

King County Democrats 2024 Endorsement Questionnaire

Candidate name
Sharon Tomiko Santos
Candidate name pronunciation
Share-on Tow-mee-koh Sand-toes
Candidate pronouns
She
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What type of position are you running for?
State House of Representatives
What position are you running for?
LD37 Representative, Position 1
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?

No

What policies and actions do you support to reform Washington's regressive tax structure?

As a founding member of the Washington Tax Fairness Coalition, I have long advocated for a graduated income tax for individuals and for businesses, including corporations. I believe that the best general approach to taxation is to allow for many sources at low rates. I would propose as a single amendment to the Washington State Constitution that, to provide for our general welfare, we institute a graduated income tax AND fix (limit) the rate of the state sales tax AS WELL AS of the state property tax. This would assure the voters that state elected officials may not easily raise these core taxes without a vote of the People. At the same time, the state should enact a Homestead Exemption to stabilize housing affordability and stability. Finally, and most important, tax exemptions must be treated as expenditures to the state budget in order to increase the transparency of how much these tax breaks cost our state and what value our state receives as a result.

How will you support high quality public education?

Our education system must move away from antiquated methods adopted in the 19th century to those which recognize the unique aspirations, aptitudes, and assets of each and every student. This means overhauling "measure and sort" practices steeped in the principles of eugenics and, instead, transforming public education to be engaging and relevant to students, allowing them the agency and opportunities to create individualized curricula that facilitate deeper learning. In contrast to the factory model approach which focuses on efficiency and uniformity in production, education institutions must re-imagine learning opportunities both in school and out of school.

In order for this to evolve, the role of the teacher must transition from "sage on the stage" to "consultant" or "advisor" who helps guide the education process. Teachers must be afforded more time to collaborate with one another as well as to engage in individualized professional development. Finally, teachers must have paid sabbaticals from the classroom to engage in research and scholarship about teaching and learning, thereby translating their experiences directly to the body of professional knowledge and practice.

How will you increase the supply of affordable housing in the state?

Although we must tackle several policy drivers simultaneously to increase the availability of affordable housing, I see the cost of land as the most costly component of development. Thus, in 2015, I sponsored legislation to discourage real estate speculation by public agencies, like Sound Transit or the Ports, and to require that surplus public lands support the development of affordable housing through long-term lease arrangement with private non-profit and public affordable housing developers. This bill was partially enacted.

At the same time, our state must grapple with inherently biased and racist housing policies that have displaced, dispossessed, and destroyed many culturally significant communities, especially in the Central District and the International District. As a result, some of the most affordable neighborhoods – the working- and middle-class neighborhoods of my 37th District – are no longer places where the diverse families who built them are able to secure or retain homesteads that serve their cultural, spiritual, social, or economic needs. This can be staunchly by requiring equitable housing density without exemptions for wealthy neighborhoods like Windermere.

What actions will you take to reduce discrimination against LGBTQ+ people, historically marginalized groups, and other vulnerable populations?

I am proud to represent the most diverse legislative district in the state where I was raised by multi-racial, multi-ethnic, multi-cultural community coalitions in the midst of the civil rights, anti-war, and liberatory movements. This upbringing shaped my views and values and informs my commitment to dismantle the vestiges of individual and institutional bias.

It has been my core mission to eradicate discriminatory and biased policies and practices in our laws, rules, and agency interactions with people of color, immigrants and refugees, LGBTQ+ and other marginalized persons, especially in K12 education and in public employment and contracting. I worked to incorporate all protected classes into Title 28A overseeing public education, to provide the Office of Minority and Women Businesses with investigative and sanctioning authority to protect against fraudulent and abusive actions by non-WMBE businesses, and to ensure that immigrant and refugees are not inadvertently caught up in a dragnet prompted by xenophobia and unfamiliarity with our diverse histories and cultures. I expect to continue to stand against discrimination and for justice wherever I see a need.

How will you seek to eliminate privately run prisons and detention centers?

Since 9/11 and the passage of the Homeland Security Act, I have diligently sought to address the unforeseen consequences of hyper-security and its impacts to the states and to our immigrant and refugee communities, including the rise of privately run prisons and detention centers.

As co-chair of a national Task Force on Immigration and the States, I worked with legislators from across the country to raise awareness about the dangers of "deputizing" state and local law enforcement officials to enforce immigration laws, a practice authorized under 287(g) of the Immigration and Nationality Act, which fast-tracks non-citizens for deportation and detains them at privately operated prisons. I brokered an agreement with then-Governor Gregoire to prohibit the Secretary of the Department of Corrections from engaging in the 287(g) program.

However, this agreement was not binding on local jurisdictions or the Washington State Patrol. A next step could be to prohibit local and state agencies from participating in the 287(g) program, thereby reducing the number of persons from our state who could be transferred to the Northwest Detention Center and rendering it financially unviable.

What will you do to promote equitable access to quality healthcare for all?

I have long supported single-payer universal healthcare as a fundamental human right. Though the specifics of health policy are not my forte, I am nevertheless a strong champion of ensuring health equity in our state policies. To this end, I was proud to sponsor House Bill 2346, to rename the Governor's Interagency Council on Health Disparities as the Council for Health Justice and Equity, and to update the mission and duties of the Council to develop a statewide framework for advancing health justice and equity. I regret that this legislation was not considered by the full House, but I intend to resurrect the legislation in the 2025 Session.

What will you bring to the Washington Legislature that would not otherwise be there?

I certainly bring institutional memory as the longest serving Member of Color in the history of the state Legislature. My tenure covers the past 26 years, during which the state has endured two recessions (including the Great Recession), the Nisqually earthquake, the impacts of the War on Terror, the McCleary lawsuit, the Dobbs decision, the No Child Left Behind and the Every Student Succeeds Acts, and many other significant policies and circumstances. I served as a member of Leadership in the House for a decade and as a contributing Member of multiple standing and statutory committees. But more than this, as someone raised in the District I represent, I bring the heart and the history of my communities to the Capitol. The heart of resilience emanating from the diverse communities of the 37th District along with the ongoing stories of hardship and sacrifice demanded of these historic communities for the "greater good." And I bring our unique history of multi-racial, multi-cultural, inter-generational coalition-building that is found nowhere else in the Pacific Northwest or across the country. I am proud to represent all of this in the Washington State Legislature.

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

Yes