

Alaska Professional Design Council (APDC) 2020 Candidate Questionnaire

Name: **Mel Gillis**

District: **House District 25**

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: We need to reduce spending, resolve the PFD issue, and grow the economy. The truth is our savings are gone and Alaska faces significant challenges. It is going to take the legislature, and governor, working together to solve our fiscal challenges.

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: I think taxes should be a last resort, not a first option. I do support user fees. I also think we need to have a larger capital budget for maintaining our infrastructure and building new infrastructure.

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

A3: Yes. It is important Alaskans are able to enjoy our beautiful state.

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: It's not a secret the University faces significant challenges. I believe the Board of Regents, the legislature, and the governor must all work together to ensure the University addresses these challenges. A thriving University benefits the state. I believe it is important that students graduate with degrees they can use to earn a living. The University of Alaska is land-grant university, yet they have not received most of the land they are owed by the federal government. We must work to get them their land. This will not only help the University, it will take some of the financial burden off the state.

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: STEM should be at the top of the list of priorities.

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: I totally support this.

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: I do not support lowering licensure standards. It is important that the state ensures people with professional licenses are qualified to perform their profession.

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: Eliminating the exemption would raise the cost of these type of projects. I am not sure how much eliminating it would change things. I need to do more research on this topic.

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

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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: I think it is important we have and enforce strong building codes. The 2018 earthquake showed what happens when we don't.

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

A8: I support alternative and green energy. But I also acknowledge we live in a state where oil/gas, mining, and resource development is a major part of our economy. Moving to alternative energies cannot happen overnight, but it should be a long term goal.