarding education, especially in light of several school districts including Seattle's contemplating school closures to grapple with deficits?

After seeing constant examples that reflect that our progressive majority's consistent placement of public education on the back burner issue,* it's clear that our constitutional priority is "Paramount in Name Only." As a former burned out public school teacher, fixing educational inequalities is my top priority: it's impossible for me to answer this in 200 words!

If we do not get vocal about our paramount duty and hire education champions to make policies in Olympia, we will continue to see schools close, bleed out overworked school staff, and children go hungry. If even wealthy places in the state



can't fund their schools, then we know it's not a money problem, it's a funding problem.

So, expand capital gains tax, get serious on wealth taxes and a statewide "jump start" tax for education and childcare, move the 60% bond threshold to a simple majority, and just actually listen to education professionals!

*If the bad track record on public education bills not passing isn't enough of an indication, I was directly told by a few sources with the House Democratic Caucus who know that this is my main reason for running, that my priorities are not "in alignment" with House Caucus goals.

What share of the state's transportation budget should be for alternatives to cars, such as transit, biking, and pedestrian infrastructure?

Slight pivot: in terms of *shares of stakeholders,* we are not listening to enough people from rural, suburban, and unincorporated parts of the state, and I'm tired of lawmakers assuming that the Association of Washington Cities speaks for all of us.

From the same conversations regarding my priorities not being "in alignment," I was also told that with my legislative district, we need to focus solely on the Highway 18 project in direct reference to my statements about our crumbling rural bridges and the roads that are the lifeblood of small communities (I'm not opposed - it's that I'm a "yes, and"). Yet, considering that due in large part to gentrification, more communities of color are moving out to communities like mine (welcome!), it is inherently inequitable.

My coalition in this race comes from a growing number of urbanists from around the state, who can vouch for my shared goals in transitioning away from car dependency and who support a holistic approach that will include our rural and suburban communities, including on more bike paths, more transit in more "outlying" areas, more protected bike lanes, more stable ferry lines, more vanpools, and more because urbanism is for all of us.



**Do you support permitting jurisdictions to choose to hold elections in even years?
What other election reforms excite you?**

Yes!!! I have also advocated for ranked choice voting, including in Olympia and with Rep Ramos because of his chairing of the State Government committee.

I believed this was the right thing all along, but considering the dynamics of my own race, I believe in Ranked Choice Voting even more as an additional means of creating productive and healthy dialogue. The current system is overly reliant on existing institutional power continuing to prop up institutional power while spending a lot of money trying to (largely unsuccessfully, as we can see from voter turnout) convince people that these institutions and institutional policymakers are more progressive than they are when it comes down to actual policy.

As a more creative way to encourage more electoral participation, we as a state must invest more in local journalism as an additional way to combat the lack of confidence voters have about what they are/would be voting on. One of the largest threats to our democracy, and that hurts the abilities for smaller city governments to disseminate information, is how local papers are being paywalled and replaced by less reliable outlets.

Also, we need to keep yeeting anything related to Tim Eyman.

Due to the interventions of ballot-initiative-monger Tim Eyman and a state legislature that caved to him even after a lawsuit overturned the measure in 2007, Washington State has a 1% cap on property tax increases, greatly tying the hands of local governments and forcing them to use ballot measures to fund basic services. Do you think this cap should remain? If so, what tools will you give local governments to deal with the [fiscal cliff they're facing?](#)



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Speaking of Tim Eyman! Yes, this 1% cap has been a huge pain in the rear to cities like mine. I can personally attest how much time our city has wasted having to have meeting after meeting about the 1% cap, only gotten worse because, due to burnout, I am coming up on my 9th appointment of new city councilmembers which means we've had to repeat this process and answer the same questions each time. I am frustrated that it was due to Democratic legislators fearing it being an election year (it's always one?!) that this bill failed. As someone who ran and won in a conservative area, then ran unopposed and ran to be held accountable, this is simply immoral politicking. Being bold in standing up for our values engages voters and increases turnout, after all!

I know how to work in tough environments, and/but I can still be sad that this is happening from within my party.

We are also on a financial precipice because of these kinds of policies, and that we are considering a levy lid lift in the City of Black Diamond to *NOT LOSE OUR FIRE SERVICES.* It's the little things in life!