



Candidate name: Pinky	Vargas	Legislativ	ve district:	42 nd
You are a candidate for:	House of Representatives	Senate		
If you are a candidate for t which position are your ru	he House of Representative nning for?	s, Position 1 □	Position 2	
Local government ba	ckground	vernment positi	on. Yes	No

Have you ever been elected or appointed to a local government position, or served on a local government board, committee, or as staff? *Local governments include cities, counties, public utility districts, school districts, fire protection districts, port districts, and more.*

If yes, in what capacity?

<u>Political background:</u> Bellingham City Council (2013-present), Council President in 2016. I've served as Chair of Community and Economic Development Committee, Finance, and Natural Resources. I'm currently serving on the Justice Committee, and Chair of Parks and Recreation.

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<u>Current Boards:</u> Bellingham Chamber of Commerce, Whatcom Tourism Board, Whatcom Lodging and Tax Allocation Committee, and Bellingham Parks and Recreation Board.

<u>Past Boards:</u> Lake Whatcom Natural Resources Commission, Opportunity Council Board, Downtown Bellingham Partnership, Mount Baker Theater, and Greenways.

1. State-shared local revenues

When the state encounters fiscal problems, legislators often take revenues historically shared with cities, or increase fees on services provided to cities to fill the state's budget deficit. Recently, some shared revenues have been restored. However, during the last recession, the Legislature enacted cuts and diversions, while unfunded mandates and other local government cost drivers remained unaddressed, including the following items:

- Changes in liquor tax and profit distributions resulting in losses of nearly \$200 million in funds that supported essential local services, such as public safety;
- Sweeping and diverting over \$1 billion in local utility taxes, real estate taxes, and project loan repayments
 from the nationally-acclaimed Public Works Trust Fund (PWTF) that helps keep local infrastructure
 operating; and
- Requiring cities to pay training fees for officers attending the Basic Law Enforcement Academy (BLEA).

Do you support or oppose the Legislature continuing to use	Support	Oppose
locally-shared revenues or revenues intended for capital		\boxtimes
projects in order to balance the state's operating budget?		

Briefly describe one or more actions that you would take to ensure your views on these issues are accounted for by your caucus and in a final budget.

If elected, I want to ensure that we are fully-funding local revenues and governments, and I will oppose attacks and attempts to underfund them. I currently work on the Bellingham City Council and know what it is like to have cuts and diversions to our City budget. I want to help find solutions to fully-fund city budgets and the state's operating budget, and plan to advocate my views to my caucus. The legislature needs to manage its budget honestly, making cuts to state programs or raising state revenue to fund what it wants to fund. It's not fair for the state to balance its budget on the backs of local governments.

2. Basic infrastructure financing

Cities face many challenges when repairing and updating critical infrastructure such as drinking water and sewer systems. Historically, the Public Works Trust Fund (PWTF), a revolving loan fund, was a significant source for financing infrastructure. As the state wrestled first with a recession and then with the *McCleary* education funding challenges, legislators repeatedly turned to diverting these funds and leaving nothing in their place. Since 2013, nearly all of the tax revenues deposited into the PWTF were diverted to the state's education funding account instead. Those revenues were scheduled to come back to the PWTF in 2019, but the revenue diversions were extended another four years.

Would you support or oppose a budget that diverted more resources	Support	Oppose
from the PWTF to address state general fund obligations?		\boxtimes

Do you believe that it is part of the state's obligation to help Yes fund critical local infrastructure, especially when taxes and fees raised to do so in 1985 continue to be levied?

As a lawmaker, how will you work to secure the revitalization of the PWTF and protect it from future raids?

No

Although we need to fully-fund education, we also need to be supporting funds and investments in our infrastructure. If elected, I will oppose attempts to divert funds from the PWTF, and work to secure its revitalization. As a local government official, I know the importance of local infrastructure and I will commit to working with the Legislature to make sure we're making the investments that we need to create jobs and help our communities thrive as they grow.

3. Homelessness, affordable housing, and mental health

Across the state, housing costs are rising and affordability issues are impacting homebuyers and renters, as well as exacerbating the already critical homelessness problems in many communities. Mental health services are stretched thin and cities (not normally in the business of providing these particular social services) find themselves increasingly trying to help residents and keep their communities safe and secure. Cities have a strong desire to work together with the state, counties, business, nonprofit, and faith communities to help address these challenges. We continue to seek financing, regulatory, and funding tools to help.

Which of the following are priorities for you? Choose all that apply.

- \boxtimes Help to end homelessness
- \boxtimes Ensure adequate mental health services for those in need
- Provide tools to help control the spiraling cost of housing

Would you support or oppose a proposal for the state to override local zoning
or density decisions to promote more affordability in housing construction?Support

Please elaborate on what you suggest doing to address one or more of these issues:

In my campaign for the 42nd State Senate seat, I have been continually advocating for ways to address the housing crisis and the rising costs of housing, homelessness, and funding mental health services.

Affordable housing is about increasing supply and access, with a focus on smart growth. There is no panacea, and this is a nationwide issue. Whatcom County is a beautiful place to live, but it is an increasingly

Oppose

harder place to afford as more and more people move here. Affordable housing is also at the crux of our very complex issue of homelessness. We need to increase the supply of affordable rental housing and add more diversity in housing types to provide an entry to home ownership. We also need to ensure continued funding for low-income housing, like CDBG Grants, HUD funding, and encourage a county-wide initiative, like the Bellingham Home Fund, which supports new affordable housing construction, and rehabilitates existing affordable housing. We also need to encourage urban villages and responsible housing design, with high standards in building codes to ensure energy efficiency and a focus on net zero, along with addressing zoning and land use decisions that reduce our carbon footprint, focuses on infill not sprawl, and ensures adequate green spaces. Additionally, we need to increase state investments in bike lanes and transit options.

In order to help end homelessness, we need to be providing and funding mental health services. The Legislature has a responsibility to advocate for funding for mental health programs, and alternatives and diversion programs to help prevent homelessness in the first place. On the Bellingham City Council, I have been focused on criminal justice reform for the last few years and I think behavioral healthcare is so important right now. I currently serve on the justice committee, and one of our main focuses is on increasing alternatives and diversions and how to keep people out of jail and off the streets. I see first-hand how our prisons have become a holding place for a those with mental health or substance abuse problems, which is magnified by Washington's opioid crisis. We need to add and expand rehab facilities for addiction and have more behavioral healthcare workers and a support system, for people with mental health disorders and addiction.

We also need to address the criminalization of homelessness. Some things the state can do to address this issue, is to support legislation that continues efforts to combat the criminalization of homelessness, increase the training of law enforcement around encounters of people exhibiting psychiatric symptoms, increase access to jail diversion and alternatives to incarceration, expand evidence-based housing and services solutions like permanent supportive housing for people caught on a cycle of homelessness and incarceration, and reduce barriers to housing, employment, and services for people with criminal histories.

As your next State Senator, I will advocate for criminal justice reform policies, funding for mental health, and programs that reduce recidivism, as well as funding and support at the state level that can help these programs be more abundant and impactful at the local level. It is absurd that we are reinforcing a cycle of bias, criminalization, and homelessness, and I would like to see legislation passed at the State Senate that helps prevent this.

4. Economic development

Economic development opportunities vary greatly across the state. Some communities have deteriorating commercial or industrial areas or lack the needed infrastructure for critical development, and others lack access to adequate broadband services. AWC supports expansion of current programs and funding, including expansion of state Local Revitalization Financing (LRF) and Local Infrastructure Financing Tool (LIFT) programs as options to incentivize economic development and support job creation.

Would you support or oppose legislation that expands the financing	Support	Oppose
options available to local governments for economic development?	\boxtimes	

What other ideas do you have for bolstering the state's economic development opportunities?

In genera, I I view Washington's economic climate to be very strong, especially in the Puget Sound region. Part of the reason that our economic climate is so strong is because of workers' generous benefits and healthy wages. By making sure that workers get fair paychecks, they have money to spend as consumers a healthy spiral upwards that helps everyone succeed, workers and businesses alike. And if elected, I'll work every day to protect those benefits and wages to help our economy grow even more.

However, there is always room for improvement for opportunity in equalizing the playing field - especially in rural areas or places outside of the Puget Sound core. Some businesses may always struggle with the costs of doing business. There probably are areas or industries that are heavily regulated, and we should also be

looking for opportunities to streamline processes or eliminate unnecessary red tape. Although, this ALWAYS has to be balanced against our responsibilities to protect workers, our environment, and other critical impacts that irresponsible businesses could have. It is not fair to allow somebody to harm the public at large, for the benefit of an individual business and its owners.

The next steps we need to take are to foster job growth in areas outside of the central Puget Sound corridor, so that the rest of the state isn't left behind as Seattle booms. That means making sure that people have the skills they need to get good jobs that pay living wages, and benefits. We need to expand opportunities for vocational and technical education, and make sure that those opportunities are available in every community. It does not help a student in rural Whatcom county much if training and education opportunity are geographically unavailable to them because they're located in King County. By expanding career & technical education, apprenticeships, and other pathways directly into the skilled workforce, and making sure that those opportunities are locally available in the communities that need to see an economic boost, we can help those local economies grow. Businesses will be able to get workers with the skills they need, and workers will get higher wages and benefits to match.

5. Local control

Cities succeed when they can respond to local residents' unique needs and desired outcomes through exercising local control. The State Constitution and state statutes provide cities with wide discretion in serving their communities. However, the Legislature sometimes considers preempting cities from enacting local ordinances or engaging in certain activities. We believe that the relationship between the state and cities functions best as a partnership, where the state gives careful consideration to the varied conditions of local governments, and appreciates the importance of retaining local flexibility.

Do you believe that local control is important	Yes	No
to ensuring responsive local government?	\boxtimes	

If you disagree that local control should be preserved, please describe one or more specific issue areas or situations in which the state should preempt local control.

OR

If you agree that local control should be respected, please describe how you would argue for the protection of local control to colleagues who want to preempt local governments.

I absolutely think that local control should generally be respected, because different areas of the state have different needs that may require different solutions. While states and cities should act as a partnership, what is best for the state is not always best for the city.

If you have any questions, please contact Regina Adams, AWC Government Relations Coordinator, at 360-753-4137 or <u>ReginaA@awcnet.org</u>. Please return your survey **by the end of the day on Wednesday, July 4** by:

- Email to <u>ReginaA@awcnet.org;</u>
- Fax to (360) 753-0149; or
- U.S. mail to AWC Candidate Survey, 1076 Franklin Street SE, Olympia, WA 98501-1346.

Thank you for your participation!