

2022 MIDTERM ELECTIONS

MEET THE CANDIDATES

10 questions. 10 candidates.

Here's what they said.

Compiled and edited by Heather Lea

Business Pulse is committed to ensuring voters have the information they need to successfully participate in every election. Whether it's local, state or federal, every election is important to ensuring our laws and policies reflect the values and beliefs of our communities.

These questions will help hold officials accountable by encouraging those who run for any office to articulate a clear, actionable vision to meet the needs of all of us in Whatcom County.



All candidate responses to our questions came directly from the candidates and have been edited for grammar and clarity when needed. Debra Lekanoff (D), running unopposed for 40th District House Position 1, declined to submit answers. Business Pulse does not support or oppose any candidates or parties.



Rick Larsen (D)

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What are your thoughts on how to address climate change? If you think it needs additional resources and focus by the federal government (and Congress), is increasing prices/taxes justified to address climate change?

Climate change is real, caused by human activity, and is a threat to public health, the environment and national security. Protecting Washington's beautiful surroundings is one of my top priorities. In August, I supported the largest investment to combat climate change in U.S. history — an investment that will reduce carbon emissions by roughly 40%. The historic bill dedicates \$2.6 billion to conserve and restore coastal habitats around Puget Sound and other marine ecosystems.

Additionally, I helped write and pass a bold, long-term investment to build a cleaner and greener transportation network and combat climate change. Thanks to that law, the Whatcom Transportation Authority has already been awarded critical funding to replace eight of its aging diesel buses with eight fully electric buses. This will help pull carbon out of local public transit, save WTA money on maintenance costs and ensure residents have reliable transportation.

Where would you place Whatcom County's agriculture sector and agriculture in general in your list of key issues? What do you believe is the biggest challenge facing agriculture in our region?

Agriculture and family farms are an important part of the economy and character of Whatcom County. In fact, there are more than 1,700 farms in Whatcom County growing the best red raspberries, blueberries and potatoes and producing the best dairy and beef in the state.

The sector faces several challenges. At the Northwest Washington Fair in Lynden, I heard from farmers how a lack of reliable broadband internet hampers their ability to farm in rural areas. I have seen firsthand how devastating flooding has impacted local farms and communities.

I will continue championing strong provisions for agriculture in free trade deals and encouraging the inclusion of

provisions to loosen limits for U.S. exports abroad so that Whatcom County farmers can continue to feed the world.

Crime has become a major issue, as the frequency and severity of both seem to be on the rise — not just in cities, but just about everywhere in the 2nd District. Beside the catastrophic impacts on individual citizens, we're now seeing businesses such as Starbucks, Amazon and others closing locations due to crime. How do you see this impacting the business community in Whatcom County and the 2nd District, and what changes would you support to help improve the situation?

As a member of Congress, I take community safety seriously. Whatcom County is an attractive place to raise a family, go to school, work and grow a business. I want to make sure it remains that way.

We need to listen to community members and law enforcement to make smart investments in proven methods, like community-based policing initiatives, to further reduce and prevent crime. Congress must increase funding for Byrne-JAG grants, which help support regional drug task forces and other local and state law enforcement needs. I also support funding to help local law enforcement hire more deputies and officers to fight crime and keep communities safe.

I will continue to push back against Republicans who want to defund the FBI and disrupt the important work these women and men are doing to protect communities. I will also continue to support legislation to increase police accountability, improve the culture of law enforcement and build trust between law enforcement and local communities.

What will the impact of the recently passed Inflation Reduction Act of 2022 be on citizens and businesses in Whatcom County and the 2nd District? Are there policies that Congress can address that either have or will exacerbate inflation and its toll on business? What might be done from a policy standpoint to alleviate the pressures every business is feeling right now?

As someone who grew up in Arlington in the 1970s, I understand how inflation hit families in the wallet then just as it hits family wallets today. I have supported legislation to lower Northwest Washington costs to all families. I recently supported legislation that lowers the cost of health care and prescription drugs for working families and seniors. That same legislation makes targeted investments to reduce energy costs and combat climate change. I have also backed a bill to crack down on unfair shipping fees that have driven up costs for consumers and businesses.

Thanks to these actions, the economy is no longer on the

mend, it is on the move. According to 126 leading economists, this legislation, which cuts the deficit by \$300 billion, “will fight inflation and lower costs for American families while setting the stage for strong, stable and broadly shared long-term economic growth.”

What would you do (or what can Congress do) to provide a measure of permanent relief for the high gas prices that citizens and businesses continue to experience?

I recognize that gas prices were inching up before Putin’s unprovoked and unjustified attack on Ukraine in February. Thanks to Putin’s price hike, consumers and businesses in Whatcom County, and around the world, have faced a spike in gas prices. In June, Washington state saw the average price of regular gas peak at \$5.53, according to AAA. People are feeling the benefit of efforts by Congress and the administration to alleviate the burden at the pump, including the release of more than 90 million barrels of petroleum from the Strategic Petroleum Reserve this year. As of Aug. 19, the price of regular gas is down an average of 45 cents per gallon in the last month in the Bellingham area, according to AAA.

Gas prices are coming down, but we cannot stop there. I will continue to support meaningful actions to relieve the financial burden on consumers while also pushing to reduce U.S. reliance on fossil fuel and invest in affordable clean energy alternatives.

Do you believe the federal government budget should be expanded, kept the same or shrunk? Please give concrete examples of where you would increase or decrease spending.

My priority for this year’s budget is to ensure families get the relief they need and invest in local priorities. This year’s budget makes those critical investments while improving health care for veterans, supporting Northwest Washington specialty crop producers, protecting the environment and more.

I recently supported legislation that reduces the federal deficit by approximately \$300 billion while making prescription drugs and health care more affordable for working families and seniors, reducing energy costs and ensuring corporations and the wealthiest pay their fair share.

Some have suggested that Congress withhold funds from local police departments that have drastically cut/defunded their police departments and/or make them legally liable for personal and property damage. Please tell us your view on the role, funding and value of the various police forces in the 2nd District.

The women and men who serve in law enforcement play a vital role in keeping 2nd District communities safe. I regularly meet with law enforcement and stakeholders to understand the needs of individual communities and how Congress can support ongoing efforts to reduce and prevent crime. This year’s budget increases funding for Byrne-JAG

grants, which local law enforcement agencies use for a broad range of activities to combat crime. I also support COPS grants that enable local law enforcement agencies to hire more deputies and officers.

With input from the 2nd District community, elected officials and stakeholders, I supported legislation to increase police accountability, improve the culture of law enforcement and build trust between law enforcement and local communities. I will continue to push back against Republicans who want to defund the FBI and disrupt the important work these women and men do to protect communities.

What do you think has caused the dramatic increase in homelessness across the country and in cities (like Bellingham) in the 2nd District over the past few years and, specifically, how you would propose that Congress assist state and local governments in your district to address the issue?

It is clear from my conversations with residents, stakeholders and local officials that there is not enough workforce housing in Northwest Washington. Region-wide barriers include low vacancy and a deteriorating housing supply. Wages have not kept pace with the rising cost of housing.

I will continue to champion solutions that local leaders and stakeholders identify as critical to tackling the housing crisis — solutions like strengthening and expanding the Low-Income Housing Tax Credit to build more than half a million affordable housing units in the next decade; investing in Community Development Block Grants; addressing the labor shortage by incentivizing career and technical education in middle and high school; and investing in the HUD-VASH program, which assists veterans experiencing homelessness.

What is the best way to lower the cost of health care and health insurance? Do you think that a government-run, socialized medical system similar to what is in Canada and some European countries is the answer to addressing rising costs?

Ensuring access to high quality, affordable health care is essential for people in Northwest Washington and across the country. Throughout my time in Congress, I have advocated for funding for critical access hospitals; better health services for veterans, seniors and people with pre-existing conditions; and health care that fits working families’ budgets.

The Affordable Care Act has helped thousands of Washington families access quality health care. Thanks to the ACA, Washington state has seen its uninsured population decrease from 13.9% in 2012 to 5.2% in June 2021, while ensuring 3 million Washingtonians with pre-existing conditions can access health coverage.

I do not support a government-run, socialized medical system like what is in Canada and some European countries. I do strongly support universal health cover-

age. I believe the best way to provide universal health care is to protect the ACA and expand coverage by adding a public option to drive marketplace competition. I recently supported legislation that lowers prescription drug and health care costs for seniors and working families by enabling Medicare to directly negotiate the price of pre-

scription drugs, capping out-of-pocket prescription drug costs at \$2,000 per year for Medicare beneficiaries and extending for three years the ACA tax credits that enabled 11,000 more people in the 2nd District and 95,000 people statewide to newly enroll in affordable health insurance plans. ■



US CONGRESS DISTRICT 2



Dan Matthews (R)

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What are your thoughts on how to address climate change? If you think it needs additional resources and focus by the federal government (and Congress), is increasing prices/taxes justified to address climate change?

While climate change may be a fact of life here on Earth, I propose bringing “climate change” of a different sort to Washington, D.C. The polarization and division of our society is reflected in our government and political discourse. If we are to adequately accomplish anything, we need to return civility and statesmanship to the train wreck in Washington. From the dark money and rancor on Capitol Hill to the demonization of the other party at every turn, this all has to stop. “Enough” is what I hear from the people of the 2nd Congressional District — my neighbors and friends and the people I hope to represent. We don’t need to “throw out the baby with the bath water,” we need a science-based (and I don’t mean political science) and adult conversation about all the issues before us today, not just the weather. Science is never “settled,” and anyone who says it is is making a political statement. What is “settled” is how out-of-touch and compromised all politicians seem to become as they get swallowed up in the money and power of the political “swamp.” People — the ones we are there to “represent” — have been forgotten. The economic, social and real-world impact — usually damage — that is visited on families has been ignored. Instead, we are getting officials and politicians prone to dictate and determine for

us the direction of our lives. So, no, increasing the cost of living or making our nation energy dependent — when we could be energy independent — is neither warranted nor justifiable. It is time to return to reality and honesty in our discourse and decisions.

Is increasing prices/taxes justified to address climate change?

No. Environmental activism needs to be tempered with real science and the very real impacts on the economy, and people, of overreaching legislation and excessive taxation, especially on gas. An indefinite rollback and freezing of gas taxes would be warranted, given the current state of the economy, the excess funds in the state budget and the beneficial effects of freezing gas taxes on gas prices. The price of gas is a major aspect of consumer spending and living costs. Government needs to stop being part of the problem and become part of the solution. Cost-benefit analyses of current and proposed measures should always be a factor in their enactment — whether at the state or national level.

Where would you place Whatcom County's agriculture sector and agriculture in general in your list of key issues? What do you believe is the biggest challenge facing agriculture in our region?

Agriculture and related issues are a key element in the economy of the 2nd Congressional District and of Washington state, as well as Whatcom County. I aim to be continuously involved in advocating for the agriculture industry should I be elected and go to Washington, D.C. Requesting appointment to the most relevant congressional committees would be a first step in my advocacy and effectiveness.

Perhaps the biggest challenge facing agriculture in Whatcom County and Washington state is “whether.” That is, whether the state (or the federal government) can stop overregulating and “managing” the ag industry — almost always to its detriment! Water rights should not be such a debatable and difficult issue — but it is, because the state and local bureaucrats want to dictate extreme and unus-

tainable rules, regulations and burdens on the ag industry that threaten its very survival. The water rights issue is at the top.

Crime has become a major issue, as the frequency and severity of both seem to be on the rise — not just in cities, but just about everywhere in the 2nd District. Beside the catastrophic impacts on individual citizens, we're now seeing businesses such as Starbucks, Amazon and others closing locations due to crime. How do you see this impacting the business community in Whatcom County and the 2nd District, and what changes would you support to help improve the situation?

This has an incredible and disastrous impact on both the citizens and businesses of Whatcom County — both the short-term and long-term impact cannot be overstated:

- makes this a less attractive place to live;
- increases the tax burden;
- major economic and social impacts; and
- encourages crime and lawlessness — a “death spiral.”

Solutions:

- Enforce existing laws.
- Support law enforcement in the conduct of their duties.
- Fully fund our police!

Action: I will propose a National Police Protection Act instituting qualified immunity protection for all law enforcement personnel and increasing the penalties for crimes against police. “Make crime illegal again!” Let prosecutors know (through legislation, if necessary) that crimes will be properly prosecuted and laws enforced.

What will the impact of the recently passed Inflation Reduction Act of 2022 be on citizens and businesses in Whatcom County and the 2nd District? Are there policies that Congress can address that either have or will exacerbate inflation and its toll on business? What might be done from a policy standpoint to alleviate the pressures every business is feeling right now?

Stop the minimum wage cycle and other job-killing initiatives.

No more government mandates.

As stated above in response to the first question:

An indefinite rollback and freezing of gas taxes would be warranted, given the current state of the economy, the excess funds in the state budget and the beneficial effects of freezing gas taxes on gas prices. The price of gas is a major aspect of consumer spending and living costs. Government needs to stop being part of the problem and become part of the solution. Cost-benefit analyses of current and proposed measures should always be a factor in their enactment.

What would you do (or what can Congress do) to provide a measure of permanent relief for the high gas prices that citizens and businesses continue to experience?

Restore our energy independence — which would mean, remove the party that has determined that this is not necessary and electing representatives who see this as a national priority. The solution is obvious: You do not return to power the ones who got you into the current mess! If they see climate change as an existential threat and find it useful to manipulate the market and public policy in such a way to “drive” us to our knees and into their Green New Deal, they should recognize that the public has paid the price for their intentional manipulation and arrogance and will vote accordingly. They have become the real existential threat — to our economy, to stability, to world peace itself — and the public will remember and respond.

As stated above, in response to the first question: An indefinite rollback and freezing of gas taxes would be warranted, given the current state of the economy, the excess funds in the state budget and the beneficial effects of freezing gas taxes on gas prices. The price of gas is a major aspect of consumer spending and living costs. Government needs to stop being part of the problem and become part of the solution. Cost-benefit analyses of current and proposed measures should always be a factor in their enactment.

Do you believe the federal government budget should be expanded, kept the same or shrunk? Please give concrete examples of where you would increase or decrease spending.

Government expansion invariably means a diminishment of our liberty and freedoms. History has proven this. The federal budget is out of control. A continuing resolution only kicks the can down the road. We need fiscal discipline and management across the board. Consideration of the elimination of unnecessary federal departments would be a start for tightening our fiscal belt. Start with the Department of Education. For every dollar that goes to Washington, D.C., for education, 78 cents remain in Washington — never being returned to the states. Let's leave that money in the states to administer and distribute and thereby save untold billions of taxpayer funds. “That government is best which governs least!”

I will propose immediately defunding and eliminating the positions of 87,000 armed federal IRS agents as unnecessary and threatening to the American public. Weaponizing government against the people is un-American and against the very Constitution I am sworn to uphold.

Indeed, we should begin the process of examining every federal agency and department for streamlining and/or eliminating — just like any good business would do to cut costs.

We must also begin the process of heading toward a balanced budget through cost reduction and management principles. The fact that this goal seems unattainable says how important it is to begin.

Some have suggested that Congress withhold funds from local police departments that have drastically cut/defunded their police departments and/or make them legally liable for personal and property damage. Please tell us your view on the role, funding and value of the various police forces in the 2nd District.

“Make crime illegal again!” Let prosecutors and states know (through legislation, if necessary) that crimes must be properly prosecuted and laws enforced.

Somewhat back to Question 3: Support law enforcement in the conduct of their duties. Fully fund our police! Public safety must always be a top priority of government at every level.

Action: I will propose a National Police Protection Act instituting qualified immunity protection for all law enforcement personnel and increasing the penalties for crimes against police.

What do you think has caused the dramatic increase in homelessness across the country and in cities (like Bellingham) in the 2nd District over the past few years and, specifically, how you would propose that Congress assist state and local governments in your district to address the issue?

Too many progressive cities — that is, run by progressive Democrats — clearly seem to have gone beyond merely tolerating homelessness, drug dealing and crime to actively enabling them. We no longer say “no” to dysfunctional and destructive behavior. The underlying problem isn’t a lack of housing or money for social programs. The real problem is an ideology that designates some people, by identity or experience, as victims entitled to destructive behaviors. The result is an undermining of the values that make cities, and civilization itself, possible. We must return to cities that are compassionate, caring, peaceful centers of a society. We have forgotten our humanity on the altar of politically correct but misguided ideology. We need to humanely and wisely address these social and human issues through enforcement, intervention, redirection and reinforcement of acceptable behavior.

If Congress should get involved, it should be to reward those cities that are actually doing these constructive things

and not enabling the destructive behaviors of this day. Leaving these issues for the states leaves accountability to local elected officials rather than a bailout from the feds.

What is the best way to lower the cost of health care and health insurance? Do you think that a government-run, socialized medical system similar to what is in Canada and some European countries is the answer to addressing rising costs?

Government is never the most efficient or preferable answer to solving a problem. Imposing a single-payer, socialized health care system is not the answer to reducing costs and improving health care. The best example of this is the VA (Veterans Affairs) — government-run health care provided to veterans — and it is a mess. Why would we propose to impose such a dysfunctional system on the rest of society? Greater choice, competition and affordability in the private market has given us the best health care system in the world. The nightmare in Canada should be proof enough.

Innovation and efficiency are discouraged in a single-payer system. There is virtually no money in the system to encourage investment in new life-saving medicines and medical devices. Lack of innovation guarantees that under a single-payer system, no new treatments would be discovered, with little or no improvement in quality of life or life expectancy, particularly for the medically vulnerable and the elderly.

We should not use other countries as a model for U.S. health care. Other countries devote far fewer resources to health care than the U.S.

We should use choice to help hold down costs. The free market and consumer choice offers the best solution. Just like all other economic activities, the free market offers the best solution to provide the greatest access to health care and to control costs. People freely making their own health care decisions and using their own health care dollars would give Americans the best chance to utilize their right to access health care, with tax-funded safety net health programs provided for those who cannot afford it. ■



Alex Ramel (D)

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According to the state Department of Ecology, Washington's new climate laws will add more than 40 cents to the cost of a gallon of gas. Is increasing prices/taxes justified to address climate change? What simple thing would you do to provide a measure of permanent relief for the high gas prices in our state?

That report from Ecology shows that the impact on gas prices from the low carbon fuel standard next year will be less than 1 cent per gallon. The 40 cents you reference is the high-end estimate for what the impact may be a dozen years from now (2034–2036). I hope you will make sure this is accurately reported in the way this question is framed.

The price of gas we are experiencing now is largely driven by Russia's unprovoked invasion of Ukraine. The best thing we can do to reduce our energy costs for folks in Washington is to reduce our dependence on volatile oil markets by converting as much of our transportation energy use to reliable, local sources through electrification, renewable fuels and green hydrogen.

Where would you place Whatcom County agriculture — and state agriculture in general — in your list of key issues? And what do you believe is the biggest challenge facing agriculture in our county and state?

Maintaining a reliable, stable, economical and sustainable food system must be a top priority in Washington. The biggest challenge I hear from farmers is water; there is a lot of uncertainty about what the rules are and what they will be. That uncertainty makes long-term planning difficult. In some cases, it makes planning for the next growing season difficult.

What is your stance on the Nooksack Basin adjudication process (legal process by which a court decides how much water a permit holder has access to)?

I support adjudication. We need to have agreement and an established record of who has water rights, where they are in line and for how much. That will facilitate water

banking and give farmers the confidence to plan and invest for the water they have. This process is also the best way for us to meet our responsibilities under the treaties with the tribes and to work together to protect the salmon.

What would you do to change the way growth management requirements are driving up the cost and limiting the supply of housing?

I support “missing middle housing” proposals to expand the allowed housing types in areas of our cities that have access to existing infrastructure like transit, schools, water, sewer and parks. Row houses, townhomes, duplexes and other housing styles that used to be much more common — and that tend to be more affordable — have been excluded from too many parts of our communities.

Do you believe the current state budget is spent effectively to make the lives of Washingtonians better and help small businesses grow?

While one can always argue for improvements, our priorities are the right ones. Our biggest expenditures by far are on education; expanding educational opportunities is one of the best ways to improve people's quality of life and improve our business climate.

Another major area of investment is in our transportation infrastructure. Again, I think our priorities are the right ones. This year, Democrats passed the Move Ahead Washington transportation package that, for the first time, prioritized maintenance of existing roads, bridges and ferry service over new highway construction. While maintenance isn't as flashy (and there are fewer ribbon cuttings for politicians to attend), companies reliant on existing services need reliable roads and networks. Maintenance also tends to create more jobs per dollar invested than new construction.

Do you support the long-term care policy and tax that was imposed and then tabled in 2021, and do you support this tax and policy being implemented in the future?

The Long-Term Care Act will ensure that people who work in Washington will have insurance against these otherwise devastating expenses that are bankrupting too many people. We need to make sure that the tax is fair for everyone paying into the system and that the account is actuarially sound. Those are solvable problems. When we have made the adjustments to solve them, I will proudly vote to enact this policy knowing that people who need care will be able to get it without creating a crippling debt for themselves or their family.

Do you support or oppose a state income tax?

Washington's tax code is broken and upside-down. Those who earn the least pay the highest share of their income, while those who have the most pay the lowest share. That's not fair, and it's not right. I'm committed to working to fix that injustice.

If we could reduce sales and property taxes in conjunction with adding a progressive personal income tax (so that the total budget was the same, but the wealthy paid more and lower- and middle-income folks paid less), I would support it. But for a variety of reasons, that's probably impractical. What I think is more practical is a wealth tax (often called a "billionaire tax"). I support this and think it's a better idea if it's structured as a tax on intangible financial property (cash, stocks, bonds, etc.) above a threshold of extraordinary wealth and coupled with a reduction in property taxes and/or sales taxes that fall disproportionately on lower- and middle-income people.

What specific policies would you propose or support to make Washington a business-friendly state?

Washington consistently ranks among the best places to do business — most recently we ranked No. 2 in the CNBC Top States for Business analysis. One of the biggest reasons is because people want to move here, including business owners and entrepreneurs. Maintaining our quality of life is essential to that strong advantage we have.

Probably the biggest problem for most businesses right now is labor supply. Addressing that will take a few key steps. Workforce training is essential; we need to help workers keep their skills current and bring new people into the market. As discussed above, we must address housing affordability and housing supply — cost of housing in our communities is forcing people to turn down jobs here. We also have to expand early childhood education opportunities. Too many parents are forced to stay home because the cost of care eats up most of what they would earn at work.

Crime has become a major issue, as both the frequency and severity seem to be on the rise — not just in cities, but just about everywhere. Beside the catastrophic impacts on individual citizens, we're now seeing businesses from Starbucks on down closing locations due to crime. How do you see this impacting the business community in Whatcom County, and what changes would you support to help improve the situation?

It's important to discuss this accurately, and the nuances are often overlooked. Most violent crime is down during the pandemic, but the rise in domestic violence overshadows that reduction in other categories. Most non-violent crime is also down, but again it's overshadowed by steep increases in car theft, organized retail theft and petty crime, like vandalism and graffiti. We've also seen our mental

health support services break down during the pandemic, which has meant an increase in homelessness and more people who are visibly experiencing mental health crises in public. Many of these folks are not dangerous, but they can be disruptive if they can't get the help they need. The problems are compounded because a wave of early retirements and difficulty hiring have meant most law enforcement agencies are short staffed. These are all national trends that we are observing locally.

This year, the Legislature doubled the number of classes in the Criminal Justice Training Academy. The good news is those classes are full right now — many new recruits are on the way. We can do even better at recruiting in the future by allowing some courses for training to be proctored locally, which will reduce an entry barrier for new hires. I expect to support enabling legislation to that effect next year. We've also recently improved the police and firefighter pension systems to improve employee retention. We've started to increase funding for unarmed crisis responders to be able to support the police. We need to watch how those programs are working and grow them if they are successful.

Inflation is often referred to as a regressive tax on ordinary citizens. However, it has a similar impact on businesses, with large companies more able to pass along price increases than smaller mom-and-pop shops. Are there policies in the state that either have or will exacerbate inflation and its toll on business, and what might be done from a policy standpoint to alleviate the pressures every business is feeling right now?

The B&O tax is regressive and falls disproportionately on smaller and newer businesses. Big picture, I favor a switch to a corporate net income tax so that companies are taxed on their revenue, not the money that passes through their hands for labor or inventory. In the short term, this last year we increased the minimum threshold at which the B&O tax is collected so that very small companies and startups are exempt.

Inflationary pressure right now is the sharpest in housing and energy. Unfortunately, neither has a quick fix. We can work to make our communities more resilient and less susceptible to global economic ups and downs by increasing our energy efficiency and our local energy self-reliance through efficiency in our buildings and electrification and decarbonization in our vehicle fleets. Even though most companies aren't buying houses, employees are going to need to be paid enough to afford a home in our community, and when those prices skyrocket, as they have been, that pushes up the cost of labor. Real action to meaningfully increase the supply of housing, and to keep it affordable, will be incredibly important to stabilizing the economy. ■



Trevor Smith (D)

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According to the state Department of Ecology, Washington's new climate laws will add more than 40 cents to the cost of a gallon of gas. Is increasing prices/taxes justified to address climate change? What simple thing would you do to provide a measure of permanent relief for the high gas prices in our state?

I could wrap my head around the carbon tax if it helped to resolve climate change or address the effects of climate change for the citizens of the state of Washington. I don't see how this is going to benefit the people of the state. Taxing fuel as a way to encourage people to consume less without investing in statewide alternative means of transportation that fit the needs of the populace and business isn't a long-term solution. I would invest in solutions that mitigate the effects that we are already seeing from climate change and invest in transit options that make it possible for ordinary folks to live their lives while getting out of their cars.

Where would you place Whatcom County agriculture — and state agriculture in general — in your list of key issues? And what do you believe is the biggest challenge facing agriculture in our county and state?

I would place agriculture in the Top 3 of my priority list. The biggest challenge I see is addressing the runoff from farms into streams and rivers. Second would be land use. The solutions as proposed that make it impossible for a farm to exist are not solutions. We can find better ways of protecting habitats if we work with farmers to achieve it.

What is your stance on the Nooksack Basin adjudication process (legal process by which a court decides how much water a permit holder has access to)?

I would look at what the federal water managers in the West are doing now with the Colorado River. They have made rulings recently in favor of water shares based on age. This is a very complicated process and isn't going to be easy.

What would you do to change the way growth management requirements are driving up the cost and limiting the supply of housing?

I would clarify the Growth Management Act to include specific areas that can be built upon while preserving agriculture, forest land and habitat. I would work to ensure that housing wasn't pushed into the flood plains or only onto agriculture land. But I feel that it needs to be guided by the local area for which it's being written. No overarching state plan is going to best suit each diverse area of the state.

Do you believe the current state budget is spent effectively to make the lives of Washingtonians better and help small businesses grow?

There are better ways to tailor the budget. We could fully invest in the infrastructure the state provides, which supports all businesses and people of the state. We can fund law enforcement and continue to support the economic development agencies and port entities in their processes.

Do you support the long-term care policy and tax that was imposed and then tabled in 2021, and do you support this tax and policy being implemented in the future?

No. I support the spirit and intent of the law, and I support the tabling of the bill's implementation. There has to be a better way.

Do you support or oppose a state income tax?

I believe in the rule of law. For 80 years, Washington State Supreme Court jurisprudence has found that a graduated income tax is unconstitutional.

What specific policies would you propose or support to make Washington a business-friendly state?

Washington is a fairly business-friendly state. Where I think we can do much better is in the realm of regulatory certainty.

Crime has become a major issue, as both the frequency and severity seem to be on the rise — not just in cities, but just about everywhere. Beside the catastrophic impacts on individual citizens, we're now seeing businesses from Starbucks on down closing locations due to crime. How do you see this impacting the business community in Whatcom County, and what changes would you support to help improve the situation?

Last session, a legislative fix was passed to try and correct the mistakes in 2021's House Bill 1054 and House Bill 1310. More needs to be done. At the same time, law enforcement isn't the only one that should be dealing with the mental health issues we see every day on our streets. Fully funding mental health in this state and fully funding our law enforcement officers are priorities I support. Undoing the damage from the prior house bills is also a priority.

Inflation is often referred to as a regressive tax on ordinary citizens. However, it has a similar impact on businesses, with large companies more able to pass along price increases than smaller mom-and-pop shops. Are there policies in the state that either have or will exacerbate inflation and its toll on business, and what might be done from a policy standpoint to alleviate the pressures every business is feeling right now?

The climate tax on motor fuels already does, and will continue to, worsen the impacts of inflation on consumers. Mandating a switch to a fully electric economy without having first fully invested in the alternative means of generating the current consumption and the increased capacity to support the removal of fossil fuels, along with the transportation and storage of energy, is going to be the next big inflationary pressure on the citizens of the state. We can and we must do better. ■



42ND DISTRICT
SENATOR



Simon Sefzik (R)

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According to the state Department of Ecology, Washington's new climate laws will add more than 40 cents to the cost of a gallon of gas. Is increasing prices/taxes justified to address climate change? What simple thing would you do to provide a measure of permanent relief for the high gas prices in our state?

We must address climate change without raising costs for individuals and families in Washington, especially in a time of record-high inflation.

The majority party plans to raise taxes on the price of gas by a dollar a gallon (House Bill 1091 and Senate Bill 5126). This is the wrong approach. In the last legislative session, I championed my FUEL Act, which would have suspended the state gas tax until the end of the year, saving consumers almost 50 cents a gallon at the pump, while using funds

from the state budget surplus to fund our transportation needs. The majority party refused this immediate relief to families.

As your state senator, I will continue to advocate for sensible solutions to address climate concerns without further increasing the cost of living in Washington state and to oppose the efforts from the majority party to increase gas prices.

Where would you place Whatcom County agriculture — and state agriculture in general — in your list of key issues? And what do you believe is the biggest challenge facing agriculture in our county and state?

Agriculture is not only a key part of Whatcom County's and Washington state's economy but an essential part of our culture and heritage. Returning affordability to Whatcom County is one of my two top priorities. Over the past few years, the majority party in Olympia has continued to increase taxes on fuel, pass labor legislation that is harming migrant workers and employers and empower a bureaucracy that prioritizes its own interests and not the agriculture community.

The biggest challenge facing agriculture in Whatcom County and Washington state right now is overregulation from the state and its bureaucracy. I will continue to oppose efforts like the Riparian Setback Bill, which mandated large buffer zones around channels of water.

Agriculture is the lifeblood of our community in Whatcom County. As your state senator, I've been an advocate for protecting and prioritizing our agriculture community.

What is your stance on the Nooksack Basin adjudication process (legal process by which a court decides how much water a permit holder has access to)?

I oppose the adjudication process due to the intense time and cost this imposes on Whatcom County residents for very relative gain. I would work within the Legislature to support collaborative efforts, like the Whatcom County Executive's "Solutions Table" or federal water rights settlement ideas. These efforts need to be fully supported and given a chance to succeed before the state resorts to litigation against all water users in the Nooksack Basin.

What would you do to change the way growth management requirements are driving up the cost and limiting the supply of housing?

I would work to streamline elements of the Growth Management Act and other legislation to remove the undue burden of our permitting process. We need balance. The GMA has imposed many unnecessary regulatory burdens on cities. This makes it difficult for them to zone while using valuable resources in litigation, which cuts into the resources we could be using to effectively plan and zone.

One of my favorite things about Washington state is our rich diversity; this applies to counties and cities across our state. Regulations and permitting requirements that make sense for Seattle might not make sense for Ferndale. By passing legislation that allows counties and cities to make permitting decisions that take local concerns into account and ensures these localities have the resources they need to plan well, we can simplify the process and build more affordable housing.

We need to make housing more affordable, not less. In Olympia, I fought against adding additional regulations to the GMA and will continue to advocate for commonsense solutions to our housing challenges.

Do you believe the current state budget is spent effectively to make the lives of Washingtonians better and help small businesses grow?

No. The state of Washington had a \$15 billion surplus this year, and not one dollar was spent on immediate tax relief for individuals or small businesses. The majority party even rejected their own tax relief plans, like a "back-to-school" three-day sales tax holiday and free admission to state parks and fairs. Even worse, in the final days of the legislative session, the majority party rejected the Republican idea to eliminate sales tax on diapers. We could have at least done this to help families out.

Over the past 10 years, Washington's state budget has al-

most doubled — but the income of most Washingtonians has not. The last thing the state needs to do is pass more taxes; legislators need to spend your hard-earned money more wisely.

Just this year, when the state had a budget surplus, the majority party raised many license fees, some by 400%. Our district voted to reduce the cost of car tabs; clearly, they thought licensing fees were too high already.

Do you support the long-term care policy and tax that was imposed and then tabled in 2021, and do you support this tax and policy being implemented in the future?

I reject the long-term care tax, which is a tax on every single Washington worker regardless of their income. Business, labor, Republicans and a growing number of Democrats also reject this tax. We need long-term care for seniors, but this is not the way to go. This program is already insolvent, and anyone who chooses to retire out of the state would not benefit from it. Unfortunately, the majority party strategically delayed this tax until 2023. I feel strongly that we need to repeal it and study better alternatives.

Do you support or oppose a state income tax?

I adamantly oppose a state income tax. The people of Washington state have voted down the income tax 11 times, as recently as last year and by over 60%. Yet the Legislature ignored the will of the people and passed this tax anyway. Even my opponent voted for the capital gains income tax, despite repeated promises not to, and admitted that the federal government recognized this tax as an income tax. I will respect the repeated decision of the people on this ruling, unlike my opponent.

What specific policies would you propose or support to make Washington a business-friendly state?

Small businesses are the backbone of our economy. By reducing taxes on small businesses, cutting unnecessary red tape and listening to small business owners, who are the experts on the ground, we can build a more business-friendly Washington state.

As your state senator, I've made it one of my top priorities to hear directly from local business owners on the issues that are important to them. They've told me how the state's overreach has impacted every piece of their business operations and made it more and more difficult to get by. I will continue to include small businesses in the policy discussions and be an advocate for the entrepreneurs who fill our county with creativity and diversity.

Crime has become a major issue, as both the frequency and severity seem to be on the rise — not just in cities, but just about everywhere. Beside the catastrophic impacts on individual citizens, we're now seeing businesses from Starbucks on down closing locations due to crime. How do you see this impacting the business community in Whatcom County, and what changes would you support to help improve the situation?

Rising crime is one of the most significant impairments to local businesses right now. I spoke to a store manager in the Bellis Fair Mall in Bellingham who said they are losing \$4,000 due to theft every single day. Criminals know exactly how much merchandise they can steal without consequence due to the laws the majority party passed.

I believe we need to repeal the anti-police laws that have escalated our public safety crisis and increase resources to law enforcement for training and recruiting. Furthermore, I will continue to advocate for a comprehensive public safety facility in Whatcom County with sufficient resources to address the crime and mental health challenges we are facing.

It's time to prioritize our businesses, families and communities above politically correct ideology and repeal the policies that are harming Whatcom County and pushing the American dream further and further out of reach.

As your state senator, I have strongly supported law enforcement and commonsense policies to keep us all safe. I am the only candidate in this race endorsed by law enforcement, including Whatcom County Sheriff Bill Elfo, the Washington Council of Police & Sheriffs and the Washington Fraternal Order of Police.

Inflation is often referred to as a regressive tax on ordinary citizens. However, it has a similar impact on businesses, with large companies more able to pass along price increases than smaller mom-and-pop shops. Are there policies in the state that either have or will exacerbate inflation and its toll on business, and what might be done from a policy standpoint to alleviate the pressures every business is feeling right now?

Unfortunately, over the past few years, Olympia has modeled its egregious spending practices off of those in Washington, D.C., further worsening the pain folks are feeling in Washington state. We are facing inflation rates we haven't seen since the 1980s, yet this past legislative session, the majority party didn't spend one dime on immediate or long-term tax relief.

Our economy is failing those who can least afford it and pushing the American dream further out of reach rather than bringing it closer. As your state senator, I've supported policies to create an economy that works for everyone and to let you keep more of your money.

As I've canvassed the district and heard from folks just like you, your stories have reminded me that our inflation rate is not just a number. I've heard from a single mom who had to cancel her son's soccer because she couldn't afford the increased gas prices to take her kid to games and to pay rent. I've heard from families who are using the money they were saving for a down payment on a home just to make ends meet. I've heard from business owners who survived the COVID-19 shutdowns and are now facing closing their business due to the rising costs of supplies, labor and the unpredictability of the market and supply chain. These are the stories I think about when I'm voting on legislation proposed by the majority party that adds fees and increases taxes.

I believe that the government exists to serve the people, not the other way around. The last thing the state of Washington should be doing is increasing taxes or adding fees for businesses or individuals. I will continue to advocate for a government that works for the people and for our small businesses. ■



Sharon Shewmake (D)

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According to the state Department of Ecology, Washington's new climate laws will add more than 40 cents to the cost of a gallon of gas. Is increasing prices/taxes justified to address climate change? What simple thing would you do to provide a measure of permanent relief for the high gas prices in our state?

It's unclear which program you are referring to — the Climate Commitment Act or the clean fuels program — but often we find that market-based methods to reduce pollution, like cap and trade, end up costing much less than expected. A great example of this was the acid rain cap and trade program, implemented by Republican President George H.W. Bush. The costs were a sixth to a tenth of the expected cost, and the benefits of cleaner air resulted in higher-than-expected health benefits. This resulted in an estimated \$4 to \$45 worth of benefits for every \$1 of cost.

I do worry about the impact of any price increase on working people, which is why I was supportive of the Working Families Tax Rebate, a bipartisan approach to lessen the tax burden for those at the bottom and encourage work. I'm also supportive of an inflation adjustment tax rebate for families that need help.

Where would you place Whatcom County agriculture — and state agriculture in general — in your list of key issues? And what do you believe is the biggest challenge facing agriculture in our county and state?

Agriculture is one of the top industries in Whatcom County, as well as integral to our social, environmental and land-use fabric. The biggest issue facing agriculture in our county and state is likely labor; figuring out how to ensure farmers get the help they need is critical. This is why working on things like tax credits for farm worker housing is important.

I also see opportunities for government to help farmers with research and development as well as technical assis-

tance. Other places around the state have long-term agriculture research stations that are examining the potential of soil health to improve yields, reduce the need for inputs and management as well as protect biodiversity and improve water quality. They say a bad farmer grows weeds, a good farmer grows crops, and an exceptional farmer grows soil. I'd like to see a research station here in Whatcom County devoted to better understanding soil health for red raspberries. I think expanding and supporting our conservation districts to help farmers access carbon markets and enroll in programs like CREP (Conservation Reserve Enhancement Program) could also be helpful. I'm looking into whether a "right to repair" bill focused on farm equipment could help farmers fix their own farm equipment faster and cheaper by allowing access to the tools to do it themselves. Water is also a huge issue. I'll address that in the next question.

What is your stance on the Nooksack Basin adjudication process (legal process by which a court decides how much water a permit holder has access to)?

When I talk to farmers and other interest groups about water, everyone likes the idea of functioning water markets, which allow for an efficient use of water resources that can free up water to be used for fish and new farms. The problem is to sell a water right in a market, you must own that water right. Currently, our system does not provide that certainty. I support adjudication to clarify those water rights, but I also understand farmers are worried about this process. That's why I also support funding to mitigate water use using efficiency upgrades or water storage solutions to support farmers who do not have a secure water right. We have a lot of water in Whatcom County, but we don't always have water when we need it. Infrastructure — both natural systems and engineered — can help mitigate this.

What would you do to change the way growth management requirements are driving up the cost and limiting the supply of housing?

We must figure out how to build more housing. I'd like to see reforms that require cities to plan for their share of growth, but also allow them to make changes in their urban growth areas when the lands initially slated for housing are prohibitively expensive to build on (Lynden is facing this issue), or when their UGA is in an area that is frequently flooded, but land just outside the UGA is on higher ground. We must consider the housing impacts when Bellingham doesn't build enough so people drive until they qualify and bid up housing prices in Ferndale. I'd also like to see cities

like Sumas be able to switch parts of their UGA that are in the floodway for areas to the west that are on higher ground, thus less likely to be flooded.

This isn't the only opportunity to create new housing; we also need to look at how to make it easier to build housing in cities. I had a bill last session that would have allowed most single-family homes in a city to build an attached and a detached accessory dwelling unit (ADU, often called garden cottages or grannie flats). ADUs are easy ways to add additional housing in neighborhoods that already have infrastructure and end up being naturally affordable. This is one of many steps, including condo liability reform and other rules, that will allow for smaller apartments and condos to be built more easily within cities.

Do you believe the current state budget is spent effectively to make the lives of Washingtonians better and help small businesses grow?

Our budget could always be more efficient. When it comes to small businesses, I think one of the hardest things is the B&O tax, which taxes revenues, not profits. This ends up being an unfair tax to low-margin businesses like car dealerships, which can end up owing taxes even in a year where they lose money. I was proud to vote on reform on the B&O tax last session, which increases the threshold and deductions (Senate Bill 5980) as well as the unemployment tax relief (Senate Bill 5873). Also in this last budget was technical support for small businesses — but, fundamentally, we need to solve wider problems like improving public safety, reducing homelessness and ensuring workers have access to affordable housing.

Do you support the long-term care policy and tax that was imposed and then tabled in 2021, and do you support this tax and policy being implemented in the future?

I voted for the first bill authorizing the Long-term Care Act in 2019 after hearing floor speeches by Republicans talking about how it would be a more cost-effective way to help care for our elders than our current system. After the constitutional amendment to invest the revenues into the stock market failed, there were changes made to the LTCA that I did not support. The way we pay for long-term care in this country is wasteful and expensive, requiring our elders to drain their assets until they are near destitute when simple interventions would often keep them healthier and in their home for longer and cost less. We need to go back to the drawing board on this one, in my opinion.

Do you support or oppose a state income tax?

I do not support a state income tax.

What specific policies would you propose or support to make Washington a business-friendly state?

The biggest piece is B&O tax reform. I think the second biggest piece is housing. If there isn't enough housing, busi-

nesses can't expand because workers won't be able to find a place to live. I want to work on better policy that recognizes this is a statewide problem that cities aren't going to fix on their own. We have overregulated our housing market. As an economist with a reputation for working across the aisle, I believe I'm in a good situation to reform this market.

Crime has become a major issue, as both the frequency and severity seem to be on the rise — not just in cities, but just about everywhere. Beside the catastrophic impacts on individual citizens, we're now seeing businesses from Starbucks on down closing locations due to crime. How do you see this impacting the business community in Whatcom County, and what changes would you support to help improve the situation?

Crime stinks. It's not just things that get stolen, but people not wanting to be in our places of commerce, like downtown, because of a fear of crime. I'm working on an evidence-based proposal to reduce crime, which you can read about soon at www.sharon4whatcom.com/PublicSafety. The basics come down to restoring accountability by ensuring our courts are delivering consequences that are swift, certain and fair; that there are adequate and well-trained police officers to respond to incidents and build trust within the community; that we have adequate and appropriate mental health resources, anti-violence programs and facilities like sobering centers that improve public safety; finally, that we invest in things like early learning, youth programs and great schools and opportunities for all that reduce criminality before it starts by ensuring we have an economy that works for everyone.

Inflation is often referred to as a regressive tax on ordinary citizens. However, it has a similar impact on businesses, with large companies more able to pass along price increases than smaller mom-and-pop shops. Are there policies in the state that either have or will exacerbate inflation and its toll on business, and what might be done from a policy standpoint to alleviate the pressures every business is feeling right now?

To reduce inflation, we must understand what is causing it: supply chain disruptions, extra demand from the federal stimulus, and high energy prices from global disruption and the war in Ukraine. Of these three causes, the first is the most likely to respond to state-level actions. I'm a member of the Supply Chain Caucus, and we've been looking at ways to ease congestion at ports especially. This has resulted in policies to improve access to restrooms for truck drivers, safe sleeping spaces, as well as other port efficiencies. We can also build a more resilient supply chain based on local producers, which is why I've been working on local food issues, supporting things like a bill to increase the threshold that small producers can sell under the cottage food permit and supporting the Washington State Food Finder. This is marketing assistance for small and medium-sized farms. ■



Alicia Rule (D)

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According to the state Department of Ecology, Washington's new climate laws will add more than 40 cents to the cost of a gallon of gas. Is increasing prices/taxes justified to address climate change? What simple thing would you do to provide a measure of permanent relief for the high gas prices in our state?

My father was a truck driver who delivered hay to local dairies. I grew up acutely aware of how the price of gas affected his work. I am proud that we are moving away from funding road improvements by using gas tax revenue, a system that has been in place in Washington state for many years. Gas taxes are a regressive tax that disproportionately affects rural communities and farmers as well as industry. As we transition to an economy with more electric vehicles, it's important that we not forget about the large number of consumers and industry who are still reliant on gas-powered vehicles. We need to take a balanced approach in moving away from fossil fuels to avoid disproportionately impacting consumers, including farmers and rural users and the manufacturing sector.

Where would you place Whatcom County agriculture — and state agriculture in general — in your list of key issues? And what do you believe is the biggest challenge facing agriculture in our county and state?

Growing up in Whatcom County and coming from a farming family, I understand how important agriculture is to the economy and community. The rising prices of fuel, labor and transportation are hitting our farmers hard, in addition to having to recover from the flooding over the winter. Agriculture is one of our biggest industries in Whatcom County and must be nurtured and protected. Since first elected, I have worked hard to protect our agricultural industries, particularly in the area of natural disaster recovery, fighting for and delivering disaster assistance

and reforming response systems to better serve local farmers. I look forward to continuing this work.

What is your stance on the Nooksack Basin adjudication process (legal process by which a court decides how much water a permit holder has access to)?

Water access at the right times is predictably becoming more of an issue as time marches on. As neighbors, it is my hope that local stakeholders will continue to work together to find a solution that works for everyone. While decisions are made politically that concern our farms, fish and people, we are all inextricably connected and need solutions that work for everyone.

What would you do to change the way growth management requirements are driving up the cost and limiting the supply of housing?

The burden of the high cost of living, especially housing, is on the top of everyone's minds these days, as so many of us struggle to make decisions and make ends meet. We need to take a critical look at historic regulation, zoning and streamlining the permitting process and avoiding duplicative regulation that places an unnecessary cost and time burden that inevitably will be passed on in housing costs.

Do you believe the current state budget is spent effectively to make the lives of Washingtonians better and help small businesses grow?

As a small business owner myself, I know how many challenges we are facing during these tough times. Before I ran for the Legislature, I started and created the Main Street partnership in Blaine, where I helped other business owners improve their businesses. This is work I have carried on in Olympia, and my very first bill that got passed was to help small businesses. I carried on this work by sponsoring disaster relief for small businesses after flooding hit our community. Today, I am working with business owners who are struggling with government red tape. We have so much work to do to improve the small business climate in our state. Washingtonians' lives and thriving small businesses are directly connected. It's important that we support small businesses in every possible way so they can both continue to provide good jobs and thrive to serve our constituents.

Do you support the long-term care policy and tax that was imposed and then tabled in 2021, and do you support this tax and policy being implemented in the future?

The long-term care policy needs a lot of work and refinement before it would be acceptable. We need to ensure that

the unintended consequences of a well-meaning policy don't hurt anyone, especially our most vulnerable.

Do you support or oppose a state income tax?

I oppose a state income tax.

What specific policies would you propose or support to make Washington a business-friendly state?

As a small business owner, I understand the challenges that modern businesses face. The responsibility of signing the front of a paycheck is one the very large majority of business owners take seriously. We need to ensure we aren't making it unnecessarily difficult for them to continue creating and providing good jobs for the people in our community. I voted to make cuts to the B&O tax this year, and now the smallest businesses won't be paying any tax. I am motivated to continue expanding this work, as businesses paying on gross receipts is an unfair structure that puts additional tax burdens on businesses for hiring. I worked to pass a sales tax holiday out of the state House, and I support other ideas like it. I have worked closely with business leaders in my community and at the state level on bills to promote economic growth and look forward to continuing discussions with shareholders on ways we can continue to work together for Washington's economy.

Crime has become a major issue, as both the frequency and severity seem to be on the rise — not just in cities, but just about everywhere. Beside the catastrophic impacts on individual citizens, we're now seeing businesses from Starbucks on down closing locations due to crime. How do you see this impacting the business community in Whatcom County, and what changes would you support to help improve the situation?

Public safety is one of my top priorities. As a social worker and mental health professional, I have worked side-by-side with law enforcement. Police and sheriff's deputies have accompanied me on many home visits over the years, and I have the utmost respect for these professionals. I do not support the defund movement. In fact, I have worked to increase pay for first responders, increased slots at the police academy to train new officers and fought to criminalize nonmedical use of fentanyl, which has earned me the

support of law enforcement professionals such as retired Bellingham Police Chief Flo Simon and the Bellingham/Whatcom County Firefighters. I have also worked to increase funding for mental health programs, particularly for our young people. What's happening on our streets are not victimless crimes. We must demand accountability through social workers, police and, ultimately, our court system.

Inflation is often referred to as a regressive tax on ordinary citizens. However, it has a similar impact on businesses, with large companies more able to pass along price increases than smaller mom-and-pop shops. Are there policies in the state that either have or will exacerbate inflation and its toll on business, and what might be done from a policy standpoint to alleviate the pressures every business is feeling right now?

Inflation is an important issue, and I see its effects in my community every day. I feel the impact at the grocery store and at the gas pump as I raise my family. Throughout my career as a social worker, I have seen the direct impact of increased costs of basic items and how it adds additional stress on people who have to make impossible choices, like whether or not the cost of gas is worth going to work or if they should pay for groceries or the heating bill. The impact on businesses as the costs go up is they either pass along the true cost to the consumer, which is a double whammy to our community members, or if they can't, they absorb the loss until they fold. That is the worry for our small family business right now and in our future. I have worked to expand the Main Street program to help small businesses in several key ways and will continue to support and lead in this area. Locally, four communities are implementing this program because of work that I led in Olympia. Main Street is a great return on investment for the state and brings our business tax money back home. I supported the B&O tax relief work of last session and will continue to work to expand that reform. It's critical that we have business owners in the space where these decisions are made to ensure the voice of our neighbors who own businesses are heard to make policy that makes sense for everyone. ■



Tawsha Dykstra Thompson (R)

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According to the state Department of Ecology, Washington's new climate laws will add more than 40 cents to the cost of a gallon of gas. Is increasing prices/taxes justified to address climate change?

No. It will negatively impact small businesses, who will be impacted for the higher transportation costs, which they may or may not be able to pass on to the consumer. It will negatively impact an employee's ability to travel to and from work. With a worker shortage already occurring, a higher cost of getting to and from work may also discourage workers.

What simple thing would you do to provide a measure of permanent relief for the high gas prices in our state?

Repeal Senate Bill 5126 2.

Where would you place Whatcom County agriculture — and state agriculture in general — in your list of key issues? And what do you believe is the biggest challenge facing agriculture in our county and state?

Having been raised on a dairy farm here in Whatcom County, I recognize that the agriculture industry in one of the biggest industries for Whatcom County. I will collaborate with the farming community to support a robust farming and agricultural industry. Water availability will be one of the top challenges for our farming community. Locally, it is more about water management. We have an excess amount in the winter and not enough in the summer.

What is your stance on the Nooksack Basin adjudication process (legal process by which a court decides how much water a permit holder has access to)?

I would rather see a concerted effort to bring all parties to the table to come to a mutual agreement rather than a court-appointed answer. All the people and businesses in our community need water to survive and thrive. We all have a vested interest in good water management for use today and into the future.

What would you do to change the way growth management requirements are driving up the cost and limiting the supply of housing?

The Growth Management Act was written over 30 years ago. The act is now limiting housing options and driving up the price of homes. Due to overly burdensome regulations, cities have difficulty processing permit requests, leading to delays that drive up the initial house prices. The regulations should be evaluated, amended or removed from the GMA so more permits can be approved and adequate housing can be built. This will help stabilize the housing industry and ensure we have adequate housing that our children and grandchildren can afford here in Whatcom County.

Do you believe the current state budget is spent effectively to make the lives of Washingtonians better and help small businesses grow?

No. There was a \$15 billion surplus this year. The money was spent with no reduction in taxes offered to businesses or the people of Washington. Rather, there was an increase in fees. Additionally, the government budget and spending plan — which promotes spending all money in the budget, often frivolously, so as much or more money can be added to the budget the following year — promotes wastefulness and lack of accountability.

Do you support the long-term care policy and tax that was imposed and then tabled in 2021, and do you support this tax and policy being implemented in the future?

No. I was a Public Safety Employee Insurance Inc. board member through WACOPS (Washington Council of Police and Sheriffs). The purpose of PSEII is to provide long-term disability insurance options for our members. When the LTC tax was introduced, our board worked diligently with our insurance brokers to put together a LTC plan that our members could purchase that would allow them to opt out. The LTC plan was underfunded before it began, and the benefits offered would not even be adequate. It was sold as a long-term care tax but acted as an income tax. Many people who would have had to pay into it would never have been eligible to receive the benefits. Additionally, analysis showed that the initial amount that would have been collected (66 cents per \$100) would have been insufficient, resulting in a dramatic increase in the fees collected. This would have most negatively impacted our minimum wage employees and small businesses.

Do you support or oppose a state income tax?

I am opposed. If we were going to entertain a conversation about a state income tax, it would only be in conjunction with the removal of all other taxes — for example, property, sales and gas tax at the state level. A complete and comprehensive discussion and evaluation of our regressive Washington state tax system needs to be completed. The goal is to adequately fund necessary infrastructure while making sure our tax system is fair, transparent and equitable.

What specific policies would you propose or support to make Washington a business-friendly state?

Removal of the B&O tax. Deregulation of the most restrictive permits for small business that disincentivize and discourage small business owners. Removal of the governor's emergency powers and legislation that limits the governor's abilities to declare businesses closed during a declared emergency.

Crime has become a major issue, as both the frequency and severity seem to be on the rise — not just in cities, but just about everywhere. Beside the catastrophic impacts on individual citizens, we're now seeing businesses from Starbucks on down closing locations due to crime. How do you see this impacting the business community in Whatcom County, and what changes would you support to help improve the situation?

Public safety is foundational to a productive and prosperous society. It is a core responsibility of government to keep our communities and the people within them safe. Our current representatives have failed to do that. Here in Whatcom County, there is a trifecta of issues influencing our rising crime rates. Whatcom County Jail is falling apart. It has not had adequate space for a jurisdiction of our size for many years. Without being able to arrest and book people, crime rates will continue to climb. I have advocated for a new jail to the Whatcom County Council.

State legislation: With the implementation of multiple legislative bills impacting, negatively, law enforcement's ability to effectively police their cities and counties, predictably, the crime rates have gone up. Criminals have been emboldened, and officers have been handcuffed. I would repeal the pursuit law House Bill 1054 and Senate Bill 5051. I would advocate for more training and wellness support for law enforcement.

Criminalization of hard drugs: I have empathy for those suffering from addiction, but the state's response to the Blake Decision — making hard drugs a gross misdemeanor offense only after a person is caught with drugs and given a phone number to call for help detoxing — is more inhumane. Overdose deaths are escalating. The state failed to acknowledge there is inadequate infrastructure (not enough detox facilities or beds) to support the decision. I

have several ideas for improving public safety. I would love to partner with private sector partners on ideas for building a better drug rehabilitation infrastructure. For businesses to thrive, people need to feel safe in their person, in their home and in their communities. When people feel safe, businesses thrive.

Inflation is often referred to as a regressive tax on ordinary citizens. However, it has a similar impact on businesses, with large companies more able to pass along price increases than smaller mom-and-pop shops. Are there policies in the state that either have or will exacerbate inflation and its toll on business, and what might be done from a policy standpoint to alleviate the pressures every business is feeling right now?

With record inflation impacting people throughout the country and being driven more broadly by federal policy than state policy, there are some temporary changes we could make at the state level to lessen the impact. For example, a repeal of the gas tax. With the \$15 billion surplus, we could have made a permanent sales tax reduction of at least 1%. As described above, a repeal/reform of the B&O tax.

In reading through your list of questions, I recognized many of my answers kept coming back to three key patterns I believe need to be addressed.

Overregulation: As with legislation passed impacting, negatively, law enforcement's ability to enforce laws in 2021, the state Legislature passed not just one law but 12 laws impacting law enforcement. The difficulty of this is the ability for an officer to be able to know all the different laws and effectively follow and enforce them. I see this pattern repeated throughout legislation. Regulation impacting small businesses is so complex and difficult to follow, many small businesses never start. Or if they start, it is difficult to remain open. Overregulation stifles innovation, which is necessary to support a thriving business community.

Regressive tax system: Washington state has one of the most regressive tax systems in the United States. I believe a complete and comprehensive evaluation of the entire tax system needs to be completed. What is most fair, transparent and equitable for the people and for the businesses trying to thrive in this state needs to be identified.

Infrastructure: Many recent legislative changes have been passed in which the infrastructure to support that change is not available. For example, the need to give a person caught with drugs — such as fentanyl — a phone number for detox assistance. There are not an adequate number of detox options available if the person were to reach out. Another example is the phasing out of all gas-powered vehicles by 2030. This pull on the electrical grid is unsustainable, and by all reports, the infrastructure cannot be completed before 2030. ■



Dan Johnson (R)

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According to the state Department of Ecology, Washington's new climate laws will add more than 40 cents to the cost of a gallon of gas. Is increasing prices/taxes justified to address climate change? What simple thing would you do to provide a measure of permanent relief for the high gas prices in our state?

Over the last 40 years, the environmental movement has been trying to scare us with the same crisis. The evolution has been from holes in the ozone to polar ice caps melting, rising oceans, global warming and now climate change. Considering the price at the pump in Washington state is already among the highest in the nation, adding another 40 cents a gallon to address climate change will do nothing more than increase the burden on an already overtaxed populous in our state in the name of environmental protection. What needs to happen is a complete top-to-bottom audit of our transportation budget: analyze every aspect of our transportation system, from our roads to our ferry system; follow every penny to its final destination; make the necessary improvements and then pass those savings to the consumer at the gas pump.

Where would you place Whatcom County agriculture — and state agriculture in general — in your list of key issues? And what do you believe is the biggest challenge facing agriculture in our county and state?

Agriculture is key to the economic success of Whatcom County and is high on the list of priorities. While some regulation is necessary, the current majority thinks that more is better, and that is the wrong approach. Regulation should be evaluated on a cost analysis basis for both industry and the public benefit. If that doesn't meet the necessary criteria, it should be rejected. In other words, the juice needs to be worth the squeeze.

What is your stance on the Nooksack Basin adjudication process (legal process by which a court decides how much water a permit holder has access to)?

Whatcom County has had decades to responsibly manage one of our most important natural resources: the Nooksack River. Well-meaning parties have worked for years to remove all uses of that river by county residents, most recently recreation in the South Fork — all in the name of salmon protection. The result is a river that floods regularly and a financial need for flood protection. There are estimates of money spent on river issues that far exceed \$100 million, and yet the battle cry remains that the salmon population is in danger. We have witnessed harm to agriculture, threats of more regulation and now adjudication — a process that will take decades to decide, along with millions of taxpayer dollars. It has been suggested that seeking out a legislative solution will resolve many of these issues, taking less time and money. I ensure that I will explore all options to resolve these issues in the most efficient manner possible.

What would you do to change the way growth management requirements are driving up the cost and limiting the supply of housing?

Growth management was an idea with a fatal flaw: reliance on local officials in charge of implementing significant changes in their communities to accommodate growth. Such reliance was unrealistic. In Whatcom County, we watch every 10 years while Bellingham retains big-value tax lands while protecting their neighborhoods from taking additional growth and refusing to expand their urban boundaries to build homes wanted by the workforce for those businesses. In turn, the population has been forced to smaller communities like Ferndale, Lynden, Blaine and others. These communities are not equipped to handle the increased demand — a plan endorsed by the County Council. Growth management needs a substantial overhaul to remove much of the discretion held by local officials and setting clear, concise, measurable planning goals for the economic regions to ensure that the population has sufficient housing choices to match the incomes of the individuals seeking to live and work in those communities.

Do you believe the current state budget is spent effectively to make the lives of Washingtonians better and help small businesses grow?

No. In fact, I think the opposite. The more prosperous the private sector is, the bigger government agen-

cies become, which results in more regulation and spending. If we continue on this track, our state government will eventually collapse under its own weight.

Do you support the long-term care policy and tax that was imposed and then tabled in 2021, and do you support this tax and policy being implemented in the future?

No. The fact that the majority in Olympia can't even swallow this new policy and tax should be a clear indicator of its path to eventual failure. Again, at the expense of the taxpayer.

Do you support or oppose a state income tax?

Oppose. Last session, we witnessed the spending of over \$14 billion in taxpayer surplus, with the majority still wanting more. This clearly illustrates they are drunk on power without the checks and balances our forefathers created.

What specific policies would you propose or support to make Washington a business-friendly state?

I would like to have more than just the state option for worker's compensation insurance, as well as allowing more carriers access to provide medical insurance in Washington state. We need to make housing affordable and increase supply so that growing businesses have somewhere for their workforce to live. At the state level, we need to audit every tax requirement for a business, from B&O to payroll taxes, and evaluate their efficiency and effectiveness, as well as take a look at the level of competency in which those tax collecting agencies are run.

Crime has become a major issue, as both the frequency and severity seem to be on the rise — not just in cities, but just about everywhere. Beside the catastrophic impacts on individual citizens, we're now seeing businesses from Starbucks on down closing locations due to crime. How do you see this impacting the business community in Whatcom County, and what changes would you support to help improve the situation?

Overwhelming police reform has contributed to a rise in crime statewide. The decreased regulation on narcotics has created addicts who are enslaved to searching for the

next "high." They will stop at nothing to obtain the funds necessary to get it. That, in combination with the absence of quality pursuit standards, has emboldened criminals to run from the law without consequence. I will ensure that police have the tools they need to properly serve and protect.

Inflation is often referred to as a regressive tax on ordinary citizens. However, it has a similar impact on businesses, with large companies more able to pass along price increases than smaller mom-and-pop shops. Are there policies in the state that either have or will exacerbate inflation and its toll on business, and what might be done from a policy standpoint to alleviate the pressures every business is feeling right now?

This last question seems to be a culmination of the previous questions. The path is simple: the end user pays for it all. Increased regulation may require a full-time employee to be hired for the purpose of keeping a company in compliance. High fuel costs make the transportation of goods and services cost more. Lack of affordable housing and strict rental guidelines increase employee wages so they can have a roof over their head. Decreased regulation on narcotics increases drug addiction and the need for government-funded rehabilitation services. Bans on plastic straws and bags force more expensive alternatives that increase the cost at grocery stores and restaurants, and exponential growth of government creates an unnecessary tax burden to both citizens and business. Our current inflation is up to roughly 8%, and that is per touch. When products are handled up to three or four times before the end user gets it, that can easily be an increase of 24% or more — and the end user pays for it all. Our state government needs to see a reduction in size, spending, tax increases, new taxes and burdensome regulations. Only then will we see relief in our wallets. ■



Joe Timmons (D)

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According to the state Department of Ecology, Washington's new climate laws will add more than 40 cents to the cost of a gallon of gas. Is increasing prices/taxes justified to address climate change? What simple thing would you do to provide a measure of permanent relief for the high gas prices in our state?

Like many, my family's budget has been squeezed by increasing prices of housing, groceries and at the pump. As a first-time candidate, I have heard from voters that they want relief, and as a legislator, I will work to lower gas prices. The Legislature has already taken the step of moving away from gas taxes to fund road improvements — a long-overdue move that helps rural residents, farmers and industry.

Where would you place Whatcom County agriculture — and state agriculture in general — in your list of key issues? And what do you believe is the biggest challenge facing agriculture in our county and state?

With more than 100,000 acres of farmland, agriculture is one of Whatcom County's major industries and is a vital part of Whatcom County's identity. Farmers in Whatcom County and around the state are experiencing rising costs and facing affordability and viability challenges. If elected, I would be committed to working with the farming community to ensure that Whatcom County has a thriving agricultural sector.

What is your stance on the Nooksack Basin adjudication process (legal process by which a court decides how much water a permit holder has access to)?

We currently face uncertainty about water rights in the Nooksack Basin. I believe we need to resolve this uncertainty for current and future generations. I support the adjudication process as a way to resolve uncertainty and

ensure that everyone has access to water that they are legally entitled to — unless a less costly and time-consuming solution can be identified.

What would you do to change the way growth management requirements are driving up the cost and limiting the supply of housing?

Whatcom County is experiencing a housing shortage crisis, leading to high rental costs and barriers to homeownership for many residents. As an example, our rent went up 35% last year. I believe families should be able to live where they work and play and that we need to create more housing density in the areas that can support it and create more pathways to homeownership.

Do you believe the current state budget is spent effectively to make the lives of Washingtonians better and help small businesses grow?

I grew up in a working-class household where my parents created a small business out of our garage, so I know just how important small businesses are and the kinds of struggles they go through. During the pandemic, I worked alongside many small businesses, helping them build back strong and recover from the pandemic. I am committed to listening to small business leaders throughout my district and greater Washington to make sure their concerns are being heard in Olympia to help these businesses grow, including how the state budget is being spent.

Do you support the long-term care policy and tax that was imposed and then tabled in 2021, and do you support this tax and policy being implemented in the future?

Whatcom County seniors deserve to age with dignity. The rising costs of health care and housing create challenges for seniors — many of whom are on a fixed income. I am all for supporting seniors, but the long-term care program implemented in 2021 had many problems. It's my understanding that the Legislature made improvements to the program this year. I would like to see how those changes support seniors before taking additional steps to ensure that Whatcom County residents can age with dignity.

Do you support or oppose a state income tax?

I would oppose this.

What specific policies would you propose or support to make Washington a business-friendly state?

My dad is a pipefitter, and my parents created a mechanical contracting business out of our garage when I was 5 years old. Growing up in that environment, I learned the value of hard work. I was introduced to many of the challenges that small businesses face in Washington state. If elected, I would be committed to supporting small businesses, including exploring changes to the state's B&O tax structure to ensure that small businesses don't pay beyond their fair share, and working to reduce unnecessary barriers and red tape to help businesses grow.

Crime has become a major issue, as both the frequency and severity seem to be on the rise — not just in cities, but just about everywhere. Beside the catastrophic impacts on individual citizens, we're now seeing businesses from Starbucks on down closing locations due to crime. How do you see this impacting the business community in Whatcom County, and what changes would you support to help improve the situation?

When I talk with local businesses and voters at the doors, crime and public safety is an issue that comes up frequently. All people deserve to feel safe in our community, and that

includes local workers and business owners. If individuals and families do not feel safe to shop and freely walk about our community, that has a negative impact on local businesses. I believe we need to support our police so they can do their jobs, while having commonsense reforms that stop abuses of power. I also support having strong behavioral health and education systems in place to help people lead safe and productive lives, reducing criminal activity.

Inflation is often referred to as a regressive tax on ordinary citizens. However, it has a similar impact on businesses, with large companies more able to pass along price increases than smaller mom-and-pop shops. Are there policies in the state that either have or will exacerbate inflation and its toll on business, and what might be done from a policy standpoint to alleviate the pressures every business is feeling right now?

If I am elected, I will work to support small businesses and alleviate the burden of inflation. From a policy standpoint, I think it is very important to look at local solutions. Crafting policy that implements and prioritizes local supply chains will reduce their reliance on imports, thus saving these companies costs. This will not only benefit these businesses, but local communities as well. ■

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