



Melissa Demyan Urbanist Questionnaire 2024

State Representative, LD45, Position 2

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?

Absolutely. Our tax code is upside down. Those that can most afford to pay contribute less than 2% of their income, while those that are barely scraping by contribute as much as 17%. Washington has the most regressive tax code of any state in the US. When machinists in my union pay more as a share of their income than their bosses and the executives that run companies, that's bad for everyone.

As a union organizer, I know what it looks like to have to stand up to powerful special interests, big corporations, and institutions to create lasting and systemic change. I'll bring that experience to advocate for progressive revenue. We need to organize a mass movement, center people most impacted, and create a broad coalition to fight for progressive policy.

Together I believe we can make the case that a tax code which values work and not just wealth is one that will enable the kind of investments in community that benefits everyone. This message can be effective everywhere in Washington, and can create the political will that is necessary for us to pass legislation—which I believe will be upheld by our State Supreme Court.



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

We are facing a housing crisis, and we must build hundreds of thousands of homes in the near future. I want to continue the discussion on including some form of an affordability mandate, because if we do not ensure some safeguards, families will continue to be forced from their homes and our homelessness crisis will ultimately worsen. The specifics of any such mandate matter, because we don't want a scenario where building is no longer a feasible investment for developers.

Everyday, I work with colleagues, friends, and family that are struggling to keep food on the table and a roof over their heads. Even with a union job that has good pay and benefits, my family is not able to afford to buy a home and rentals are few and far between. For so many members of our community things are much worse.

Transit-oriented development is critical, and in the current landscape, we aren't building enough homes in all neighborhoods. My concern is that without any kind of affordability mandate we will see a continuation of gentrification, people on fixed incomes forced from their communities, and seniors that can't age in place with their families.

Passing a TOD bill is one of my top priorities and I believe we can be creative in accomplishing this without worsening displacement, and ensuring our investments truly benefit working families.

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?



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I fully support the Rent Stabilization & Renter Protections in HB2114. This legislation is essential for mitigating the rapid increase in rental costs and providing much-needed stability for renters like my husband and I across Washington State.

I know firsthand how to bring people from opposite sides of the table together. In union negotiations, we don't make proposals to "screw" the company. We're negotiating to ensure workers' needs are met because it's proven that companies with a satisfied workforce do better. We first must listen and understand needs and concerns on both sides, and that is what I intend to do. My goal is to ensure this bill passes, and that involves meeting with legislators who are opposed and hearing their issues, identifying common ground, and making the argument that this bill is good economics for their districts and the state (because it is). I am skilled at coalition building and will engage the community so legislators will hear from stakeholders and their constituents, for whom this bill would benefit the most.

Despite previous setbacks, I am confident that with an organizer in Olympia, rent stabilization will become a reality in Washington State.

What are the highest priority items on your housing agenda?

My housing agenda focuses on several high-priority items to ensure that all residents have access to safe, affordable, and stable housing.

I will advocate and work towards rent stabilization and support enhanced renter protections. Our communities will benefit from transit oriented development including increased density around transit hubs. This goes hand in hand with my



belief that we need more sustainable and green building practices. Lastly, I will support low income housing initiatives that will protect our most vulnerable.

We can accomplish these priorities with innovative housing solutions including promoting the creation and expansion of community land trusts and ADUs. We need comprehensive planning and coordination including data driven policy making and a regional housing strategy that works with local government and community organizations to make sure these changes create positive tangible housing solutions. Having worked as an organizer for most of my professional life, I am equipped to use my problem solving skills to employ pragmatic solutions to address the housing crisis we are experiencing in Washington.

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?

Addressing educational inequities in Washington State requires a bold and comprehensive approach. The McCleary ruling was a significant step forward in recognizing the state's obligation to amply fund public education, however it did not fully resolve the chronic underfunding and systemic inequities that plague our schools.

My roadmap to fixing this includes implementing progressive revenue measures including a wealth tax, closing corporate tax loopholes, expanding the capital gains tax, and reforming the funding formulas especially for special education. This would allow for reducing class sizes and modernizing facilities.



Other inequities that need to be prioritized include expanding Early Childhood Education, support services for low-income and vulnerable students, and promoting apprenticeship and career training programs. Moving forward, I plan to involve educators and community members to address culturally responsive curriculum, inclusive education, and implementation of restorative justice models.

We need bigger, bolder solutions to fully meet our constitutional obligation to amply fund public education—the status quo just isn't cutting it.

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

I believe it is pertinent that we significantly increase the share of the state's transportation budget dedicated to other forms of transportation, such as transit including ferries, rail, biking, and pedestrian infrastructure. Specifically, I advocate for allocating at least 40% of the transportation budget to these alternatives.

Budgets are a statement of values, and by looking to the future, investing in transit-oriented development and a well funded and integrated transportation network, we can create a better future for our children and a cleaner, more efficient society for us all. We need to prioritize sustainable transportation options, which will ultimately promote public health by reducing pollution and increasing physical activity. Additionally, this creates a more inclusive society and allows for more economic mobility. A decrease in vehicle traffic creates safer streets and a more livable community. To achieve these goals I will prioritize funding for public transit projects, support safe routes to schools and develop comprehensive bike and pedestrian networks. Lastly, I will seek federal grants and partnerships with private



entities as this should be a community effort as we move forward into a more sustainable future.

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

Yes, I support permitting jurisdictions to choose to hold elections in even years. This reform can significantly increase voter turnout by aligning local elections with higher-profile state and federal elections, making it more convenient and likely for citizens to participate in the electoral process. Increased turnout ensures that elected officials more accurately represent the will of the people, thereby strengthening our democracy.

In addition to supporting even-year elections, several other election reforms excite me including: ranked-choice voting which will allow voters to rank candidates in order of preference thus ensuring that elected officials have broader support from the electorate, making election day a state holiday which would allow citizens with time and opportunity to participate in the voting process, investing in voter education programs to ensure voters are well-informed about issues and candidates, implementing robust campaign finance reform in order to reduce the influence of money in politics, and ensuring all polling locations are accessible and provide language assistance.

By supporting these election reforms, we can create a more inclusive, fair, and representative electoral system that empowers all citizens to participate in our democracy and one that truly reflects the diverse voices and interests of the people it serves.



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](#)?

No, I do not believe the 1% cap on property tax increases should remain. This restrictive cap has limited the ability of local governments to fund essential services such as education, public safety, infrastructure, and social services. It forces communities to rely on ballot measures and levies, which can perpetuate inequality and create instability in local funding. To address this crisis, we need to implement inflation based adjustments to ensure that property tax revenues keep pace with the rising costs without placing an undue burden on taxpayers. Additionally, we should diversify revenue sources including local option taxes and impact fees. We must create public-private partnerships and work out revenue sharing solutions, solving these problems together while encouraging enhanced fiscal management including efficiency audits and prioritizing long term financial planning at a local level.

By adjusting the restrictive property tax cap and providing local governments with a diverse toolkit of revenue options, we can empower them to adequately fund essential services and address the fiscal challenges they face. These reforms will promote fiscal stability, equity, and sustainability, ensuring that all communities in Washington State can thrive.