



AFT Washington 2022 Candidate Questionnaire

About AFT Washington

AFT Washington represents approximately 6,500 education professionals working in community and technical colleges, regional universities, early learning, and K-12. Our members work with all ages of students, from young children in pre-K education settings to adults in higher education, as well as all facets of education. Our members are bus drivers, maintenance workers, faculty, paraeducators, food service workers, custodians, success coaches, grounds crew members, and more.

Together, with our members and national organization, we advocate and fight for:

- Safe, welcoming, and thriving neighborhood schools for every student, and high-quality, affordable post-high school opportunities to fulfill our paramount duty to help *all* students succeed, at every level;
- Economic and advancement opportunities for everyone;
- Affordable, high-quality healthcare for everyone;
- Democracy, pluralism, and voting rights by involving the voices of students, parents, and the community, side-by-side with educational employees and elected officials;
- Racial, social, financial, and civic equity, and fighting back against discrimination, hatred, and bigotry.

We hope you will take this opportunity to complete the questionnaire below and allow us to better understand your candidacy. Completing the questionnaire is required for consideration of endorsement or possible campaign contributions. If our Committee on Political Education (COPE) decides they would like further information, we may ask you to participate in an interview.

To be considered, return your completed questionnaire via email, by close of business, on March 25th to aftwashington@aftwa.org. If you have questions, please leave a message at 206-242-4777.

Candidate Biographical Information

Name

Alex Ramel



Candidate for which office: **State Representative, 40th District, Position 2**

Party affiliation: **Democrat**

Political background (*offices held or currently hold, offices ran for, party positions, etc.*):
Incumbent since January 2020

Community or organizational memberships (*past and present*):

- **Washington State Building Code Council (Current)**
- **Washington House Democratic Campaign Committee (Current)**
- **Whatcom Climate Impacts Advisory Committee (Past)**
- **Whatcom Democrats Campaign Committee (Past)**
- **Board of Directors at Sustainable Connections (Past)**
- **Worker Retraining Advisory Board at Whatcom Community College (Past)**
- **Board member Whatcom Conservation Voters (Past)**
- **Board President at Kulshan Community Land Trust (Past)**

Current occupation: **Climate Policy Advisor**

Current employer: **Stand.earth**

Are you currently a member of a labor organization? **Yes**

If yes, which labor organization, and how long have you been a member?
I joined WSFE as an affiliate member this year

If not currently a member of a labor organization, have you ever been?

If yes, which labor organization, when, and for how long?

General

1. **Why are you running for this elective office?**

I've spent my career and my free time trying to advance progressive policies to confront some of the biggest challenges in front of us. I've worked hard for the action that we need to address climate change in a meaningful way. And I've been part of a team implementing innovative solutions to help people afford homes. I've been helping other progressive leaders run for office since 2005. I know the work that needs to be done on these issues, and I'm passionate about getting it done.

2. **What qualities distinguish you from other candidates for this office?**

I have a history of working with broad coalitions to get things done. This means that while working to achieve environmental priorities, I've maintained a 100% voting record with [Washington State Labor Council](#) and helped advance some of labor's top priorities. It means that while I've worked to increase accessible multifamily housing, I've earned support as a City Champion by the Association of WA Cities and been recognized by the Low Income Housing Alliance. It means that my work on clean hydrogen policy --a key climate change priority-- earned broad bipartisan support in both the House and the Senate.

My role in the House leadership means that I have established valuable trusted relationships with decision makers and focus our caucus's priorities.

My role in political campaigning has consistently been to strategically strengthen progressive leadership with an eye to enacting better policies. I've done so as a volunteer, as a party leader, as a fundraiser, and on the board of the HDCC.

Revenue and Education

1. For decades Washington State has had the most regressive tax system in the country, contributing to underfunding of public education and many other investments in the public good. **The pandemic has highlighted the numerous gaps in education funding that persist, for example in the form of the digital divide, the need for wrap-around services, stagnant wages, etc. When new funding is allocated, it is often for specific populations of students or specific programs and in relatively small sums. How will you approach finding new sources of revenue to both invest in Washingtonians and create a more progressive revenue system?**

In 2021 I joined the Finance Committee and have been an active participant in the work of our tax structure workgroup aiming to address these serious problems in our tax code. I was part of the team that worked on the strategy to pass the Capital Gains tax and that is currently working to advance a 1% wealth tax. I voted for both of them.

- I drafted a revised estate tax schedule which would increase revenue by increasing the rate on the largest (wealthiest) estates. In my view, this is an important step toward addressing wealth disparities. Rep Tina Orwall was working in parallel and she introduced the bill with both of our ideas in 2021 and I cosponsored, and it didn't pass. I plan to introduce it in 2023.
- I've also been exploring ways to close the estate tax loophole that occurs when Washington residents receive large inheritances from estates in other states, called an inheritance tax. There are challenges with making this work within existing law, but I believe it's worth continuing to pursue.

- I also introduced legislation last year to close tax loopholes for fossil fuel companies. While Washington is better than many other states in this regard, we still offer about \$25 million/year in tax benefits for fossil fuel use and I've tried to close those exemptions.

With regard to your question about the dedication and use of revenue, I would say that in general, we should dedicate new revenue either to priority programming that addresses a specific need --such as education as we did with the cap gains tax-- or we should dedicate it to targeted tax reductions for those who need it most--like the working families tax credit. There are those who want a broad based tax reduction, and I disagree with that approach since it wouldn't address the existing disparities. Changes in the tax structure should solve problems, including wealth inequality.

Kudos to AFT including this question at the top of your list of priorities. If we are to solve systemic problems, we need a broad coalition working on systemic solutions. Thanks for being part of it.

Do you support...

	Yes	No
Capital Gains Tax?	YES. I cosponsored and voted for it	
Wealth Tax?	YES. I cosponsored and voted for it	
Estate Tax?	YES. I cosponsored the bill last year and plan to re introduce it	
Elimination of cap on Workforce Education Investment Account tax?	YES. I cosponsored and voted for HB 1504	

2. During the pandemic, many Washingtonians have lost their jobs and been evicted from their homes. The poverty rate has increased during the pandemic, particularly for BIPOC Americans. In the 2022 legislative session, a bill was introduced that would have given cash assistance to those below the poverty line with a stipend, also known as Universal Basic Income or Guaranteed Basic Income. **What is your position on this policy? Do you believe it can help address the racial wealth gap?**

I was a cosponsor of this bill by Rep Berry. I think it's an idea whose time has come and I expect to continue supporting the advancement of this idea in future legislative session.

3. Public education, from K-12 through Post-High School has seen state disinvestment for several decades. **What will you do to increase the funding of community and technical colleges in order to invest in the workforce? Do you support pay equity for part-time faculty?**

I absolutely support additional investments in public education; it's the biggest responsibility in our budget. As I indicated above, I think dedicating revenue from future improvements in the tax code has to be part of the way we address these challenges.

We are also going to have to look at pay rates across the whole system of state government next year as we tackle the budget, and this includes faculty. We need to be prepared to adjust pay to keep up with the rapid changes in cost of living.

I have both a cousin (in Baltimore) and a partner (at WWU) who work as part-time faculty, and so I am very familiar with the disparities and I would be eager to see this problem resolved.

4. Pre-K 12 employees work with students dealing with a wide range of issues outside of school, e.g. trauma, behavioral challenges, developmental disabilities, health issues and more. This can pose safety issues, for example for paraeducators who are often hit, bitten, shoved or in other ways harmed because of student behavior. Many factors contribute to this phenomenon, which translates to a range of potential solutions. **How would you approach problem solving if a group of workers sought your support in addressing this issue?**

What I have been hearing from advocates, unions, and districts is that the highest needs are for support staff: more nurses, counselors and training for paraeducators. We need to have specialists for these responsibilities so that teachers can focus on teaching. And we need to have enough of these support staff available.

That's what I supported this past year by cosponsoring and voting for HB 1664, which adjusts the prototypical funding formula and will invest hundreds of millions of dollars into schools across Washington to meet these urgent needs.

5. In recent years public officials have attempted to solve budget problems through privatization of public services. This diversion of public funds has led to a poor quality of services, reduced accountability, and a loss of good jobs, while failing to realize the promise of saving money. **What is your position on privatization in the education arena? Please explain.**

Do you support...

	Yes	No
Public tax dollars funding private charter schools?		YES and NO*

Privatization of school and college resources (i.e. counseling, childcare, student services)?		NO
Public Capitol Funds for projects at private colleges and universities?		NO

1. I voted against charter schools when their creation was on the ballot. I don't support expansion of the existing limit on the number of schools.

However, the votes spoke, and we created a program. There are now a number of charter schools in Washington that are operating. Students and their families have made significant life changes to enroll in these schools, so I would not vote to cut them off or close them at this time.

2. I don't support privatizing public services in general.
3. I don't support use of public capital funds for projects at private schools. The only caveat to this is the Northwest Indian College. It's not part of our state funded school system, but I think still serves an important public service and so I have been exploring how we could support NWIC's campus with capital funds in the future.

Collective Bargaining

1. Many Washingtonians recognize the value of union representation and are organizing at their workplace, such as legislative aides in Olympia, workers at Starbucks, etc. **Do you support every worker's right to collectively bargain for better working conditions, and their right to join a union? Please explain.**

Yes, I support every worker's right to organize and join a union. Where so called "right to work" laws have passed, wages have gone down and so have worker protections, union participation in elections has declined and corporate interests have gained an advantage. It's insidious and we need to stand against it.

2. We see ongoing attempts to weaken unions and diminish working conditions here in Washington State and at the federal level. **What policies can support unions and workers' rights and how will you work to enact such policies?**
 - I supported inclusion of project labor agreements and other labor standards in tax incentive legislation for data centers. This bill was the top priority for the construction trades, and I was instrumental in getting it passed with this provision.
 - Similarly, I've supported tax incentives for clean energy and manufacturing that is contingent upon project labor agreements, prevailing wages, and other labor standards.

- I supported, and cosponsored, the bill that will ultimately enable legislative staff to organize.
- Last year, when the Teamsters led a strike for the warehouse workers at Bellingham Cold Storage and the company tried to break the union, I organized a letter from about 2 dozen local elected leaders to the CEO asking him to negotiate in good faith.
- I helped organize a coalition of local elected officials at the request of SEIU 1199 to respond to anti-union workplace activity at a local healthcare facility.

Social Justice

1. What do you see as **your role** as a state official in addressing racial, social, and economic inequities in our educational system? **Please specifically address each issue.**

Historical inequities, systemic racism and generational poverty all end up overlaid on the map of where people live in our society. Since most kids in Washington go to schools in their neighborhood --particularly in k-12 education, but also in the community and technical college system-- that means unequal school districts have been part of the system that perpetuates those cycles. We need to intentionally disrupt that system by equalizing funding. The McCleary fix was a good start, but only a start. We made more progress this year with HB 1664.

Going forward, the House Democrats have made a commitment to examine every policy and each budget decision through a lens of equity. Just as we don't pass a bill without asking "what does this cost?", we shouldn't pass a bill without asking "how does this advance racial and social equity?" As a member of the House Democrats leadership team, I am committed to making sure we continue to apply this lens in every policy area, including education funding.

2. We are faced with numerous threats to social justice, including ongoing threats to our immigrant communities, the housing affordability and student debt crises, police accountability, and more. **Where have you shown leadership and acted on issues of social justice in the past? What will your social justice priorities be if you win your election?**

In my job outside of the legislature, I have been a member of our internal Equity Committee which focuses on making sure that our workplace is welcoming and accessible and that our advocacy always keeps people who have been historically marginalized at the center of the environmental improvements we are working for. Specifically this has meant that our work to limit the expansion of dirty energy projects has been done in coalition with and following the leadership from Tribes and First Nations near the projects. As examples, I have helped organize events to elevate the voices of Gwich'in leaders opposed to drilling in their homeland in the Alaskan Arctic,

and I've helped build a traditional watchhouse with the Tsleil-Waututh people near Vancouver BC to oppose an oil pipeline through their traditional homeland.

Within the legislature, I have worked particularly hard to address our housing crisis which we know falls disproportionately on people of color. I helped pass a major reform to our multifamily housing tax exemption program in 2021, led the way on important amendments to enable REET exemptions for affordable housing projects, and to make the use of local rural sales tax funds usable for workforce housing. I also sponsored a budget proviso to support the development and expansion of Community Land Trusts around Washington, creating new opportunities to build wealth through limited equity homeownership for those who have been left behind.

I'm on a team with many strong voices of people of color. I recognize that for people of color these disparities are daily lived experience, so I prioritize understanding and learning from those perspectives to inform my decision making. When those with lived experience intend to be at the front of a policy priority; you can and will see me stepping up to support their leadership.

3. Several bills were passed in the 2021 legislative session designed to reduce police violence and hold police accountable; in the 2022 session attempts were made to dilute the definition of excessive force and minimizing the role of de-escalation. **What is your position on these issues?**

I supported the passage of these policies in 2021, and supported the three bills that passed in 2022 which I would characterize as technical corrections. Most significantly we clarified the circumstances under which police can use force at all. The 2021 legislation had inadvertently left involuntary treatment orders off the list of situations where police can use force -- this was an oversight. Consequently, many police departments were refusing to take people experiencing serious behavioral health crisis into protective custody. They were interpreting the law from 2021 as prohibiting helping people who need help. We made the intent of the law from 2021 clear. Police are still required to deescalate, and excessive force is not allowed.

There were other proposals to further roll back the accountability laws that passed in 2021, which might be characterized as "diluting the definition of excessive force and minimizing the role of de-escalation," I did not support these measures.

4. Hate crimes have risen 25 percent nationally since 2015. But the number of hate crimes in Washington state increased by 97 percent. There were 542 hate-crime incidents reported statewide. **How do you plan on addressing the increase in hate crimes in Washington state?**

Preventing open carry of firearms and intimidation at public meetings was an important step. I would support additional funding and other resources to prosecute and



investigate these crimes. I'd just add that in Skagit county we had one high profile case of a young man who was brutally assaulted by an assailant using racial slurs, and the the County Prosecutor declined to prosecute it as a hate crime. So getting the right people into key elected offices remains an essential part of the solution.

Campaign Information

Are there any additional comments you would like to provide that you believe are necessary in understanding your candidacy?

I know that with the other candidate in the race that you will have pressure to support him or split your endorsement. This is made more difficult because he is a nice guy and has done good work in the community. But his candidacy is misguided; I am asking for your sole endorsement.

I have a 100% voting record with WSLC. In the Finance committee I've carried a lot of water for labor priorities, including top priorities for the building trades and many of the priorities AFT's priorities listed above on this questionnaire.

I expect to win this campaign handily, and would hope to be able to invest as much of my time and resources as possible on supporting other priority candidates in neighboring districts. Your early and sole support for my campaign will help make that outcome clear sooner rather than later.

What is your overall campaign budget?

I'm still recalibrating after recent changes in the race and don't have a fresh campaign plan written. I have \$41K on hand. I raised over \$110K in my last race (my campaign account plus my PAC), and I expect to exceed that this year.

How many volunteers are currently working on your campaign? What is your goal for volunteers working on your campaign?

I have a couple of volunteers helping with logistics, website, and email right now. I can and will mobilize many more. I hope to be able to mobilize them to win in neighboring districts if my race doesn't need the extra effort.

To date, how much money have you raised and obtained pledges for?

\$41,000 on hand. I have pledges and checks to submit for another ~\$10,000.



AlexRamel.com

Please provide any endorsements you have received:

Most endorsements haven't started yet. You can see my endorsements from 2020 [here](#).

Relevant to this conversation, I have financial support this year from Teamsters Legislative Action, SEIU 1199NW, SEIU 925, and the Northwest Regional Council of SMART (Sheet metal workers and allied trades).

Campaign address: PO Box 2819 City: Bellingham

Zip: 98227

Campaign phone: 360-305-5079 Home phone: none

Email address: AlexWramel@gmail.com Website address: www.Alexramel.com