

King County Democrats 2024 Endorsement Questionnaire

Candidate name
Kevin Van De Wege
Candidate name pronunciation
Last name: VAN - D - WAG
Candidate pronouns
he / him
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What type of position are you running for?
State Executive
What position are you running for?
Commissioner of Public Lands
Are you a Democrat?
Yes
Have you ever been a member of another political party?
No
Does your campaign have a code of conduct for staff and volunteers?
Yes

What are your top three policy priorities?

Wildfire: DNR is the WA's leading wildfire-fighting agency. Wildfires are the #1 threat to natural resources in the state. I've been a state legislator for years, but a firefighter my entire professional life. As Commissioner, I will maintain and create healthy forests through smart forest management, and by continuing my strong relationship with tribes to develop critical plans on how to protect our land.

Climate Change: Centuries of industrialization have filled our skies with CO2. I will help address the urgency of climate change to leave public lands healthy for the next generation of WA residents. I will bring coordination between DNR and Ecology, work with the state's top scientists, and drive legislative action in an arena I've guided bills into law for two decades.

Environmental justice: For generations, our state's natural resources have provided a wealth of recreational and employment opportunities for tribes and rural communities. These groups and minority communities are most impacted by pollution, degradation, and wildfire. I commit to continuing my work with these communities to address their concerns, and invest in their economies by creating good well paying jobs.

Climate change has increased the portion of the year at high-risk for wildfires from three months to nearly six months. Outside of the requirements of HB1578, passed in 2023, how will you approach wildfire control and prevention?

As a firefighter, I've breathed smoke-filled air and felt the heat up close. As a legislator and the Chair of the Senate Agriculture and Natural Resources Committee, I have also passed legislation on the statewide level to address wildfire risk. I was the original sponsor of the legislation referenced in HB 1578, that added the International Wildland Urban Interface code to State Building code in 2018. This legislation also directed the DNR to create a statewide map of wildland fire risk in coordination with cities and counties to best prepare our citizens for the growing threat of wildfire.

I know better than anyone the approach needed to stop fires in their tracts, but most importantly, I know how to prevent fires before they start, and to equip our communities with the tools they need to be protected. This encompasses everything from utilizing smart land management and prevention strategies in our state's working forests, making sure new building construction is done with fire resistant materials and incorporates proper buffer zones, and giving first responders the tools they need to protect our most impacted communities.

How will you build and strengthen relationships with other departments to ensure that Washington is taking a comprehensive, sustainable approach to preserving our natural resources?

DNR is an incredibly large organization with an enormous responsibility to preserve and take care of the state's land, water, and natural habitat. I plan to bring heightened coordination to DNR by working collaboratively with the Department of Ecology, working with the state's top scientists, and working with the state's stewards and tribal communities.

As an example: two centuries of industrialization have filled our skies with carbon monoxide, and 30 percent of that ends up in our waters, mostly from upland water runoff flowing into the ocean. This leads to overly acidic waters, which is deadly to all forms of marine life – including, and especially in Washington, salmon. Though acidification is largely seen as an air quality issue, which places it primarily under the scope of the state Department of Ecology, the considerable role of water runoff makes it essential that DNR work with DOE on joint solutions to this man-made problem. Ultimately, I believe the answer will require more than just coordination between these two agencies – it will take significant legislative action in an arena where I've guided bills into law and solved state problems for nearly two decades.

How will you prioritize addressing pollution?

Addressing pollution starts with ensuring we have a robust data collection system to monitor air quality across the state, especially in vulnerable communities. Then, it involves listening to community experiences and placing air quality monitors not only where they currently exist but also across the state in areas with poor air quality and health impacts is essential. I support strong air quality standards based on data collected from an expanded monitoring network to help reduce pollution levels significantly. This includes increased investments in community grant programs to reduce air pollution for the most affected areas. We also need to continue investing in public transportation systems and electrified transportation for heavy-duty vehicles can help reduce emissions and improve air quality.

We value understanding of, respect for, and maintenance of Tribal rights and treaties. How will you coordinate with our state's Tribes and collaborate towards the restoration and preservation of our natural environment?

I have been working to build lasting relationships with tribes in the state for nearly twenty years, and I have learned how to work collaboratively with the tribes on the Olympic Peninsula to care for the Olympic forest and their precious lands. We need someone in office who has a proven track record of both understanding the ins and outs of forest management and wildfire prevention, and who also has the crucial experience of working with our state's original stewards to learn from their insights and strategies and to implement these across the state.

What opportunities do you see as the Commissioner of Public Lands to pursue environmental justice for communities harmed by historical practices?

This is an issue that is very important to me. We need to partner with communities who have been harmed by historical practices, as these communities are on the forefront of experiencing the drastic effects of pollution and environmental loss. Listening and working with these communities first, will show us how we can better serve at-risk groups so that they can live in a healthy and happy environment, and so that the areas of the state which have yet to be significantly affected, can stay that way. This is the approach I have taken working in the rural Olympic Peninsula, and this is the approach I will take as Commissioner of Public Lands.

CERTIFICATION: The candidate hereby certifies that, to the best of their knowledge, the provided information is true and accurate.

Yes

Created on: March 29th, 2024