

Alaska Professional Design Council (APDC) 2020 Candidate Questionnaire

Name: **Jim Cooper**

District: **Senate District F**

1. The State of Alaska continues to face significant budget challenges, how will you address the State's budget and revenue issues? Please provide details.

A1: The answer is not to only cut funding to vital programs that provide needed services to our residents. The answer is to look for revenue sources that allow these programs to be funded. The programs I am concerned about are: early childhood development, university funding, health services, public safety, school debt reimbursement, senior benefits to name a few. One cannot continue to defund these critical programs that will adversely affect our families. All revenue sources need to be addressed, including increased oil taxes on our resources, increased gas tax, income tax, and diversify and expanding the state's economy.

2. In 2017, the American Society of Civil Engineers (ASCE) ranked Alaska as having a C- with respect to the condition our state's infrastructure – see following link:

<https://www.infrastructurereportcard.org/state-item/alaska/> Do you support taxes and user fees, such as increased gas taxes, to help provide funding for these needs? If not, do you have another plan for maintaining our road system?

A2: As stated above, I am in favor of increasing the gas tax, both on the oil companies and tax at the pump. These funds could and should be used to bring and keep our roads and bridges up to the best standard possible.

3. Alaska is eligible for federal funds through the Lands and Water Conservation Fund for design and development of parks and cultural facilities. See following link:

https://omb.alaska.gov/ombfiles/21_budget/DNR/Proposed/2021proj32552.pdf Do you support the state receiving these funds? If not, why?

A3: Absolutely. Alaska is a prime destination for tourists and having first class facilities for the tourists and for our residents is potentially crucial to our economy.

4a. The University of Alaska (UA) system has faced severe budget reductions over the past several years. Do you support current funding levels, further decreases, or efforts to reestablish funding that has been cut in recent years? If increases, where do you see that funding coming from?

A4a: I believe the University system should be fully funded. Having an educated and trained workforce is important to the economy. It is to be noted that having graduates from a University program increases the GDP of the area and the nation. Once again, all revenue sources need to be examined. Monies need to be derived from numerous sources

as not one can fund these programs.

4b. As a follow up, if cuts are maintained or deepened, which programs within the UA system should be prioritized over others and where does the engineering curriculum fall in the priorities list?

A4b: I'm biased as both my son and daughter-in-law have advanced engineering degrees. As such, I lean towards the engineering curriculum near the top. However, I have an advanced degree in finance and I firmly believe that is near the top as well. Both of these programs provide graduates with needed education to build and keep our economy strong.

4c. Architecture, landscape architecture, and interior design programs are not offered within the UA system. What are your thoughts on strengthening opportunities for Alaskans through the Western Undergraduate Exchange (WUE) program to make attaining these professional degrees more feasible so Alaskans can return home to our state to fill the need for design professionals?

A4c: Again I have a bias. One of my nephews has an Architecture degree and although he has a contracting business (he builds houses), he uses that degree extensively in helping clients design custom homes. My district is in the Mat-Su valley and it is the fastest growing area in the state. With the amount of new people arriving, the need for Alaskans with these degrees is becoming more critical. I am fully behind increasing the opportunity for the WUE program to provide us with trained architecture, landscape architecture and interior design graduates to fill the need we have.

5. Several states have sought to reduce or eliminate the scope of professional licensing (Engineers, Architects, Land Surveyors, and Landscape Architect) within their states. What is your stance on Alaska's current requirements for these professions: should the state's laws remain the same or be subject to change, and if changed, would you support decreasing or increasing the projects that require professional licensure?

A5: Unfortunately I do not know the state laws on this but having these professionals licensed makes complete sense to me. Licensing gives credence to their profession and provides clients more trust in their abilities.

6. The "Industrial Exemption", found in Alaska Statute 08.48.331(a)(10), allows certain infrastructure, systems, and structural projects to be designed without the requirement of a licensed Professional Engineer (PE) IF the project is such that the risk to human health, safety, and welfare is limited only to employees of the company doing the work and not the "general public". It has been suggested that some very significant engineering disasters in our nation's history, such as the Challenger Space Shuttle Disaster of 1986 and the Deepwater Horizon Oil

Spill of 2010, may have been linked to similar "Industrial Exemptions" and might have been averted had a licensed PE been the ultimate steward of safety in those examples. Do you feel it is appropriate or inappropriate to maintain Alaska's Industrial Exemption?

A6: I believe all people deserve the right to be protected. I, personally, would trust a PE overseeing and approving a project than I would of someone who could just hang a "shingle" outside their office. I think the Industrial Exemption is a thing of the past and should be scrapped.

7. State law requires that all new buildings larger than a triplex are to be designed and constructed to the latest approved edition of the International Building Code. However, engineers performing earthquake damage assessments after the November 2018 earthquake found that a large portion of buildings are not being built in conformance with the code where there is no formal enforcement. This led to more structural damage in Eagle River and the Matanuska Borough, where there is no code enforcement, compared to Anchorage, where there is code enforcement, even though ground motions were similar. What would you do to bolster adherence to and enforcement of building codes in the vulnerable and growing population centers around Alaska that are not currently under the purview of a local code official?

A7: As former Mayor of Palmer, I felt lucky we had a code enforcement program and was dismayed that virtually anything could be built in the Borough if it was outside the city limits. The problem in Alaska is the State Fire Marshall's office only did fire and life safety review. There was no staff to do structural review and no staff to do follow-up inspections. And they only did the reviews, as stated, on building larger than a triplex. As a result, the builders figured out they would build two, three or four triplexes and have no review. The cities and the Anchorage Municipality have deferments which allow them to conduct the reviews and inspections. The Boroughs need to get this deferment and take on the responsibility as the state does not have the resources to carry out this important and potentially lifesaving function.

8. Do you have any plans to help reduce greenhouse gasses in order to mitigate the effects of climate change in Alaska?

A8: Climate change initiatives are definitely on my radar. The state needs to be actively engaged in the discussion on how to decrease our CO emissions. Solar power, wind power, fuel cells are all items that must be considered to preserve what we have and what our grandchildren will have.

9. Is there anything you would like our organization to know about you?

A9: I was in the Coast Guard for 26 years and have been on the forefront of preserving our environment and way of life, from drug interdiction, protection of our fisheries to

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working on the diminishing ice cap. As Mayor of Palmer, I worked to establish the first ultraviolet light wastewater treatment plant in the state. As President of the Alaska Municipal League I worked on ensuring the voices of those in the far reaches of Alaska were heard and worked with USDA on getting sustainable projects to the villages. I am concerned about the future of our environment and yet at the same time preserving the future for our children and grandchildren.