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2020 Pierce County Democrats Endorsement Questionnaire  
-Partisan Election-

Candidate name: Yanah G Cook

Position sought: Pierce County Council, District 3

Date submitted: 4.12.2020

**Candidate qualities and conduct:** The Pierce County Democratic Central Committee endorses and supports qualified Democrats seeking elected office. When deciding whether to recommend endorsement, the Endorsements Committee may consider the candidate's dedication to Democratic Party values and principles, the viability of the campaign, and the candidate's qualifications for office, among other things. Endorsed candidates are discouraged from supporting non-Democratic candidates or from supporting any candidate who doesn't represent Democratic values. Endorsed candidates should distinguish themselves from any Democratic opponents in an objectively fair, informational, and non-confrontational fashion.

**By submitting this endorsement questionnaire, I publicly affirm:**

- I am a Democrat and will uphold Democratic Party values.
- I will abide by the above principles of conduct.

You may respond N/A (not applicable) if appropriate. Expand or decrease space as needed.

Questions

1. Why are you running for this particular office?

*I am running because I truly care about Pierce County's rural, semi-urban, unincorporated areas and communities and am disturbed by the lack of accessibility, accountability and responsibility that has been allowed to become the status quo for my District's council member. I am committed to being the change I want to see in our local government.*

2. What are your qualifications (traditional or not) for seeking this elected office?

*My family and I have lived in unincorporated Pierce County for almost 29 years. I qualify to hold the office of Pierce County Council Member because of my years of community dedicated activism as well as my background in public service. I was a public servant of the Washington State Department of Transportation (WSDOT) working in contracts and right of way for almost 17 years. As part of my involvement at work, I served for seven*

*years as co-organize and fundraiser of the Combined Fund Drive and Well Fed, Well Read Programs for the WSDOT Olympic Region.*

*I also have a Bachelor of Arts degree from our local State college -The Evergreen State College and am a registered Advanced Clinical Hypnotherapist. I run my own small business (established 1995) as a counselor/consultant. I understand the ups and downs of running a business.*

*Through my experience working on the ground as a grassroots organizer for years, I have been especially intent on Getting Out the Vote (GOTV) and working to get qualified, dedicated caring democrats elected has given me firsthand experience as an active concerned resident and democratic advocate in my community. Additionally, I have been an elected Precinct Committee Officer since 2016 and through my duties to this office, I have knocked on my rural neighbors' doors, listened to their concerns called them and helped to understand their issues and know how important it is to allow their voice to be heard in our county government.*

*Since 2017 I have served as Vice Chair of the Washington State Small Business Caucus where I advocate for the small businesses, their owners, and their employees in Washington State. I am the first Citizen Lobbyist for the 2<sup>nd</sup> LD. As a lobbyist, I have hand-delivered and brought constituent postcards, letters, and concerns to each of our District Representatives. I worked to promote passage of several bills – for example: SB 5395, - Comprehensive Sex Education Curriculum, SHB 1713 – Missing and Murdered Native Women, and I-1000,-Affirmative Action and Diversity Commission Measure.*

*I have gained valuable experience as an active member of several campaign teams for other progressive Democrats all over Pierce and Thurston Counties. In 2004-2005 I advocated and helped organize to get AFSCME union representation for WSDOT state workers that were not covered by the Engineers 17 Union and was a member on the first negotiations committee on that front.*

2. What are the 1 - 3 most important issues for your district or your elected body/office?

- *When elected to the PCC I will be an active steward of our water resources. I will take action to ensure our aquifer, lakes, rivers and streams will be protected from pollution and from any neglect they have been exposed to for far too long. This will involve working in collaboration with our tribes, cities, water districts and state as well as the military at JBLM to establish fair rules and regulations to protect our entire region's primary sources of drinking water and to protect our salmon, natural resources, parks, Native Sovereignty and to promote safe fish passages.*
- *Another issue that I want to address while in office is more citizen accessibility to the District 3 Council Member. Past inaccessibility and unresponsive representation has had negative effects on the rural natural environment and has become the status-quo for the Pierce County Council. The current policy of holding Council meetings at 3pm on Tuesdays started in 1981. Even with modern internet access to recorded meetings, this creates a very real barrier for many who wish they could appear in person to hear the meetings and engage in public comment. Most working class residents cannot afford to take time off work to speak about their concerns to the County Council. If we move the meetings to 7pm not only will many more of our citizens be given the*

*opportunity to participate in local government and have their voice heard, but another courtroom could be made free for use during the day which will increase the capacity for our courts to process cases and perhaps a Mental-Health Court could use the space during the day. In addition to the time change, as it stands, only one County Council meeting is held in each of the seven districts and only once per year, meaning the Council only comes to my rural community to hear my constituents once a year. This prevents citizens with limited time and transportation from being able to attend this one local area Council meeting. As a Council member I would see to it that the once per year requirement is changed to at least four times a year (once per quarter), because a government that is not accountable or accessible to its constituents is the antithesis to our progressive values.*

- *For the past few years I've attended Pierce County Council meetings but most regularly during the past year as well as Pierce County Regional Committee meetings and PC Planning meetings. I've met repeatedly with local community leaders and other groups regarding the proposed Centers and Corridors plan. This "totally urban solution to the housing shortage" is well meaning but short sighted and leans too far in favor of what the "developer's desires" rather than what the rural property owners, farmers, unincorporated and semi-urban residents want the developments to look like and the infrastructure to contain in their communities. As their representative I will ensure their voices are heard! I will make certain that they all have a seat at the planning table; developers have met all concurrency policies and respect the unincorporated Community Plans while also seeing that public safety and quality of life infrastructure is guaranteed. While supporting wise responsible planning I will seek more rural economic development with locals able to live and work near their homes high on the priority list. I will work on initiatives to help elders stay in their homes and also work on strategies to raise wages and stimulate more economic stability - opening doors and opportunities to affordable housing. I will work closely with State and local agencies, churches, local councils and organizations to address the needs of the growing homeless population.*

4. Why should the Pierce County Democratic Party support you for this position, and how have you demonstrated Democratic values?

*I have been a progressive thinker all of my voting life. And that includes being an advocate for humane and caring values that help raise people up and create opportunity to improve the lives of all people. And yes, I have been a Democrat for my entire adult life. I have helped in canvassing, chasing ballots, GOTV all over the District and phone banking for many candidates. I have organized and led forums, town-halls, rallies, meet and greets, and democratic fund raising events for both Pierce County and Thurston County. I come from a military and strong union family with a history of activism and public service. In my professional life I always understood the power and importance of organized labor and fighting for worker's rights. After retiring, I decided to extend my public service to help preserve and protect my local area communities. I realized that the most effective way for me to make a positive impact in my district was to help my fellow progressives win races and help push for humane social policies. Becoming an elected Precinct Committee Officer and listening and speaking with my neighbors, property owners, community leaders, first responders and local farmers over the years compelled*

*me to seek public office - as an advocate for social justice, the environment, equity, and to stand up for the marginalized unincorporated and rural residents so they have a voice that is heard.*

5. When elected, how will you make yourself accessible, and how would you obtain constituent input on issues and decisions?

*This is one of the most important issues to me personally, and I have been very open with the drastic steps that must be taken to make sure our government is accessible, accountable, and open to all so that it is responsive, listens, and acts on residents' concerns. The first big step is to overhaul the County Council schedule by moving County Council meetings to the evening, and holding at least four in-district meetings in each district every year. I will also hold town-hall meetings when important issues come to the front and will have open lines of communication and listen to residents' concerns. What I can do personally is ensure the people of my District have an advocate they can trust that they know will put their concerns first on the Council. I will fight for my constituents and their interests and see to it that my office is open to anybody and everybody in the County that desires to be heard and involved in the political processes in Pierce County.*

6. How have you previously provided and how would you increase access and influence for people and groups that may lack them?

*I pride myself and my campaign team on our ability to reach out and involve people who have been ignored for decades at the County Council government level. Many people we talk to will tell us they have not been asked for their input and many are those who have lived here all their lives and others for decades! I strive to be a bridge to balance the urban/rural division by listening and sparking productive communication and understanding. Much of my campaign up to this point has consisted of getting out and meeting with different community groups, forging those connections that won't just help me with my race, but help me be the best representative I can be. Organizations like the NAACP, Indivisible groups in Tacoma and Puyallup, Frederickson Clover Creek Community Council, Friends of Pierce County, and the Pierce County Agriculture Advisory Committee, local business associations and rotaries have helped me gain insight on what I can do to help the most people once I am on the Council.*

7. Do you support unrestricted access to reproductive health care for all women, including the right to abortion?

*Yes. Healthcare is not just women's rights but a human right, everyone needs adequate access to the healthcare they need reproductive or otherwise.*

8. What are the core functions of the elected office/body you seek; how can you improve them?  
*See response to Question 3 above.*

9. Please list any key endorsements.

*Pierce Port Commissioner, Kristin Ang, Thurston Port Commissioner, E.j.Zita,*

30<sup>th</sup> LD, Mike Pellicciotti,  
Derek Young, Pierce County Council member,  
Eatonville Town Councilman, Tom Walter, former State Senator, Marilyn Rassmusen,  
Jamie Smith, Candidate for 25 Legislative District Representative  
Chair of WSFDW, Carin Chase  
President, Pierce County Chapter WSFDW, Fannie Kelley,  
Bruce Lachney,  
Dennis Townsend,  
Jim Halmo,  
Pastor Larry Jones

*I am working on Questionnaires for multiple organizations and have virtual meetings lined up with more local electeds.*

IF ELECTED TO THIS POSITION (*some questions may not be applicable*):

10. What would you do to ensure that your constituents each have a truly equal and fair opportunity to succeed based on merit and effort, rather than pre-existing status or classification?

*The reality of life in the 21<sup>st</sup> century so far is that we still face many of the issues of inequality that we have been fighting against for decades, and people do not have equal and fair opportunity to succeed. All people deserve to have fair and equal opportunity to get an education or certification for their career without going into lifelong debt. There are a plethora of steps that should be taken at all levels of our society, but as a Council Member I will see to it that I do my part to ensure as many people as possible have equal footing in our community. I think one of the biggest improvements that can be made is with post-secondary education. Right now most K-12 programs are very much centered on getting their students to a position to seek an undergraduate degree. While this works for many people, only around 25% of the US population ever gets the chance to actually attend college. I believe that the county, our school districts, and our labor unions can form a partnership that will provide an alternative to college, joining the military in order to get an education, or low wage work. If we can expand the opportunity for high school graduates to join an apprenticeship, a trade school, or a vocational education program (like Pierce County Skill Center) we will be allowing our students who do not have the income to move away from their home, and pay for an extravagantly expensive education, the opportunity to stay in or near their community and obtain skills and career training to provide living wage jobs.*

11. What benefits and problems come from increasing population; how would you address them?

*Pierce County is a wonderful place to call home, and with our region's economy growing (at least up to the point of this past month and the change that the virus has brought) at an unprecedented rate. It's no wonder so many people have been moving here. With our growing population there have been new problems that must be addressed by our County government. In our rural areas new development has skyrocketed, and for the most part, has been unrestricted. This has created many new homes and brought many new families to our community, but at the same time it has left our infrastructure, schools, and first responders spread thin and in need of additional funding. On the Council I will ensure all new development meets or exceeds concurrency standards that will ensure our schools, parks, roads, and*

*emergency services have the tools, funding, and staffing needed to ensure public safety and support our new citizens.*

12. How would you support workers, including union workers, whether employed privately or by government?

*I am an avid supporter of our unions and workers' right to organize. On the council I will take action to ensure we are bringing well-paying union jobs into our community. There is no reason the workers of Pierce County should be forced to settle for low-wage hourly jobs that can't keep up with housing costs..*

*On the public front I strongly oppose the privatization of government services. Privatization of public services is like the saying "a penny wise and a dollar foolish" it may seem to management a quick way to save money but at the cost of sub-par quality and a reduction of continuity, worker safety, and lower production. It is obvious that as we continue to contract out work that used to be done by our public employees; (and our manufacturing businesses) the only winners are the corporations having their pockets lined with taxpayer money and to continue their profit over people practices.*

*For private industry I want to ensure our labor leaders have a seat at the table so we may work synchronously to bring good paying jobs to our communities. This is why I have spent so much of my campaign galvanizing ties with the Pierce County Central Labor Council, SEIU, and our firefighting unions.*

13. What policies and actions would you take to protect and improve the natural environment?

*See Response on #3 First Paragraph*

14. What would you do to increase housing access and decrease income inequality?

*Housing affordability, low non-union wages, and homelessness are some of the most important issues facing our state coming into this new decade. Drastic changes must be made if we are to maintain and improve the quality of life for the people. On the Pierce County Council there are several major steps we can take to improve the situation in our communities. The first big step would be to require that most new residential property being built (utilizing local union labor) in urban areas offer a variety of multifamily units, this brings the density of housing up decreasing the cost of property to families. The next would be to lobby for higher wages, an increase in the availability of public housing, and to lower the bar to qualify for said housing. There exists a cycle of poverty where a steady living situation is required to gain employment, and employment with humane wages is required for a steady living situation. Local, state, and the federal governments should be working together to help our citizens out of this difficult cycle through access to higher wages and less difficult to attain affordable housing.*

15. Identify any budget challenges for your elected office/body, how would you deal with them?

*I like that the Pierce County Council has now moved into a two year budget cycle and I believe it will prove to help the budget focus be more strategic for priority areas I fund important. Some of these include funding to ensure our Sheriff Department is fully staffed and trained, first*

*responders are given what they need to provide for public safety, options and solutions for homelessness, and a myriad of important associated areas that need funding including Mental Health Court, continual expert training for first responders and law enforcement. We need to focus on public transit routes that serve our rural areas, solutions that work on the opioid crisis, more protection for domestic violence victims, more funding and grants for local and rural park development.*

15. How will you approach safety, police, and court system issues – and what are they?

*Public safety is one of the important issues I have found my constituents are concerned with. As a County Council member it is important to help our sheriff's office and law enforcement departments have all the staffing they require to be able to reach into very rural areas with good response time. While also having balance in their difficult task as peace officers encouraging good relations with community groups and welcoming public engagement and input. Another of the most important things we can do for the people of our community is make investments in mental health services in our county, ensure our peace officers have effective, consistent, and frequent training on de-escalation techniques, connecting at-risk individuals with community resources, and consistent engagement with the many diverse cultures that make up our community. In terms of the courts, I would like to see the use of long term imprisonment applied truly when an individual presents a clear danger to the community or has continually been convicted of life threatening behavior and acts. Alternatives such as well supervised community service, addiction treatment, education, skills training, probation, and other actions that discourage repeat offenses should be the new normal.*

17. Finally, any additional comments you would like to share with the Committee:

*I believe in working hard to help the people of District 3 and all people in Pierce County to thrive. This includes lobbying for the minimum wage to be at least \$15 or higher. If people aren't making a livable wage they can't keep housed and if workers can't afford the rent then they end up living in their cars or worse. The State legislature needs to focus one whole session or perhaps a special session exclusively on revamping the State tax system. Band-Aids aren't working. People are frustrated and Washington has one of the most regressive tax systems in the country.*

*I am also in favor of looking for and bringing new ecologically mindful employment opportunities to our area that will pay living wages and that will provide employees to work near where they live. I want to also work to invite more hospitals in the unincorporated areas along with more clinics. I believe we can forge a collaborative of churches, agencies, organizations, businesses, community groups and leaders to establish a cohesive workable plan to rehouse the homeless. While also working to get them training or skills in order to find employment that can provide wages to afford housing. Or if they are disabled, sick or injured on any level, get them the medical attention they need to live a productive life and stop the cycle of neglect. .*

*I have always been a person who looks at a cup half-full and immediately plan creative, effective ways to fill it up, use its contents to help others and then fill it up again. It is what I want*

*to continue to do as a legacy to help all my friends, neighbors, and all the communities in my District and in all of Pierce County.*

*Thank you for your consideration.*