



Food Lifeline’s goal is to elevate the issue of hunger with candidates during the election cycle. Each candidate for state and federal office received our questionnaire. For every candidate that replied, their original responses are presented as submitted. See results at foodlifeline.org/advocacy.

Debra Lekanoff	Candidate for State Representative, District 40, Position 1 (Burlington)
<p>In Washington, 1 in 6 children experience food insecurity. What steps or legislative actions would you take to address child poverty and hunger?</p>	<p>When it comes to children and food security, some of the most important pieces to retain in the budget are related to education: investments in educators and staff, student meals, and technology. Excellent educators, counselors, nurses, and staff are essential for a high-quality education for all students. During the pandemic, schools have risen to the challenge and are providing meals to students. Many districts waived the income requirement for eligibility to receive free meals and thus opened the option up to all students. When our schools are able to safely reopen, we need to make sure they can continue to feed students. With districts having to adapt to virtual learning across the state, we also must ensure we continue to fund technology so all students can have access to devices and high-speed internet. In the 2020 Supplemental Operating Budget, my colleagues and I secured investments in child care, which include directing funds towards low-income families, and making sure families with children who are most at risk of not being ready for kindergarten have access to subsidized Pre-K and early learning slots. Earlier this year, the Legislature passed HB 2456, a law to extend the homeless grace period for families experiencing homelessness who access the Working Connections Child Care from 4 months to 12 months, giving those families more time to find employment and secure housing while making sure their children are able to remain in child care. I look forward to working with care advocates and stakeholders to find more funding avenues for these programs. My kitchen table always has a seat for Food Lifeline as we work together in the coming session to address and alleviate child poverty and hunger.</p>
<p>If elected, in what areas would you support making investments to overcome racial inequities?</p>	<p>COVID-19 is forcing us to look at the roots of injustice ingrained in our society, and we have a real opportunity to create a new normal and prioritize equitable access to opportunities and services. While maintaining support for education, expanding workforce, and investing in</p>

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infrastructure is critical, we must also meet the day-to-day needs of folks across the state. We must protect workers who feed us everyday and increase access to affordable, full spectrum health care. This must include behavioral health and substance abuse recovery to ensure we are maximizing the economic opportunities for all of our community members. Though we have already identified these as areas of high need, we cannot be blind to new or different ideas. I will invite communities and stakeholders affected to sit at my table and discuss those issues most important to them. As I stand with salmon eggs in one hand and seeds in the other looking over the Salish Sea, I recognize that we must make early, incremental investments to ensure long term success. We cannot separate affordable housing from healthcare, workers rights, access to clean water, and the right to a healthy environment. I will continue my work with the Growth Management Act and incentivizing cities and counties to incorporate affordable housing into their land use plans so we continue to grow well and grow smart. We must support more policies that grant worker protections like paid family medical leave and a living wage, as well as policies that support basic human rights like universal healthcare and access to affordable housing near jobs, wrap-around services, public transportation, and utility infrastructure. This will mean increased density in some urban centers in the 40th district, which will have the additional benefit of protecting our salmon. Urban sprawl is one of the biggest threats to salmon health, which is a huge indicator of the health of the Salish Sea and Washington State. Policies that address systemic racism will lead to healthier communities, healthier salmon, and a healthier environment.

How will you address the role of government and taxes during your campaign and address this issue in the legislature should you be elected? Specifically, are you supportive of tax code reform? Taxing capital gains in Washington state? And funding the state's Working Families Tax Credit?

Last year the City of Seattle, Progressive Tax Revenue Report shared this fact: Washington State's tax system is the most regressive in the country, with households in the lowest 20% income bracket paying 16.8% of their income in state and local taxes while households in the top 1% pay only 2.4%. Even though Washington is an extremely high-tax state for lower-income residents, overall it is a relatively low-tax state. In fact, Washington ranked 41st among the 50 states for state and local taxes as a percentage of Gross Domestic Product according to the Department of Revenue. In summary this means we have more work to do to create

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legislation and generate policy solutions that correct our current tax system. Economic austerity is not going to create the change that our state envisions. We must work together to reform our tax code, identify strategic savings, and make long-term investments in our infrastructure so that our economy, government and communities can prosper and meet the challenges we will undoubtedly face during our recovery. There is no single answer to correct our course. It will require surgical approaches that, on balance move, our workers, families, and businesses in the right direction. I co-sponsored the Working Families Tax Credit during the last session, and I went a step farther and co-sponsored HB 2521 to add ITIN filers to those who qualify for the Working Families Tax Credit. This bill did not make it out of committee, but I am committed to getting back to work on it in the next session. Earlier this year, my colleagues and I also advocated at the federal level for inclusion of ITIN filers in the next federal stimulus package, the HEROES Bill. While the next bill has stalled in the Senate, we will continue our advocacy until ITIN filers receive the support they deserve. The WA State Tax Structure Committee was formed in 2018 and co-Chaired by Rep. Noel Frame and Senator Keith Wagner. The Committee is diversifying our revenue sources so we do not rely primarily on sales and property tax in the future. This crisis has shown us that relying on sales tax leaves us vulnerable and unable to fund our essential services that support all who call Washington home. I support identifying new progressive tax opportunities for Washington and utilizing the best information to create a future for the state that is sensible and sustainable after all the lessons we have learned. My goal is to work with all the stakeholders, review and consider analyses, and develop the best laws and policies moving forward. The past two years, the Department of Revenue has had a joint legislative task force reviewing the income tax and revenue situation for Washington State. The work is still in progress, and the results will help the Tax Structure Committee make its decisions about how best to move forward.

Please describe policies and investments you would support to improve farm worker rights and living conditions, if you are

It is my job as a Washington State Representative, who not only serves the 40th Legislative District, but all Washingtonians, to open my doors and bring together as many people, voices and opinions as I can together to sit at

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elected?

the table and work out what we can do to keep our food and farmworkers safe and healthy. Food is bigger than politics, and the health and safety of our agriculture community must be a priority for all of us right now and for generations to come. As part of the response to COVID-19 earlier in the summer, I worked side by side with several Representatives and Senators in the WA Legislature to consider ways to address rent relief for migrant workers and find pathways to ensure H-2A workers and undocumented community members are included in the funding assistance going out to the community. I partnered with distilleries in the 40th district to make hand sanitizer that we can distribute to farm workers. This was nowhere near sufficient to meet the need, and we have much more to do to make sure essential workers who feed us do not go hungry themselves due to lost wages, healthcare expenses, or rent prices. In the coming session, I plan on working on a Washington State Farm Bill to supplement the federal Farm Bill. The Washington State Farm Bill would increase efforts to improve rural development, access to nutritious food, environmental conservation, and farm worker protections. I always set a wide table and look forward to continuing to partner with organizations like Community to Community and Familias Unidas por la Justicia to work towards community-driven solutions.

If elected, what will you do to alleviate hunger and poverty, and create economic opportunity for Washington state residents?

Part of economic opportunity requires that early educational opportunities are equal across all communities and families. That is why I worked to create new opportunities for educational resources at every level. I sponsored HB 2753 to strengthen school enrichment levies, and I co-sponsored bills to increase funding for school counselors (HB 2699), to provide more opportunities for scholarships for students with low-income (HB 1311) and for Native American students (SHB 2001), among many others. One of our biggest collective wins was passing a law to allow students with incomes below \$50,000 to apply for the Washington College Grant to attend post-secondary school tuition-free. We will continue to support and sustain this important program, but I know we need to provide more consistent and sustainable levels of funding for public education in Washington to ensure every student has access to high quality, affordable education, no matter their citizenship status, zip code or income level. Women's participation in the economy is critical

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for families across our state. There are many complex reasons women’s participation is both critical and endangered. I devoted time during the 2019-2020 biennium to improving options from women in the workforce. As a single, working mom, I strongly support Paid Family and Medical Leave (PFML) and will continue to join efforts to expand access for all sectors. I co-sponsored HB 2614 which strengthens the 2017 PFML by offering technical fixes and clarifying definitions. Finally, I co-sponsored HB 1303 to expand access to subsidized child care slots for students pursuing higher education. Everyone deserves the opportunity to pursue their educational and professional goals, and expanding access to child care will help to level the playing field for women and parents. Simply put, this is not a political issue. No matter our beliefs or affiliations, every one of us must eat. Our family farmers, food and farmworkers do not grow, harvest and distribute food based on political beliefs or legislative ideals, and our support for them cannot depend on how we voted in the last election or the letter we put next to our names. I look forward to working closely with Food Lifeline to find solutions to alleviate poverty and hunger, and to find innovative ways to create economic opportunity for all Washingtonians as we continue to recover and rebuild from COVID-19.

Yes/No Section

If elected, will you insist proposed laws, bills, policies, and practices be evaluated for racial justice and equity?

Yes

Will you commit to implementing the state Food Policy Forum’s recommendations to mitigate the agricultural symptoms of climate change and to help farmers adapt?

Yes

Will you commit to supporting efforts to reduce wasted food if you are elected?

Yes

Do you believe that every human being deserves physical, social, and economic access to sufficient,

Yes

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safe, and nutritious food that meets their food preferences and dietary needs for an active and healthy life?

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