



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: Sharon Shewmake

Candidate for which office: State Senate, 42nd LD

Party affiliation: D

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

Currently state representative for the 42nd LD from 2018-present

Community or organizational memberships (past and present):

Lettered Streets Neighborhood Association, various academic affiliations, Washington Center for Economics and Financial Education board member

Current occupation: Economics Professor

Current employer: Western Washington University

Are you currently a member of a labor organization? yes

If yes, which labor organization, and how long have you been a member? United Faculty of Western Washington University, since 2013

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 been serving in the House for the last 4 years and I want to make sure the State Senate can work productively with the House to pass good legislation on housing, education, the environment and a big piece of that will be flipping this seat. When I declared it was Doug Ericksen's seat, and since then I believe we still need a strong voice in the Senate.

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

I'm the only economist in the legislation and the only Democrat in this race. My opponents are all Republicans or former Republicans. One is the appointed Senator Sefzik (whose mother I beat in 2020) who opposed policies like funding stabilization which keep our K-12 running smoothly as we progress out of the pandemic, the college loan program and I'll also be the only one that is willing to take meaningful action on housing affordability (Sefzik also voted against 1660, my ADU bill) which I believe to be fundamental to an economy that really works for everyone.

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?

Do you support...

	Yes	No
Capital Gains Tax?	x	
Wealth Tax?	Maybe lots of dials here	
Estate Tax?	X	
Elimination of cap on Workforce Education Investment Account tax?	x	

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'll be honest, as an economist there are still questions about the impact of UBI. Conceptually it makes a lot of sense. We have a hodgepodge of means tested anti poverty programs that can result in really high marginal tax rates if you account for the loss of these benefits. If you get a raise and lose your SNAP benefits, did you really get a raise? I think programs like the Working Families Tax Credit do a better job of addressing this but as the nature of work changes we have to experiment with things like UBI. So I'm supportive in theory but really need to see and understand details.

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?**

CTCs do a great job on their own and as part of a larger higher ed ecosystem with 4 years and Running Start. They are the ticket to a better life for many and we have to keep making that economic case. I support pay equity for part-time faculty.

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?**

We've been hearing about this even before the pandemic and it makes me cry. We need counselors and more adults in school. We invested about \$3B in the budget to do this and I'm open to other suggestions here. You are the experts in this.

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.**

I'm skeptical that privatizing services really cuts costs. When you privatize people still have to do the work, but now they have a whole new HR department, manager, salesperson to get the government contracts and make a profit. It can also lead to holes in the system such as our GRACE program (diverts high 911 users into social services) which had to create a special position in a local non-profit that had a totally different pay schedule and it's been causing problems. It would have been easier if the city could have hired her directly.

Do you support...

	Yes	No
Public tax dollars funding private charter schools?		x
Privatization of school and college resources (i.e. counseling, childcare, student services)?		x
Public Capitol Funds for projects at private colleges and universities?	x	

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 was a co-sponsor of the first bill this session for the LA union and voted for the second one. One of the things that struck me about the bill was that the asks were for things like an extra case worker during the year, not money, not time off, but the resources the LAs needed to do their jobs better. Being good at your job, whether as an LA or a teacher or a custodian, is itself part of the reward and people want the tools they need to be good at their jobs!

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'm open to learning more about ideas here. I don't serve on the labor committee so I don't always know what the next thing coming down will be.

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.**

We need to make sure that our education systems are not doing harm to marginalized communities and continually listening to what needs are not being met. This is hard. A big piece of this is funding, and I'm proud of the investments we have made but it's not the only piece. It's also making sure teachers know how to meet their students and have tough conversations as part of their education and continuing training. I've had these conversations with my fellow faculty at WWU and frankly it's made me a better teacher.

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?**

The passage of the Climate Commitment Act was a big piece. So was my low-income solar program that will help low-income folks get access to the benefits of solar by removing the high upfront costs. I'm excited to see what we can do!

Going forward it's housing, housing, housing. I had the housing bill that addresses zoning that made it the furthest this year—1660 the ADU bill but it died in the Senate when Republicans and a democrat dropped so many amendments on it that it would have run out of time. This is a big reason why I'm running for Senate. We cannot build our way out of the housing affordability crisis just by funding the housing trust fund. We had a historic investment this year in the housing trust fund and it's about 4,000 homes. We need 170,000-250,000 just to catch up. We will have to leverage the power of the private market and that means zoning reform, condo liability reform and looking at creative solutions to help people access the capital needed to build a home.

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 voted for many of the police bills in 2020 and the heard from my chiefs about many of the unintended consequences. It was hard conversations. My view on this is that we should have put the effective date out further on the 1310 and other pieces of legislation. I know this is a difficult ask but the fact the AG hadn't come out with model policies meant many of our officers were just terrified about what they were and weren't able to do. Some of this was WASPC making this political but I think there was also genuine concern that we had changed the accountability rules at the same time as we changed what we were expecting from officers. If you were to do that with my job, I'd be confused and nervous too.

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?**

I'm really open to suggestions on this. That's horrible and scary. I support a discussion about race and justice in schools, but people committing hate crimes may not be swayed by this kind of education. I think we also need to do some training on how to recognize disinformation. Finland does this and reading about it, it's pretty interesting.

Campaign Information

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

What is your overall campaign budget? \$600K (yikes)

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

We have a number of people who informally volunteer but not a set count. We just got off legislative session so are just now ramping up.

To date, how much money have you raised and obtained pledges for? \$65K

Please provide any endorsements you have received: I haven't put this together yet but I can share endorsements from precious years. <https://www.sharon4whatcom.com/>

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Zip: 98227

Campaign phone: 8505910202

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