

FEDERATED FIRE FIGHTERS OF WYOMING
2020 Candidate Questionnaire

The Federated Fire Fighters of Wyoming represents professional firefighters throughout Wyoming. Your responses to these questions will be reviewed by the FFFWY Government Affairs Committee. After reviewing your questions you may be asked to meet or take a call with our Committee and Executive Board so we can clarify your answers. Please return this form electronically by August 2nd, 2020, to be considered for endorsement by the FFFWY and assistance through FFFWY FIRE PAC.

Candidate Name: Jackie Grimes

Office Sought: State Senate

District (if applicable):10

Campaign Committee Name: Elect Jackie Grimes

Campaign Address: 1602 Clydesdale

City: Laramie

State: WY

Zip: 82070

Campaign Phone Number: (307) 223-5763

Campaign Contact Person: Jackie Grimes

Name

Phone#

E-mail Address jacqueline@electjackiegrimes.org

Website Address: www.electjackiegrimes.org

Do you have a Primary Election opposition? No

Have you received any endorsements? Yes

If yes, please list your endorsements: WEA, SMART Transportation, Run Wyoming, Representative Charles Pelkey

Have you ever held public office? No

If Yes, what office and when:

Why are you running for election?

Briefly describe

I am running for office because the Wyoming Legislature has failed to act on any account to address our economic, health, and mental health crises. It has failed to find stable means of funding public services; a roll that government is expected to pay in order to keep our infrastructure usable, our communities safe, and to provide a quality education for all of Wyoming's children. When I looked at the legislature, it is filled with wealthy and retired individuals who do not understand the real needs of the average working individual or family. As a woman in my 30s, with two small children, a public educator, and wife to a small business owner, I know the real hardships our communities are facing because my family is as equally impacted as yours.

What are your three most important political issues?

First, and foremost, we have to stabilize our economy, diversify our job market, and stabilize revenue streams needed to provide public services. Secondly, we have got to address our health crisis in our state. At minimum, that means expanding Medicaid, a move that over half the state is in favor of by our legislature has failed to act upon. It also requires addressing our near double monthly premium rates for health insurance. I firmly believe in order to address our health crisis, we must also recognize the mental health concerns within our state and take active steps to address our rates of suicide. Lastly, public education is of vital importance. Our government has cut funding for multiple years and made no attempt to address revenue shortfalls to stop the cutting of funding to public services. With the pandemic putting public education in such jeopardy, now is the time to invest in education and expand education to early childhood education to ensure pre-school/pre-k centers can have the supplies needed to keep facilities open and healthy, as well as protect their viability should they be ordered shut again as many have closed as a result of families being unable to pay tuition.

Concerning public employees, what are your most important issues?

The most important issue for public employees at this point is stabilizing our revenue streams in order to ensure that we are able to provide high-quality public services. This also means tapping into our rainy day fund because it is literally a monsoon outside. By utilizing this fund for what it was intended to be used for, we can avoid furloughs and layoffs of our public employees. I want to remind people that during the worst closure, it was public employees who kept local economies going by spending more than they ordinarily would in order to continue to support others in their community.

Compare/Contrast yourself with your opponent(s)

Well this is easy. Dan Furphy wants to cut everything, I don't want to cut any public services. Dan believes we have too many public employees. He talks a good game but has failed in his time in legislature to act to prevent our economic crisis; a crisis that was already happening pre-COVID. He had his chance to make a difference and has done nothing to act on any of the many recommendations to bring in new revenue streams.

Craig Malmstrom is making unrealistic wild promises of jobs that would take away from local business, cost the state more to maintain, do nothing to contribute to revenue shortfalls, and turn Wyoming into the new West coast. I am sure I am not alone in not wanting to be the west coast. By the biggest difference between myself and my opponents is that I am invested in this with you. Both Dan and Craig are retired and boast being wealthy; what happens to our state and communities does not impact them. They can wait out this bust. The rest of us cannot. I am in it with the majority of families in our state.

If your candidacy is endorsed, what assistance do you ask from the Federated Fire Fighters of Wyoming?

First, your endorsement would be a great honor. I have such respect for what firefighters do on a regular basis and our volunteer firefighters who take on fire season. Additional assistance that would be meaningful would include a chance to meet with the local teams in Albany County to hear more directly for them what their experiences have been and what needs there are to appropriately fund fire departments. In addition, volunteers; people willing to hand door hangers, call their neighbors and families and ask them to vote for me. Lastly, financially, this is an uphill battle. My family is not wealthy and all donations are greatly appreciated in order to maximize my ability to reach voters.

Please answer the following (7) questions which are specifically related to public safety and firefighter safety.

The primary function of local government is to provide public safety. With the severe economic downturn from the rescission in minerals and the collapse of tourism do to the COVID response, Wyoming cities and counties are suffering from lost revenue. These entities provide most public safety services in the state. We have witnessed municipal budget cuts of non-essential services. Unfortunately, we also have seen proposals that would decrease public safety.

1. Would you support using COVID and other funds to assist Wyoming cities, towns, and counties, in providing adequate public safety through their fire departments? Absolutely, this is not just a support, I would strongly advocate for this and the use of rainy day funds until we stabilize our revenue streams.

All our families are exposed every day to known cancer causing chemicals which are added to household materials theoretically to keep us safer from fire danger. However, the chemical added to our furniture which is present in every home in Wyoming is not safe for our families and is much more hazardous when it catches on fire. Fire fighters come into contact with flame retardants in their daily lives, just like the rest of the population. But fire fighters have a much higher risk of suffering the negative, cancer-causing effects of carcinogenic flame retardants as those chemicals burn in a fire – whether it's in the air they breathe, exposure during the overhaul of fires, the absorption through their skin during and after working at a fire, or after the incident as they are exposed to the toxic soot that covers their turnouts and equipment. It is the FFFWY's position that this exposure contributes to the reason that our members have a significantly higher incidence of cancer than the general public. Much of the movement to date towards toxic-free fire safety and the removal of toxic flame retardants have been achieved by passing legislation and changing standards and regulations at the state levels.

2. ***Do you support the use of alternate methods to achieve fire safety without utilizing toxic flame retardants? Please explain.***

I support alternative methods to achieve fire safety without using toxic flame retardants for multiple reasons. First, if individuals are willing to take on the risk of death in order to save lives, then the minimum we can do is take preventative measures to reduce their cancer risks. Second, this is an investment in the health of everyone. Several steps can be taken to achieve this. To begin with, starting an educational campaign to bring awareness to the public at large at the risk of the chemicals being used in their household items; we have seen this have positive impacts resulting in alternative practices with climate change and public health (e.g., asbestos). Secondly, much like there have been incentives for using more energy efficient cars, creating legislation that allows for tax incentives for purchasing items that do not carry a cancer risk in the fire retardants.

3. ***Do you support a ban on the use of harmful toxic flame retardants which contribute to significant health issues with the public and fire fighters? Please explain.***

Yes! While I am not a firefighter, I am an individual with a high cancer risk and know how hard it is on your own to reduce your risk by what you choose to expose yourself to. Firefighters do not have that luxury, they never know the environment they are going into or entirely what they have been exposed to. I think this is a very small ask considering what is asked of firefighters when protecting our community.

Fire fighters are exposed on a daily basis to stress, smoke, heat and various toxic substances. As a result, fire fighters are far more likely to contract heart disease, lung disease or cancer than other workers. As fire fighters increasingly assume the role of the nation's leading providers of emergency medical services, they are also exposed to infectious diseases. These illnesses are now among the leading causes of death and disability for fire fighters, and numerous studies have found that those diseases are occupational hazards of fire fighters.

In recognition of this risk, Wyoming has enacted presumptive disability laws, which presume that cardiovascular diseases, certain cancers and certain infectious diseases contracted by fire fighters are job-related for purposes of workers' compensation and disability retirement unless proven otherwise.

4. ***Do you support presumptive disability laws here in Wyoming covering both professional and volunteer fire fighters? Please explain.***

Yes, I believe that those who take on mental and physical risks as part of their jobs for the betterment and protection of their communities should not bear the additional medical costs associated with that and should be covered by workmen's compensation and additional funding so they do not experience additional financial burdens from their job.

Wyoming became a "Right to Work" state in 1963. In 1965, the Wyoming Legislature granted Collective Bargaining rights to firefighters with Binding Arbitration. The FFFWY believes that because firefighters are included in "extra Hazardous" classifications of employees they need the ability to discuss public safety and firefighter safety with their employers, as well as pay and benefits.

5. ***Do you support the Wyoming Law which has been on the books for over 55 years, granting firefighters the right to bargain with their employers with binding arbitration? Please explain.***

I 100% support firefighters right to bargain with their employers. I am a union member. I do intend to take “right to work” on and overturn this legislation. Since this time, work environments have become more unsafe and workers have had no true negotiation power resulting in Wyoming workers being taken advantage of time-and-time again.

Most Wyoming career fire fighters earn a defined benefit pension as a part of their compensation during their working years. In many cases, fire fighters have negotiated for strong pensions in exchange for higher pay or other benefits. The promise of a secure retirement income is especially important for fire fighters as they retire earlier than other workers and often have higher expenses associated with medical and healthcare. Furthermore, many professional fire fighters do not collect Social Security and thus depend on the defined benefit plans they were promised for retirement income.

A broad and determined coalition of anti-labor and interest groups is attacking public pensions and threatening to replace secure pensions with defined contribution 401(k) style plans in the states. These groups argue that overly generous benefits are bankrupting state pension systems – a statement that is patently false. Wyoming pension plans are well funded and improving.

After a lifetime of risking their lives for others, professional fire fighters deserve the secure retirement they have earned.

As a candidate and a potential member holding state office will you serve as an ally to protect public sector pension plans and the promise of a secure retirement for professional fire fighters?

I am also a public employee as an educator and have paid close attention to our state retirement; it is not experiencing shortfalls and to strip this away with a documented 401(k) failure model is a disservice to our public employees and puts many in jeopardy for retirement.

6. ***Wyoming Retirement System provisions provide over 300 million dollars into Wyoming’s economy each year. Wyoming firefighters are not eligible for Social Security when they retire. Do you support the Defined Benefit system which is currently being utilized?***

Yes, I support the current protected state retirement benefit system.

7. ***Currently there are three active Wyoming pension funds that are serving retired and active duty firefighters in Wyoming. All Wyoming citizens pay a fire insurance premium tax. Only one of the firefighter pensions receives 100% funds from this direct tax revenue to keep the plan healthy. Would you support using a portion of these tax revenues should the need arise to keep the other two firefighter pension funds healthy?***

Yes, it only makes sense to me that the public invests in the health and welfare of firefighters given the risks they take on for their communities.

Thank you for you time in answering this questionnaire, please return a copy to ffwyfirpac@ffwy.org.