

42nd Legislative District Position 2: General Election, Nov. 3, 2020

Candidates for 42nd Legislative District Representative Position 2 were invited by *Salish Current* to answer questions on ten topics: coronavirus, state budget, local economy, policing, climate, education, health care, housing, transportation and border closure.



Jennifer Sefzik (R-Bellingham) is running for Position 2.



Rep. Sharon Shewmake (D-Bellingham) is running for re-election to Position 2.

Coronavirus. *In the future would you advocate more than voluntary stay-at-home, masking and social distancing directives to contain the coronavirus pandemic?*

Sefzik: Voluntary stay-at-home, masking and physical distancing are always an option at any time for anyone, whether it be for coronavirus, the flu or any other type of infection prevalent at the time. This has been and should always be an option. Safety is important but can be achieved without sacrificing our liberty. As it was recently said, our Constitution is not a “fair-weather document” to be discarded when conditions are less than ideal.

Forced lockdowns with no end in sight are inappropriate. We can be both free and safe. Our freedoms were bought at a very high price and we should not abandon them so cheaply.

Shewmake: We have to back up and look at the science: in this case, the reproduction number, R_0 , which is 0.86 for Western Washington. R_0 tells you how many additional cases of COVID-19 we’d expect to see from one infected person being dropped into a group of people with no immunity. If R_0 is greater than 1, then the virus is spreading. $R_0 < 1$ means virus numbers are going down. In Western Washington, R_0 is 0.86, which is a good thing because it’s below 1. It means the measures we are taking here are working.

We could do more, but as the governor discovered, you have to have people on board for a policy to work. Yakima saw one of the worst outbreaks, but once it became a Yakima problem that people from Yakima had to solve, mask compliance went up and, temporarily, Yakima was the only place in the state where R_0 was less than 1. So given our R_0 is less than 1, I wouldn’t ask for additional measures but if the number gets above 1 with our current policy in place, I’d listen to public health experts and psychologists to advocate for a policy that could work.

State budget. *When you work to balance the budget, what would you specifically cut? What would you save? How would you raise revenue?*

Sefzik: One thing is certain, we should not be raising taxes. Those who produce the bulk of state revenues have already paid a heavy price as their businesses have been decimated. A great place to start is to look at the large budget increases enacted in the last session. Across the board state spending cuts (excepting law enforcement) are also something to consider as it will force everyone to share in the solution and encourage efficiency. We cannot allow our state spending to continue to outpace inflation and population growth. If this continues, we will destroy our revenue sources as they seek more business-friendly environments.

Shewmake: My opponent says that she'd defund Planned Parenthood to fix the \$8.8B budget shortfall, but Planned Parenthood has a budget of only \$1.3B nationwide with about \$530M coming from federal Medicaid, so I would ask her more about the math there. Some cuts have already been made, and we can get some savings from delaying spending. I will prioritize those that are most vulnerable. These people were most hurt by the last recession and the pandemic.

As for revenue sources, I'd look at a carbon tax that can be bonded as a stimulus measure with at least 15% being returned to low-income families through a match to the federal Earned Income Tax Credit. If we're going to solve climate change, it can't fall on the backs of the poor. Carbon taxes aren't a long-term solution to our regressive tax structure, but they are ideally suited to a temporary setback because they start out low, (and) are a long-term signal to businesses that we will be in a carbon constrained world so it's time to start planning. They also hopefully turn to zero as we move to a net zero carbon economy.

***Local economy.** If you think your district's economy should be more diversified, what specifically will you do to make that happen?*

Sefzik: Legislators and politicians in general do not create jobs. Jobs are created by entrepreneurs who risk their capital, time and energy in the hope of success. This is what grows an economy. The role of a legislator is to protect the business environment in which they operate to provide fairness, predictability and a reasonable level of infrastructure. This has not been happening. Our agriculture, manufacturing, refining, retail, service, logging, construction, etc. — all our businesses are stifled today by overregulation, uncertainty in permitting, and an antibusiness climate. If we will simply cut redundant regulations and allow our talented men and women to pursue their dreams, our economy will diversify itself.

Shewmake: A big area I've been working on is childcare. We simply do not have enough, it's too expensive and it's hurting businesses because their workers can't concentrate without a safe place for their kids.

A big opportunity is broadband. We're learning that many more jobs can be done remotely. Bringing those remote, high-wage jobs to Whatcom County would also mean there would be a multiplier effect as people go out more, need more construction, services, etc.

Another big opportunity is green manufacturing and heavy industry. We already have people interested in doing biofuels and renewable hydrogen in Whatcom County at Cherry Point

and I want to be someone that can help guide decision makers toward science-based policies.

Police. *If you think police reform is necessary to prevent discrimination against people of color, what specifically will you do to improve policing and police accountability?*

Sefzik: The vast majority of our police are not discriminatory toward people of color. Can we improve policing and accountability? Of course, nothing is perfect, but improving does not mean the status quo is bad. We should never cease to improve.

What is most sad about the current situation is the that opportunists are using isolated events to separate us. Polls clearly show that people of color do not want to defund the police.

Law enforcement is one of the toughest jobs around and is now one of the least appreciated. If we are not careful we will chase away the best and brightest from this profession and then we will have a real problem.

Climate. *If you agree that forest fires, extreme weather and changing ocean conditions are caused by changing climate, what will you specifically do to address climate change?*

Sefzik: It is interesting that first on the list are forest fires. Simple forest management would reduce the likelihood and impact of these events. It is noteworthy that these fires are in most cases started either intentionally or through carelessness. The penalties for such actions should be severe.

Nature has an amazing ability to adapt and conform to whatever conditions it faces. I believe that mankind is an integral part of nature and as such nature adapts to us. We need to be good stewards of the land and I believe we are continually getting better in this role.

Our family converted our home to all-electric, drive two electric vehicles and produces all of our electricity utilizing solar panels. We did this because it made sense for us economically, not

Shewmake: Police accountability is a crucial missing piece. I'm a college professor; when I hear there are professors sexually harassing students and not being fired, that makes me mad and I think we should reform the tenure system to make this not happen. Police should be held to the same standard. We need a fair system of police accountability where officers feel they can get a fair evaluation, but the community feels that, too.

There are members of my caucus looking at additional reforms on use of force, interactions with minors, no knock warrants, and I'll be supporting evidence-based reforms that save lives.

Shewmake: We need to put a price on carbon. This isn't a radical idea, George H. W. Bush proposed it in the 1990s and BP is a supporter of carbon pricing now. The hard part will be figuring out a pricing mechanism we can all agree on. My preference is for a fee structure. It's more transparent and gives business a reliable signal with less volatility than a cap-and-trade program, but I'm not an ideologue. What I do want to ensure is that this doesn't fall on working-class people.

There are a number of other policies we'll need to think through in a climate -onstrained world and my guiding principle will be science and economics. California is looking at liability reform for utilities during wildfires. My bill last session, E2SHB 2518, made needed changes to our natural gas utility regulation that will cut

because it was forced by government action. As a legislator, I will have already done what few others have in this regard.

pollution, create jobs, reduce energy costs and make our communities safer.

I strongly support the oil and gas industry. Oil has been and continues to be a force for good in the world. The energy it supplies is cleaner, more abundant, reliable, accessible and affordable than its competition. It will drive innovation forward for competing energy sources.

Education. *What will you specifically do to ensure that every K-12 student has a computer and high-speed internet to attend remote schooling?*

Sefzik: The best way to solve this problem is by local action, the same way that most educational issues should be addressed. By the time the state legislature meets and takes action, the school year will be almost finished. Local school boards can meet quickly and decisively. Because the problem will vary from district to district, so should the solution. State legislative action would be far less targeted and effective.

Shewmake: We're in the process of creating a digital initiative to ensure access to devices, technical training, and connections.

Remote schooling provides an historic opportunity to reimagine schooling and find better and more efficient methods of learning. This could also provide dramatic savings. For example, school transportation money saved could be used to provide computers and internet hot spots for students. If we continue with remote learning, even for just a portion of students, facility costs may decrease. Local school boards can adjust budgets and move funds quickly.

Plans are underway on a global level to make internet accessible to all by companies such as SpaceX via satellites it is placing in orbit. This is happening without the need for government intervention and will happen faster than if government did intervene. In the meantime, in most cases hot spots can be created.

Health care. *What will you do to improve access to affordable health care in the state and in your district?*

Sefzik: Medical savings accounts are a federal program that have proved effective. A derivative of this is where employers financially reward employees for wise use of their insurance. This, too, should be encouraged at the state level.

“Health insurance” has morphed into something different than its original intent. What was once purchased to insure against financial disaster from an unexpected medical event now operates as prepaid medical services. This distinction has broad implications and dramatically drives the cost of insurance and medical services. Returning to the former model would save money, create better access and encourage users to make better decisions.

State tort reform should be considered. Doctors must be accountable but must also be allowed to function in a manner that best serves their patient rather than their malpractice insurer. Dealing with the homeless and mental health crisis will also bring down the costs of medical care as this portion of the population disproportionately uses emergency services for nonemergency needs.

We should also explore working with adjoining states to standardize our insurance so that companies can operate across state lines without seeking approval in each state. This could possibly lower the cost of insurance as well.

***Housing.** What will you do to improve access to affordable housing in the state and in your district?*

Sefzik: Affordable housing begins with affordable land. The Growth Management Act has artificially constrained the supply of land such that there are not enough areas designated for development, thus creating scarcity. This Act needs repeal or significant improvement.

Overzealousness in declaring wetlands along with unreasonable wetlands setbacks renders large portions of properties undevelopable with 5th Amendment implications. We need to return common sense to this process.

Shewmake: I supported the creation of a public option in 2019 and will support a path to universal coverage.

Shewmake: We need to look at the Growth Management Act and figure out where we can build safely, we need to encourage infill (there is no reason we can't have six-plexes in neighborhoods like mine — the Lettered Streets), and we need to fund the housing trust fund to provide safe and decent housing for those who are most vulnerable.

The large amount of time and expense required to get a plat approved stifles development and dramatically increases costs. We need to reduce regulations and require swifter action.

Whatcom County is considered one of the most difficult places in the country to develop property. If we want affordable housing, this has to change. Along with GMA action, I would encourage a review of the Department of Ecology and its impact on development and permitting. If a lack of affordable housing is racist, then the legislature must be a part of the solution.

Transportation. *How will you pay for our state transportation needs, including ferry service?*

Sefzik: We must be more forward thinking. For example, self-driving vehicles will allow for existing roads to carry larger traffic loads faster and safer. It will make taxi-type service more affordable and accessible and reduce the need for car ownership.

Shewmake: Long term, we need to think about how to fund transportation in a world where most people aren't buying gas. That will look like a road usage charge, but I don't support a road usage charge for gas-powered vehicles that are also paying gas tax.

Mass transit needs to be seriously reconsidered. A COVID event makes this type of transportation unreliable and threatens the viability of this major investment. Monies spent there may be better allocated to improving our roads. As with affordable housing, our regulatory environment unnecessarily drives up the cost of transportation infrastructure.

Reliable ferry service is vital to Washington's transportation system. Privatization with long-term contracts that ensure service at a lower cost and fares may be possible. The private sector operates airlines efficiently and effectively so perhaps it is time to look at our ferry services in a similar manner.

Before looking for new transportation funds we owe it to our taxpayers to improve the efficiency of current spending.

Border. *What conditions do you think need to be met for the border between Washington and British Columbia to be reopened?*

Sefzik: The border should be opened immediately. There is no evidence to suggest that continuing this shutdown is helpful. The social and emotional cost to impacted families, such as our friends at Point Roberts, far outweighs any perceived benefits. The reduction in cross border trade has devastated communities on both sides of the border.

Shewmake: Right now, Canada does not want to open the border for Washingtonians. This is hurting our district, Point Roberts especially but Blaine, Sumas, Ferndale and even Bellingham businesses rely on shoppers and visitors from Canada. I wrote a letter to our federal delegation specifically about the Point Roberts situation.