

## 2018 Candidate questions

### Whitman County Commissioner

1. What education and experience has prepared you to be Commissioner?

- **Bachelor of Arts in Finance and Accounting from WSU**
- **Corporate accountant**
- **Staff position in the College of Agriculture at WSU with teaching and research responsibilities in agricultural economics.**
- **Former Certified Public Accountant**
- **Graduate of the Washington Agriculture and Forestry Education Foundation (two year leadership program encompassing state and federal issues related to natural resources)**
- **Legislative Assistant to Sen. Larry Sheahan in the Washington State Senate**
- **Farm business owner for almost 30 years.**
- **County Commissioner for nearly 12 years**

2. What three key things would you like to accomplish as Commissioner?

**It is first important to remember that the issues facing Whitman County are local and practical, not partisan. Never is party affiliation a factor. Secondly, goals should be achievable within our resource constraints, both financial and personnel. Thirdly, while commissioners do have county wide budgetary authority, they do not exercise operational control over independently elected offices (such as Auditor or Treasurer). Only by respectful and collaborative relationships with these independent elected offices can we achieve countywide goals. With that said, and in no particular order of importance, here are three among many I would like to accomplish:**

- **Fund and implement a Global Information System (GIS)**
  - **Possible capital investment to implement of over \$500K**
- **Build on our 2017 clean audit and continue to improve our financial processes to improve timeliness and data availability for managerial and budget decision making.**
  - **Improve internal controls per Generally Accepted Accounting Principles (GAAP)**
  - **Cash balance accuracy and timeliness (with Auditor and Treasurer)**
  - **Continue to implement Government Finance Officers Association (GFOA) financial consultant recommendations.**
  - **Implement financial process improvements (see “Extreme Government Makeover”, Ken Miller)**
- **Extend budgeting horizon past one year to strategically plan for fiscal sustainability**
  - **Necessary to improve historical financial data set**

3. One of the duties of County Commissioner is to levy taxes to operate the county and adopt a balanced budget for each calendar year. What skills do you have that make you especially prepared to accomplish a balanced budget?

***My education and experience in finance and accounting has prepared me to understand the fiscal issues budgeting presents. If you don't understand the difference between commercial and governmental accounting you aren't prepared to address county budgeting. I do understand the differences and their implications.***

***My many years of experience running an agricultural business, from which I have depended on for my living (in a sometimes challenging economic environment) has prepared me to plan and prioritize. I have actually signed a paycheck. I have been tasked with funding health care for my employees. I have many years of experience doing the very things commissioners are tasked with doing in the public interest.***

***Most importantly I understand, and apply, basic budgeting principles. If you don't understand the basic distinctions between "one time" expenses (such as capital expenditures) and "ongoing" expenses (such as funding of our salary classification system) you can't manage the relationship between cash balances and revenue streams. If you don't understand grant funding and its relationship to the associated expenditures related to that grant you will soon find yourself gradually and seriously out of budget balance.***

***I know how to do these things. Most importantly, I have been involved in the county budgeting cycle for twelve years. Achieving a balanced budget in many of these years, including this year, has been challenging. However, in spite of these challenges, we have maintained our basic level of services and continue to fund a "restricted reserve" intended to prepare us for emergencies. We have been able to accumulate, over time, beyond our ongoing expenses the cash necessary to fund capital improvements (not the least of which is the GIS system I have described above).***

***It is very important to note that most of the services provided by Whitman County, and associated costs, are as "agents of the state" that we are either constitutionally or statutorily obligated to provide. Our budget is largely driven by these obligations. Opportunities for cost saving is much more limited than most people realize. Knowing where these opportunities lie is fundamental to budgeting.***

***Platitudes and wishful thinking won't cut it for long term fiscal sustainability. Whitman County deserves leadership that is educated, experienced and very familiar with the specific challenges facing Whitman County, most of which will never make the paper.***

4. What are your specific plans pertaining to handling traffic growth in the county?

***It is first important to recognize that Whitman County's transportation system is administered by three separate, but connected, jurisdictions: the State of Washington (for example state highways 26 and 195), streets within municipal boundaries and Whitman County.***

***Whitman County's jurisdiction consists of 424 miles of paved roads and 1500 miles of unpaved roads. The challenge to Whitman County's road system is not traffic growth but rather the maintenance and improvement of our existing transportation infrastructure.***

***The good news, at least for the paved portions, is that Whitman County's "pavement condition index" has gone from 58% in 2009 to 82% in 2017 at the same time this index has been decreasing statewide. All this has been accomplished at the same time our Public Works employee numbers have dropped due to state mandated revenue declines in Public Works.***

**Funding toward the County's transportation system comes from state grants for construction projects largely allocated by the state through the County Road Administration Board (CRAB) and a portion of your County property tax dedicated to ongoing road maintenance. Both state funded (CRAB) and property tax revenue sources are under pressure for a variety of reasons.**

**Most importantly to the property tax portion is the state initiative that limits property tax growth revenue to 1% (plus new construction). The effect being that if the inflation of road maintenance costs exceed 1% that is an effective loss in available maintenance dollars in value adjusted dollars over time.**

**One thing the County can do is to resist the temptation to "divert" dollars from Public works portion of property tax (as some counties have done) to balance our general fund. Another is to increase efficiencies in our Public Works Department to stay within our available revenue. I am proud of the efforts already accomplished by our road department thus far.**

**The state controls both the purse strings and the cost drivers in our transportation system. Whitman County has been doing their part to stay within our budget constraints. However, unless the state steps up at their end we can expect increasing difficulties in maintaining the basic services of transportation on county roads.**

**To that end, I represent all counties across this state, as a board member of the Washington State Association of Counties (Democrats and Republicans working together), that specifically advocates for county transportation issues, as well as other local concerns, to the State Legislature. As a former staff member at the Washington State Senate, I certainly understand the process, challenges and opportunities in this environment.**

Conclusion:

**I certainly appreciate the opportunity provided by Palouse ProActive to solicit more detailed debate on the issues related to this year's campaign for county commissioner. The injection of partisan politics into this race, completely unrelated to our local issues, has certainly been frustrating to observe as a candidate and, I think, very unfair to our local community. My hope is that when people vote they will stop and consider our races for county office on their own merits rather than who they may or may not support at the state and federal level. Ask the detailed and probing questions and expect something more than campaign slogans and platitudes.**

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