

Alaska Professional Design Council (APDC) 2020 Candidate Questionnaire

Name: **Shelley Hughes**

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: It's important to note that currently the ratio of our state operating budget to our state's economic output is the most out of proportion in the nation. The size and growth rate - and the sustainability - of our budget is, simply put, not affordable for our small population.

Here are some options I believe we should consider. Fix outdated spending cap in constitution through ballot in 2022; institute a statutory spending cap in meantime. Combination of restructuring overhead of departments (\$100 million); some education reforms (keep flat); Medicaid rate, options, and eligibility changes and provider fee to pay state match (\$300 million); inflation-proof Permanent Fund prior to 50/50 split for government/PFDs (\$500 million); pool school district and municipal employees with state employees for health insurance (\$100 million); move savings on balance sheet from ERA savings to PERS/TRS savings (\$300 million); provide state a share of TAPs property tax (\$250 million) currently collected by local governments. Institute an Audit Sunset Commission to comb through weeds of every department, agency, program, formula on a regular basis; legislature could not let audit sit on shelf because department, agency, program would sunset unless legislature reviewed recommendations for improvements to entity (to meet mission, be efficient, serve public) and took action accordingly and reinstated entity.

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 support user fees where practical (i.e., for Knik Arm Crossing). With above operating budget adjustments, depending on oil and other resource and economic development activities, we should be able to once again have some funds for the capital budget rather than just the bare minimum. If we still had a shortfall for the capital budget after the above reforms are implemented, I would prefer a general sales tax over a gas tax as more revenue would come from nonresidents (once tourism resumes, post-COVID) and be better balanced regionally. Unlike a gas tax, a general sales tax wouldn't put an unfair weight and responsibility on Mat-Su residents (who drive more miles on average than residents from other regions).

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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: If we apply for and accept these funds, we must ensure we have a fiscal plan for the upkeep and maintenance as we should not put any additional burden on Alaskans in the out-years. We have to ensure we have a state budget that doesn't overburden our small population with taxes. I love the idea of building parks and cultural facilities but we must ensure we can pay for the maintenance of these items into the future.

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 still believe that some restructuring of UA is possible without hurting the core, highest-demand, and state-appropriate academic programs. Even with the recent and planned reductions, our state will be providing more per student for a state university than any other states provide. The average state contribution in the US is \$7000 per student. Alaska contributed more than double that (between \$16,000 and \$17,000 per student) prior to the reduction in FY20. Alaska continues to be the highest per student contributor among the 50 states.

We don't need three English departments, three history departments, etc. We should have one such department of each type, with the cream-of-crop professors retained at each campus to carry out the mission of the department. Programs and degree programs that either are not core or are not high in demand, unless they are Alaskan / Arctic specific, should be reconsidered.

The UA system cannot be all things to all people. Better that UA focus on what they do well, and do it really well. This change would actually raise the ratings and the caliber of the university. Right now, overall, UA does not rank well nationally because it spreads itself too thin. If UA were to narrow its focus, it could climb in stature in college rankings. UA would then begin to draw students from across the nation and from around the world - and we'd keep some of our best and brightest here in state instead of losing them to schools in the lower 48. This would increase research dollars as well as alumni contributions.

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: See answer 4a. As far as engineering, I consider it a core program near the top and

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also a program which must be customized for Alaska / Arctic because of our unique challenges, terrain, weather, earthquake proclivity, etc.

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 support increasing WUE opportunities for architecture, landscape architecture, and interior design. I believe there is an incentive for the WUE student to return to his or her home state, which would be great - to get these trained professionals to come back and help make our state look great!

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: My concern would be life/safety and any softening of regulations must bear this in mind. Because we don't offer schooling presently for architects and landscape architects, if we have a shortage of these professionals, we should consider state reciprocity to make it more likely that these individuals might come to Alaska. In general, I am not fan of licensing regulations that are overbearing, and would return to the premise of life/safety as far as which requirements should or should not be changed.

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'd like to learn more about this and learn what projects in Alaska are of concern to APDC due to an industrial exemption that was granted.

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,

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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: I think this is a matter that APDC should take up with the local municipalities first to see if it can be addressed there. Because Eagle River and Chugiak are within the Municipality of Anchorage, I am unclear as to why there is no enforcement in these areas.

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 moving forward renewable energy projects that pencil out economically. I'd like to see the Susitna-Watana Dam project built. I'd like to see the Knik Arm Crossing built so that the tens of thousands of cars driving the long way around to commute to Anchorage daily would have a shorter route.

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

A9: Three things:

1. My mother was born in 1929, graduated from high school at age 16, and was the only female in her master's degree architectural program at the University of Michigan 5 years later, in 1950. Her career was all pre-computer, and I remember her studio in our home with her drafting board and T-square where, when I came home from school I'd find her, busy drawing up plans by hand.
2. I have been the champion at the state level for promoting the Alaska-Alberta rail line crossing, passing a resolution in the legislature urging the signing of the presidential permit in May 2019, and encouraging the White House and our federal delegation for the past year and a half for President Trump to get it done. He signed it on Sep 29, 2020! We look forward to this infrastructure project going forward and expect it, once built, to increase our annual GDP in Alaska by about 10%.
3. I recognize the need for new infrastructure in Alaska and the maintenance of existing infrastructure in order to increase economic and resource development. We are still a relatively young state, and my hope is that with careful restructuring of our operating budget, we can begin to have a healthier capital budget once again.