

Candidate Questionnaire - Responses 09-11-22

Colorado State Senate, District 7
Janice Rich (R)

By now, you have read and considered the seven political principles we feel should guide political conduct in Western Colorado.

1. Do you believe that political extremism poses a threat specifically in Western Colorado? If yes, please explain why. If no, please explain why not?

Political extremism may sometimes exist on both the right and left. One might observe it in a speech, a letter to the editor, gatherings on street corners, or in front of buildings on issues on any given day. At what point is freedom of speech defined as extremism and creating a threat?

2. Do you endorse each of the seven principles Restore the Balance feels should guide political conduct in Western Colorado? If you endorse them all, please explain how you will work to execute these principles. If there are one or more principles you do not endorse, please identify them and explain why.

While I appreciate the role of Restore the Balance in our community, in my four years in the Colorado State Legislature, I have not made endorsements of the principles of any special interest group, despite the nature of the cause or my personal belief. My view is respect for you/your group for having the passion to assert your positions and do so in a way you desire.

3. We believe that public interest must come before party loyalty. It is important our elected officials have the courage to stand up for what is right even when their party puts pressure on them to "go along."
 - a. Is there any current policy of your party you disagree with? If yes, what are you doing to bring about change?
 - i. **There are policies any elected official may disagree with their chosen affiliated party from time to time. For me, it is for each individual to choose the affiliation that most aligns with their core values OR to choose not to affiliate if that is most aligned with their core values.**
 - ii. **As an elected official, my focus is to serve my constituents while honoring my oath to our State and US Constitutions.**

b. In the past, have you disagreed with a policy or piece of legislation your party has endorsed or supported? How did you stand up to get your point of view across? What actions did you take?

- i. I recall being a co-prime sponsor of the Colorado Reinsurance Program (HB19-1168) in my first year as a legislator. While several on my side of the aisle were not in support and attempted to hijack it with unfriendly amendments, I stood up to them on the House Floor because I knew this Bill was in the best interests of my constituents in Western Colorado.
- ii. This past Legislative Session, I was one of two Republicans in the House to support the Fentanyl Accountability and Prevention Bill (HB22-1326). While critics wanted possession to be a felony under all circumstances (as did I), under the current makeup of the Legislature, that was not going to happen. This Bill allows law enforcement to now prosecute possession of 1-4 grams as a felony, but it will be challenging because of the new standard to provide that the offender "knew or reasonably should have known" that what they possessed contained fentanyl. While not a perfect Bill, it is better than what law enforcement was previously working under. Law enforcement in my district supported the passage of this Bill.

4. Can you provide some examples of how you worked with members of the opposing party to craft legislation as an office holder or in developing your policies as a candidate? Please be specific.

In the past four years, all Bills I sponsored passed both the House and the Senate with bipartisan support, EXCEPT for one bill which died in a House committee. Also, all Bills were signed by Democrat Governor Polis. The following are just a few of those Bills:

HB19-1168, the Creation of the Colorado Reinsurance Program to provide reinsurance payments to health insurers to aid in paying high-cost insurance claims. My interest in this Bill was attempting to lower health care costs in Western Colorado.

HB20-1003, concerning Modifications of the Rural Jump-Start Zone Act. This legislation made modifications to the Rural Jump-Start program and extended the program for an additional five years. It loosened the competition clause to increase participation. It incentivizes businesses to locate and create jobs in rural Colorado by providing (1) participating businesses relief from state income and sales taxes and local businesses personal property tax, (2) their employees relief from state income tax.

HB20-1014, concerning Unconsented Use of Donor Gametes in Fertility Treatment. This legislation created new civil penalties and criminal offenses related to the misuse of gametes (sperm and egg) in an assisted reproduction procedure. There have been nine (9) known fertility fraud lawsuits filed in North America. This conduct has affected families all over the world. Most states do not have laws that make it illegal for a doctor to impregnate his patients using his own gametes, although such conduct clearly violates ethical standards and fiduciary duties. This legislation created a new civil cause of action, and a civil cause of action is now available for each child born as a result of the assisted reproduction procedure.

HB20-1051, concerning Final Disposition of the Abandoned Cremated Remains of Persons Eligible for Interment in a National Cemetery. The idea for this Bill was brought to me by our local Missing in America Project. It now permits a veteran's remains recovery organization to determine if unclaimed cremated remains are of United States military veterans, and further requires that a facility in possession of the cremated remains transfer those remains to a national cemetery of state veterans' cemetery for final interment. Qualified American veterans were assured that they would receive an honorable, dignified military service and would be laid to rest in a Veterans Cemetery. This legislation now ensures that any veteran will have a proper Memorial Service with full Military Honors.

HB21-1028, concerning the Preparation by the Division of Housing Within the Department of Local Affairs of an Annual Public Report that Provides Information on Money Administered by the State to Promote the Provision of Affordable Housing. This creates a single, public source that details the money coming in and being spent on affordable housing. Prior to this Bill, these reports were scattered in multiple areas from updates to the Joint Budget Committee reports, to the federal government, and the meeting minutes of the State Housing Board. It now requires the information to be contained in one place, updated annually, and posted publicly.

HB21-1119, concerning Lowering the Suicide Rate by Enhancing Care for Persons Affected by Suicide, and, Broadening Colorado's Focus to Include Suicide Prevention, Intervention and Postvention. The proposal for this Bill came to me by the Postvention Group in Grand Junction. The main focus is about lowering the suicide rate by enhancing care for persons affected by suicide. This legislation will increase the resources available to primary care physicians. It will provide education and training for healthcare providers, first and last responders, as well as K-12 educators. It also expands the scope of the grant program within the Office of Suicide Prevention that provides resources to local school districts. It also expands on the definition of "comprehensive suicide prevention" to mean strategies or approaches to prevent the onset of suicidal ideologies, public health intervention support and postvention responses for individuals and communities who experience suicide or a suicide attempt.

HB21-1200, concerning Financial Literacy Standards for Public Schools. This legislation empowers students with the critical financial literacy knowledge (9th through 12th grades) they need to make better financial decisions, creating an understanding of the costs associated with obtaining a post-secondary degree; how to budget and manage the payment of those costs, including managing student loan debt. Coloradans currently owe over \$27.7 billion in student loans. Studies have found that students who did not receive financial education were less likely to pay their bills on time and more likely to roll over significant credit card debt each month. A survey of 15-year-olds in the US found that 18% of respondents did not learn fundamental financial skills that are often applied in everyday situations such as building a simple budget, comparison shopping, and understanding an invoice.

SB21-151, concerning Transparency in Reading Programs Implemented in Public Schools. This legislation requires local education providers (LEP) to submit certain information related to the Read Act, including reading curriculum, to the Colorado Department of Education (CDE) - which will in turn post the information on its website in a user-friendly format. Each LEP will provide a link to the CDE on their website. Because there are those who struggle with reading, time is precious. This will be of great assistance to parents who want to find out the reading curriculum being used.

HB22-1083, concerning the Creation of the Colorado Homeless Contribution Income Tax Credit. This legislation repeals an existing income tax credit to taxpayers who make contributions to enterprise zone administrators and replaces that income tax credit with one that is available statewide, modeled after the enterprise zone tax credit. It replaces the responsibility with the Division of Housing in the Department of Local Affairs. The amount of the income tax credit remains the same, except for contributions made in distressed counties — that amount increases to 30% rather than 25%, and the new tax credit is capped at \$750,000.

HB22-1108, concerning a Requirement that the Transparency Online Project Web-Based System Includes the name of the Vendor paid in Connection with Each Expenditure Included in the System. The Colorado Information Marketplace webpage did not include the name of any vendor paid in connection with an expenditure. It is a nice spreadsheet, but without vendor information, the webpage is largely useless for anyone who wants to know how and where taxpayers' monies are spent. In an effort to restore transparency, character, and common sense, this legislation will bring accountability and transparency back to the government.

HB22-1350, concerning Creation of a Grant Program to Meet Workforce Needs Throughout the State. This legislation establishes the regional talent development initiative grant program in the office of Economic Development to fund these initiatives through the state that meet regional labor

market needs and specified grant program goals. This is also intended to respond to the negative economic impacts caused by the pandemic. It is intended to meet workforce development; create pathways between K-12 education, higher-ed, and employment; provide opportunities for regional earners to gain economic mobility and earn a living wage. This legislation was and is supported by Colorado Mesa University.

SB22-106, concerning Behavioral Health Entity Conflict of Interest Policy. We learned that some mental health centers that owned some of the payer systems, control provider networks, and service delivery were making decisions. This was akin to the “fox guarding the hen house.” This legislation now requires each management care entity, service administration, or organization with 25% or more provider ownership to comply with conflict of interest policies in order to promote transparency and accountability. They will no longer have control, influence, or decision-making authority in the establishment of provider networks.

SB22-121, concerning Higher Education Tuition Policy. Higher education institutions continue to face fierce competition for students and headwinds in state support, philanthropy, grants, and contracts. In 2016, the Colorado General Assembly passed SB16-121 to provide the University of Colorado System the ability to pledge 100% of tuition revenues as security to bondholders. This legislation now allows the remaining nine state institutions of higher-ed to pledge 100% tuition toward bond obligations (which was currently set at 10%). Increasing pledged tuition to 100% will bring Colorado in line with the industry norm and will serve as a counterbalance to credit challenges facing all institutions of higher education. This legislation was and is supported by Colorado Mesa University.

SB22-172, an Initiative to Increase the Number of Health-Care Professionals Practicing in Colorado’s Rural Areas. This legislation expands the concept that will add training programs that produce other members of the healthcare team if they choose to create their own rural track. The important idea is that these new healthcare provider programs could use the existing 17-year successful, national model and proven MD process and infrastructure to support rural training. This is currently in place at the CU School of Medicine and a Rural Program with the vision and willingness to share its knowledge and infrastructure with 15 universities, colleges, and community colleges, in a collaborative effort to meet the needs of rural Colorado. Colorado Mesa University is one of those universities and is in strong support.

5. There is much concern about mass shootings taking place across the country. Congress has passed by bi-partisan legislation on the subject.
 - a. Do you support the legislation that was passed this year? Why or why not?

I do not oppose background checks; those are already in place in Colorado, as is the Red Flag law. However, I do not believe the root causes were effectively addressed in the federal legislation, such as: mental health, gun safety training, and school safety issues. Plus, law enforcement resources were not included.

The following are Bills that I recall in the 2022 Colorado Legislative Session concerning firearms:

- i. **HB22-1086 Vote Without Fear Act**. (no bipartisan sponsors) This Bill does not allow firearms within 100 feet of a ballot box or vote center. I was a no vote on this Bill as counties and municipalities (by statute) already have the authority to create ordinances for this. (I support local control.) The bill passed on a party-line vote.
- ii. **HB22-1145 Possession of Large Ammunition Magazines for Competition**. This Bill died on a party-line vote in committee; it did not make it to the House Floor for consideration. Not allowing larger ammunition magazines for competitions may have cost Mesa County some sporting events at the Cameo Shooting & Educational Complex.
- iii. **HB22-1168 Public School Hunter Education 7th Grade Course**. A bipartisan bill that now allows a hunter safety course to be taught in seventh grade. I was a yes vote. With bipartisan support, the Bill passed and was signed by the Governor.

b. What other changes you would like to see in gun legislation?

- i. **The implication of the question is that more gun legislation is needed to reduce gun violence. The shooters in these tragic incidents are already breaking the many laws we have on our books. That tells me more laws may not be the solution. We should focus on mental health triggers, encourage teachers to speak out, and support law enforcement, together with resource officers in our schools.**

6. The legitimacy of 2020 election has become a point of contention between 2022 election candidates. Do you agree that the 2020 election results were legitimate? If you do not feel that President Joe Biden was fairly elected, why do you feel that way and what factual evidence supports your belief?

I accepted the 2020 election results. In December 2020, the Colorado Legislative Audit Committee held a hearing and listened to seven hours of testimony on both sides of this issue. The public was also invited to listen to this

hearing. An audit of the 2020 election in Colorado was requested by a member of the committee; however, that request died on a party-line vote.

I was the Mesa County Clerk for 8 years (2003 through 2010). During that time, I saw first-hand the professionalism and dedication of my election staff, plus election judges who worked tirelessly; the education and training that staff attended to become certified election officials (both on state and national levels); their patience and kindness to our voters; and willingness to educate and provide answers to any questions our voters might have.

7. What are the three biggest issues facing citizens in Western Colorado? Briefly describe your proposed solutions to two of these three issues.

I have more than three:

Make Colorado affordable. Deliver a state where middle-class families can afford their homes, gas, and groceries. Reverse the excessive fees, taxes, and regulations that threaten the American Dream out of reach of many Coloradans.

Prioritize public safety. Work to recruit and retain more officers. During my four years in the Colorado Legislature, there has been a lack of support for law enforcement by the majority party. It is important to bring down the crime rate, which is spiraling out of control. I also refer you to paragraph 3b(ii) above. We need to strengthen legislation concerning the issue of Fentanyl.

Expand educational choice. Foster greater choice for all families; find innovative ways to ensure funding follows the students rather than being bound by systems. A one-size-fits-all system has failed our most vulnerable.

Protect our water. Secure and sustainable water future is essential. I support investing in infrastructure for water storage, instead of following land which creates soil and weed impacts on farmland.

Of course, **transportation** remains an important role of government that I hope to tackle as well. But, I have already written about more than three.

Thank you for the opportunity to respond.
Janice Rich
Candidate, Colorado State Senate SD7