

2020 Senate District 66 DFL Candidate Questionnaire

Candidate Name: John Lesch

Position Candidate Is Seeking The Endorsement For: State Representative

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Please respond to the following questions, limit 5 pages for the entire questionnaire.

1. Education What should the state do to address the educational needs of our children, the working conditions of our teachers, and educational opportunities for adults?

As a state, we direct our resources to support our values, and yet for the past 3 decades our education system has suffered a lack of resource allocation which reflects a decreasing commitment of public education. The tax cuts of 1999-2001 must be reversed, and at least 80% of that incremental revenue must be statutorily dedicated to education. After that we can talk priorities and disparities. Funding first.

2. Youth Services What would you do to better support our youth population?

We owe our youth access to adequate educational, employment, and recreational opportunities. They deserve after-school opportunities to engage positively, reasonable resources for school and parks athletics, funding for community arts, theater, and environmental education, but also the partnership to create apprenticeship opportunities in potential careers with livable wages and no student debt.

3. Senior Services As the size of the aging population grows, how would you address the increasing needs of seniors?

First, the longer life of our seniors today is not always supported by the newer defined-contribution retirement plans. We must embrace the defined benefit plans of unions and public employment so seniors have the resources to survive and thrive. Second, financial exploitation of adults is on the increase. Increased investigation of scammers and fraudsters has been my priority and will continue to be. Third, seniors must be given opportunities to grow old in their own homes with the community resources they need, and without being forced out by regressive property taxes.

4. Environment 4a) In your view, what should be the state's role in mitigating and preventing climate change impacts? 4b) On a state level, do you oppose the construction of Enbridge Line Three?

(a) Since we successfully mitigated point source and power plant emissions over the last 15 years, the leading cause of carbon emissions is automobiles. This

means that our number one job in delivering a green solution to climate change is reducing vehicle miles traveled. That means achieving transportation solutions which get people out of their cars, and land use policies which permit livable density instead of suburban sprawl.

(b) Yes.

5. Mining 5a) What is your stance on copper-nickel mining in the state of Minnesota?
5b) What alternative proposals do you suggest to bring needed jobs to the area?

- a) I oppose it. The economic impact brought to MN by copper-nickel mining is negligible as a measure of jobs, and the risk to the Superior and Hudson Bay watersheds is too great, in the absence of an adequate environmental cleanup fund in the event of a disaster, to justify a small economic gain.
- b) A robust rural broadband package directed to the Mesabi range, would radically alter the economics and opportunities for those greater MN residents. 90 years ago we achieved a measure of geographical justice with rural electrification. It's time to do so in the age of information.

6. Immigration 6a) What concrete steps will you take to ensure immigrant Minnesotan's rights are protected/to protect these communities from unreasonable fear of deportation? 6b) Do you support the abolition of ICE on a federal level and noncooperation with ICE on the state level?

- a) I support the separation ordinances in Saint Paul and Minneapolis, and would support a statewide separation statute. Further, I support policies which prohibit local law enforcement personnel from acting on their own independent initiative to cooperate with federal authorities on immigration matters.
- b) There will always be some agency which administers and oversees rules related to borders, customs, and immigration in the U.S. (and every country); however, that's the Feds' issue, and there is no reason why we should direct state or local resources to help the Feds prosecute their own failed policies. It's gotten bad enough that Minnesota should actively rebuke the cruel and inhumane policies which separate children from their parents.

7. Labor A new wage theft law was passed last year, yet there has already been a hearing to attack this legislation. Business owners and other employers feel that it is a burden and that there is too much confusion adhering to the law. In addition, employers are trying to get around this legislation by misclassifying workers as independent contractors (see legislation against this practice in HF4009/SF4018). What will you do to protect workers and this law?

New laws which protect workers' rights always involve growing pains. This also occurred when we banned smoking in bars and restaurants. Owners said that the regulations were too burdensome and restaurants and bars would close. Further, businesses attempted clever ways to circumnavigate the law. In the end, workers, and our health, won. No one is talking about reversing that law, not even the bar and restaurant industry. Similarly, business owners will grow accustomed to the

expectation that they pair fair wages for the labor they receive. I do expect the GOP to grouse about workers' rights – just as they always do, but I expect that our wage theft law, the strongest in the nation, will win the day and stand the test of time.

8. Transportation Public transportation often gets reduced in areas where it is most needed. In your view, what should the state do about public transit infrastructure while addressing concerns about access and affordability?

We must support density along transit corridors which increases the sustainability of transit numbers and riders in a way that not even the most right wing republican can object to. We cannot build our way out of congestion with horizontal lane miles. The dollars simply do not justify it (even ignoring the carbon impact). Residentially dense transit corridors reduce housing costs, give low income folks (and everyone, for that matter) better access to the services they need, and make public transit along those corridors the least expensive and most efficient of any modern transportation solution.

9. Housing We are in the midst of a housing affordability crisis. What would you do to advocate for our district and the state in solving this crisis?

First, a robust bonding package for affordable housing in the bonding bill. We need to aim for \$500 M in the next bill. Second, an increase of 4% and 9% credits for development of affordable housing to fill the gap facing lower income folks. Third, a reexamination of 50s and 60s era zoning codes which encourage sprawl, punish density, and allow for veto power of anyone on the block to increasing housing. We must not forget market rate housing in this mix, as the housing shortfall at this crisis point can be impacted by increased housing supply at any income level.

10. Food Security Would you support the State of MN funding breakfast, lunch and snacks for all Pre K thru 12 school children in public schools with no fees?

Yes. It's not just educationally prudent and good for learning, but the right thing to do.

11. Healthcare 11a) In your view, is healthcare a human right? 11b) Do you support passing single payer healthcare for Minnesota, and what would the transition look like? If not, what is your proposal to provide affordable healthcare for all Minnesotans?

- a) Yes.
- b) Yes, baby steps toward single payer health care would likely involve the expansion of Minnesota Care and/or Medical Assistance to broaden the risk pool and provide a viable base from which to fund access.

12. Cannabis 12a) The current medical cannabis program is not affordable (\$250 for certification, \$200 to participate, and hundreds of dollars for the medication) Will you work to make this affordable and accessible to all? 12b) Do you support the legalization of cannabis for adult use in Minnesota? 12c) If cannabis for adult use were to be legalized in Minnesota, what measures will you take regarding Minnesotans currently incarcerated under cannabis-related non-violent drug charges?

- a) Yes.
- b) Yes.
- c) I have publicly supported a general amnesty for all propationers, parolees, and pesons incarcerated on cannabis-related felonies, and automatic expungement for the same. As a society we cannot afford to allow an entire segment of our population to be punished, or haunted, by something that has been legalized. Failing to do so is a recipe for civil unrest.

13. Gun Control What is your position on gun control, and what specific legislation would you be willing to sponsor?

I support universal background checks and red flag protection orders. These are our flagship gun control initiatives in the MN House DFL caucus while we hold the majority. While there are many other worthy ideas to stem the public health menace of gun violence, we as a caucus, and our stakeholders like Protect MN and Mom's Demand Action, have made the affirmative decision to stick with these two bills, and not be distracted by other worthy endeavors, until we pass them and achieve the safety Minnesotans deserve. As a member of the 2019 Judiciary/Public Safety Conference Committee, I stood with Protect MN, Mom's Demand Action, and our millions of allies when we included these provisions in our bill over GOP objection.

14. Women's Rights Do you support the ERA becoming a part of the Minnesota Constitution?

Yes, I am a past chief author of the Minnesota ERA ratification legislation, and have signed on every year it has been introduced in my tenure, as well as the state legislation which has been offered more recently. There is no excuse for MN to fail in gender equality – we should be a leader.

15. Diversity The folks at the endorsing convention will not fully reflect the diversity of gender identities, racial and ethnic identities, and religious affiliations in our community; if elected/re-elected what do you see as your role in addressing the needs of folks underrepresented?

Saint Paul has always been a diverse community. While 66B is currently majority white, in my first 10 years in the legislature I represented a district that was barely plurality white. These demographics are not the only disparity where our delegates will not represent the district as a whole. Our convention will be nonrepresentative in age. Income, educational level, health, disability status, and immigration status, among others. The time, resources, and education required to be poitically active, attend caucuses and convention is a product of privilege. The question is not whether we have privilege, but whether we use that privilege to deliver justice for every person in our community. That's what I have done in my legislative tenure. I represent everyone

16. Corporate Money in Politics 16a) Do you take campaign contributions from corporate PACs? 16b) What is the approximate average individual donation size currently to your campaign? 16c) What would you support at the state level to curb the

role of corporate money in politics?

- a) No.
- b) \$77.99
- c) The new model of fundraising and spending means that old models of campaign finance reform have become obsolete (as seen by Obama's bypassing of the federal match in 2008 and 2012). We should probably increase the limits so as to reduce the incentive to skip participation in the public process, and make the PCR program easier for campaigns to administer and thereby incentivize broader participation by the electorate.

17. Ranked Choice Voting 17a) Do you support ranked choice balloting, locally and the state-wide level? 17b) What do you see as positives and negatives of ranked choice voting?

- a) Yes.
- b) Positives: a broader set of choices for people disaffected by politics percieving limited choices; a method to achieve a modified majority mandate in a policital setting where those results have become more rare; the potential to incentivize campaigns to contact voters in communities which have been historically ignored. Negatives: the system requires a more complicated formula to declare victory, potentially engendering community distrust in outcomes which aren't immediatly available; a binary decision-making process will hold the average voter's attention better than a flowchart of choices, so public education and familiarization are much more important to resource in a ranked-choice system.

18. Public Health/Emergency Preparedness 18a) If elected, what steps will you take to ensure that Minnesota is better prepared for the next pandemic? 18b) What steps should Minnesota be taking for emergency preparedness (such as COVID-19, grid collapse, etc.)?

- a) Next session I will work to pass my bill which grants universal earned sick and safe leave for every Minnesotan. More than any other factor, this measure could flatten the curve at the front end of a pandemic.
- b) MN must enable partnerships with nonprofits and private businesses who could supplement immediate resouce scarcity (e.g. hand sanitizer, masks) through regulation relaxation and state funding or tax credits.

19. Consensus Building What are your strengths for positive community outreach and consensus building?

I do not listen to one group, but seek input and understanding from every corner of 66B on legislative issues. I seek out and maintain friendships across racial, religious, and economic boundaries, and challenge myself to steer clear of clique-politics. This makes me a better listener, a better learner, and a better leader.