

King County Democrats 2009 General Candidate Questionnaire

Candidate Name	Ross Hunter
Position sought	King County Executive
Residence Legislative, County Council and Congressional district	Leg District 48 Council District 6 Congressional District 8
Are you a Democrat? Are you known as a Democrat?	I've been a Democrat my entire life. In 2002 I took a seat that had been Republican since 1889 - well over a century. If I wanted to be a Republican that would have been the time to discover it.
Campaign Information	
Campaign Name	Friends of Ross Hunter
Web page	www.rosshunter.com
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Candidate Background: Community service, education, employment and other relevant experience.

Describe your qualifications, education, employment, community and civic activity, Union affiliation and other relevant experience.

I am a 4-term incumbent in the Washington State House of Representatives, representing the 48th District since 2003. I currently serve as chair of the Finance committee, and have been a member of the powerful Ways and Means committee since I joined the legislature. While in the legislature I've served on the Information Services Board, responsible for managing complex software projects, particularly those that cross jurisdictional boundaries. I've helped save the state millions of dollars and fixed broken projects.

In a previous life I worked at Microsoft for 17 years, winding up as a General Manager responsible for several hundred people and multiple products. I hold several patents related to Microsoft Access, a product I worked on for a very long time. I have substantial experience in managing complex projects, most specifically software development projects.

I attended Yale University, graduating in 1983 with a BS in Computer Science.

I serve on the boards of the Bellevue Schools Foundation and Hopelink, the Eastside's largest human services agency. This gives me insight into the human services needs of King County in a way it would be difficult to learn in the legislature. I've previously served the community as the

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leader of a large Cub Scout pack, and as a member of the Cascade District Committee, helping organize the Scouting program on the Eastside. I received a "District Award of Merit" for the time I spent on this.

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What ratings and endorsements have you received?	
Legislative District Democrats	
Union Endorsement	
Municipal League	
SEAMEC	
Other Endorsements	

Which groups do you plan to ask for an endorsement?

Most groups, with the exception of those that have odious requirements. The "Club for Growth" or "Human Life Washington" are unlikely to find my candidacy enticing.

Please answer the following questions*		Yes	No	Qualified
1	Do you support the King County Democratic Platform?			X
2	Do you support the right of workers (excluding military) to bargain and strike?	X		
3	Do you support affirmative action?	X		
4	Do you support freedom of choice in contraception, abortion and sterilization?	X		
5	Do you support public funding for abortions for poor women?	X		
6	Do you support school vouchers? Do you support charter schools?			X
7	Do you support the Davis-Bacon Act?	X		
8	Do you support equal rights for women?	X		
9	Do you support major changes in the way we live to help stop global warming?	X		
10	Do you support the restoration of voting rights to persons convicted of a felony who have served their sentence?	X, and voted for it this year.		

Please answer the following questions *		Yes*	No
1	Have you ever failed to pay any taxes or court ordered judgments?		X
2	Have you ever been found in violation of a Public Disclosure Commission,	X	

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	Federal Election Commission or Seattle Ethics and Elections Commission regulation?		
3	Have you ever been convicted of a felony?	no	

* If you answered “Yes” or “Qualified” please explain your answer.

The KC Democrats platform is an excellent document. In 11 pages of single-spaced 10pt type there are a few quibbles I have, but I subscribe to the core tenets completely.

I wrote and supported a charter school bill in 2004 that would have been the best public charter school bill in the nation, providing a limited opportunity for some very successful charter operators to work here and help us explore how to best serve our most at-risk children. The schools would have been part of the public school system and would have been good for children.

I screwed up how expenses incurred in one reporting period but paid in the next should be reported my first campaign in 2002. I was fined \$100.

Are you a member of another political party? If so, which ones? Have you ever supported or given money to a candidate from another party in a partisan race? If so, whom?

I’m a Democrat. I have not publicly supported candidates from another party in partisan races.

Are you a member of your local Democratic District Party? Have you contributed financially to any Democratic Organization? Have you been a Precinct Committee Officer? When/Where?

I am a member of the 48th Legislative District. I’ve contributed to the 48th and to King County Democrats. I was a PCO in my precinct until it was merged with another last cycle and a neighbor graciously took over the merged precinct.

What are the main messages of your campaign? What is your campaign plan? How many doors have you knocked on to date, pieces of mail planned, budgeting, staffing? What is the fundraising goal for your campaign? How much have you raised to date? Why will you win?

King County is a great place to live. We have beautiful mountains, sparkling waterfronts, vibrant cities on the Eastside and in the South end, and, of course, Seattle, with some of the most innovative and dynamic employers in the world. But the King County Council and the Executive have for too long ignored problems that make our governance incredibly painful and expensive.

It’s time to seriously confront problems that have festered for decades. Sometimes the solutions make people uncomfortable, but as Gene Duvernoy of the Cascade Lands Conservancy says “We have one last chance to get it right.”

We are on a path to not having housing that is affordable for the middle class in King County. Our current vision is one of denser, transit-oriented development inside the urban growth boundary and pastoral splendor outside it, but we are on a path of developing mega-homes on large lots. This will drive middle and low-income people to commute from far away – and we’ll have to build the roads to get them here because transit won’t be cost-effective.

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As a region we try to provide the services that people need, but by letting the turf wars between cities and the county dominate the decision of who provides the service we wind up spending tons of money on overhead we could better spend on direct service provision. Jails are a great example – the cities are banding together to build a jail that the county should be able to build and run more efficiently. There are economies of scale here, but because nobody trusts anyone else the most inefficient and expensive method gets chosen.

Jails aren't sexy, but they have to be done. Doing them efficiently saves money that we can use for things we do want to do.

It's time for King County 2.0. It's time for a new regionalism that brings the 39 cities, the 33 water/sewer districts, the 20 school districts and all the other governments in King County together to confront problems like the housing/transportation model, how we handle stormwater runoff, how public health gets funded, and how the criminal justice system should really work.

My campaign will be about resolving these issues. As a region we share a vision for the future, but we don't agree on an implementation plan. I have a history of bringing people together to build things, resolve problems, and get projects on track.

At the time I write this I've been a candidate for less than a week. I've raised \$10,000, and have about \$75,000 in available surplus funds. I expect to raise and spend about \$350,000 in the primary, and a total of about \$1 million in the general.

I'll win because I'm the candidate with the strongest managerial background, the strongest ability to take on serious problems, and the ability to relate to the whole county, not just to Seattle.

What are the single most pressing issues facing your jurisdiction? What actions would you take if elected?

The most pressing need relevant to this race is the need for adequate funding for necessary functions of the King County government, including public health, human services, public safety and transportation, most certainly including transit.

To address these needs the county needs to better husband its resources before it will be able to convince either the legislature or the voters that it can be trusted with additional revenue. It's crucial that we maximize the level of service we offer to the citizens of the county, spending as little as possible on overhead.

As executive I would:

- Work closely with the cities, water/sewer districts, fire districts, etc. to finalize the annexations of unincorporated land inside the urban growth boundary. This will improve the efficiency of county government operations and save money that could be better spend on direct provision of services. I made sure SB 5321 passed this year, with solutions to all the major annexations in King County. The policy has already resulted in Kirkland commencing annexation of 35,000 people in Finn Hill and Kingsgate.

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- Re-organize the county government to clarify the relationship between county-wide services and those that are provided to the unincorporated areas. This will necessitate replacing the county's antiquated accounting system with a more modern one, a project undertaken by the previous executive that failed at the cost of tens of millions.
- Take on solving some of the crucial issues that face us – transportation planning and growth management. These are related in deep ways. In short, we all share a common vision of a verdant, productive county, blessed with high-paying jobs and smoothly flowing transportation systems. Without major corrections in how we tie housing and jobs together we are unlikely to achieve this vision. We must agree on a plan (not a vision, a plan) that ties housing goals and job growth together so that we are not forcing people to drive for hours to go to work, and so that we don't have to pave everything to build the roads to support this broken model. We cannot afford the cost of building all these roads, nor do we wish to support the environmental consequences.

If you are a candidate in a contested primary race, what record of performance, ability, experience, personal qualities, and positions on issues distinguish you from your opponent(s)? If you do not receive the nomination, is there any reason you could not support your Democratic opponent in the general election? Please explain.

I am a candidate in a contested primary, though the race is non-partisan. I will most certainly support a Democratic candidate in the general election.

I bring two key attributes to this job that my primary opponents do not – management experience and a high level of impatience with business as usual. In my business career I've managed groups up to hundreds of people, leaving Microsoft as a General Manager. I have a track record of building and empowering teams of people that get work done.

In the Legislature I have a history of taking on difficult issues and bringing them to resolution:

- I sponsored and passed the first significant elimination of a toxic chemical in Washington, eliminating the use of PBDE, a toxic flame-retardant that damages the brain and hormone development of small children. I did this in spite of withering opposition from the chemical industry, including hundreds of thousands spent on lobbying other legislators and on attack ads in the media.
- I drove the effort that resulted in passage this year of the first significant re-write of the definition of "basic education" in Washington. (HB 2261) This is the law that determines the level of funding in the budget for base services. We expanded it to provide enough support for kids in all financial situations to get enough credits to graduate prepared for gainful employment or for further education. It includes early learning for low-income youth, a key element in preparing our most at-risk children for a productive future, and a significant shift of resources to schools with more challenging populations so we can make real our commitment to ending the achievement gap for children of color and those from low-income backgrounds.
- I took on solving a key part of King County's revenue problems this year by helping finalize the provisions for annexation of unincorporated areas inside the urban growth boundary, and providing both new revenue options for transit and flexibility in the use of existing revenue sources.

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- I re-wrote the tax code for digital products, updating a section of code that hadn't been touched for almost 30 years. This protects the tax base from losing ground because of changing patterns of use of products like music downloads and on-line software. Coming to an agreement between the revenue needs of cities, counties, and the state and the interests in the business community in not disadvantaging businesses here in Washington was difficult, but worth doing. This will protect tens, and perhaps hundreds of millions a year in revenue in the future as we shift more products into the digital realm.
- I was the prime sponsor in the House of the "Rainy Day Fund," a tool to make sure we don't over-spend in flush times and cut drastically in times like we have today. It took persuasion and clear explanations to get this to pass, and I'm sure glad we have it today.

Do you believe the current structure of taxes and/or fees that generate funds in your area are fair? If not, how would you change it?

Washington's tax code is the worst in the nation – it is very regressive. The lowest quintile of the income distribution pays 15-20% of their income in state and local taxes, while to top quintile pays close to 3%. Changing this in any substantive way would be difficult, given the requirement for a constitutional amendment to implement an income tax. The votes do not exist for this in the legislature or amongst the people. There are several other approaches that could be taken, including focusing on property taxes with some kind of homeowner exemption or circuit breaker. These are state issues, and not local King County ones.

The tax structure in King County is quite inequitable. The county funds services for urban residents of unincorporated areas at urban levels, using taxes collected in the cities to pay for it. This cross-subsidization makes it difficult to explain how the budget works and is unfair to incorporated urban dwellers. The tax system also does not keep up with inflation, forcing reductions in the level of service offered over time.

In the past several years King County has often engaged in an exercise often called "closing the Washington Monument" as a way of raising revenue from its citizens, putting attractive items on the ballot and paying for less attractive items from the base budget. I believe in budget clarity, and would prefer a simpler system of County taxation that would put less compliance burden on businesses and make clear to citizens what they are paying for, but that didn't require the amount of organizational overhead we have today.

King County has a ten year plan to end homelessness. What ideas do you have to increase low income and affordable housing/?

The contributions from the Housing Trust Fund at the state level, the housing levy in Seattle, etc. are crucial to building a stock of housing that will be permanently available for very low-wage workers. I've been happy to support this during my time in the legislature and will support it as King County Executive.

To increase affordable housing for people slightly higher up the income scale we must re-balance supply and demand. There are too many people chasing too few houses, driving prices up and lower-

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income workers further out. If we wish to create affordable housing near to where people need to work, we will have to increase the density of housing we allow in our urban areas. Doing this will put downward pressure on prices, causing us to come back to a more normal spread between housing costs and incomes. This is politically difficult, but is a key element in changing the existing dynamic.

The other approach is to make sure that we continue to have high-quality jobs for people, so they move up the income ladder. This requires improvements in education, post-high school job training and retraining efforts, plus laser-like focus on attracting and retaining high-quality employers.

We need to do both things. I approve of most of the elements of the ten-year plan, and work closely with my local housing agency, but building government owned housing will not make a significant dent in the problem for the middle class. It's critical for helping much lower-income people live with some dignity.

What role should government play in the healthcare system?

The federal government should create some kind of universal plan, or should get out of the way and let the states do it. Current ERISA laws make it very difficult for a state to legally create a single plan and require all employers to be part of it. I have provided the following proposal in previous versions of this questionnaire – it may prove helpful in this one as well.

We should have a national health care system. The reasons are obvious – we cannot have an internationally competitive manufacturing sector without it, it's morally indefensible to have a system where people cannot afford basic healthcare coverage, and it is destroying the ability of the state to have a balanced budget that funds anything other than healthcare.

My personal experience last year with medical treatment has strengthened my viewpoint on this issue substantially. It turns out that as a state employee I have fabulous healthcare coverage. Even with that, my family spent over \$10,000 on healthcare last year (a tiny fraction of the actual cost of my treatment.) This amount would bankrupt many low-wage workers, let alone the cost of the actual treatments, which were large enough to be a line-item in the state budget.

If I were designing a national system it would:

- Provide everyone with a refundable tax credit sufficient to purchase basic health coverage. A refundable credit is one that is provided in cash back to people who don't have enough tax liability to produce the credit – like the earned income credit.
- Require insurance companies to offer a mandated basic plan to everyone for the amount of the credit, but allow them to offer additional coverage however they like, as long as they charge everyone the same amount for any plan.
- Require everyone to use the credit, signing them up for a default provider if they don't take action on their own.
- Pay for it by eliminating the employer deduction for healthcare coverage, giving employees a raise for the amount of the coverage they were getting in the past, minus the credit.

I believe this system would be an amazing change in the way we provide healthcare. It would change the business model for insurance companies, getting them in the business of pushing providers to be more effective rather than finding ways to cherry pick groups of healthy individuals. I believe it is doable politically, and would be my platform were I to run for national office. It's not doable at the

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state level because of the revenue problem and our inability to legally tap the tax exemptions companies currently get for healthcare expenses. Washington simply does not have sufficient resources to do this without defaulting on constitutionally-mandated programs like education.

We should consider the Massachusetts program, but I have serious concerns with parts of it. The costs of providing subsidies for low-income workers are extreme in a state with the most regressive tax system in the nation, and I don't believe we would be able to generate the tax revenues to do it. I certainly support a public dialog on this, and voted for the bills to create this dialog, with actuarial data about the real costs of a system.

I like Kriedler's plan for now, and would be willing to help create a dialog about it as we move forward. Having portable catastrophic insurance can help people keep their house and their financial future if they have a half-million dollar intervention like I did in 2007.

I'm pleased that we now have mandated labeling of the caloric content of fast-food purchases. I've pooh-poohed this in the past but have been impressed with how compact the information is and how useful it is making selections. This was driven by the King County Health Department and was good work. The county can do this kind of public health work and add real value to people's health, but isn't a provider of healthcare to the general public.

What is your position on civil rights for Gay, Lesbian, Bisexual and Transgendered people? What is your position on equal rights for same-sex couples when it comes to benefits, civil unions, marriage and parental rights?

I have consistently co-sponsored and voted for every major piece of civil rights legislation for the Gay, Lesbian, Bisexual and Transgendered population of Washington. As King County Executive I would continue the county's policy of benefits for domestic partners, and would strive for all civil rights for everyone, regardless of sexual orientation, including the right to marry when we believe we can defend against a referendum or an initiative trying to repeal it. I certainly support the ability of GLBT couples to have families.

What creative solutions can you offer to address the problems of the economically disadvantaged?

King County as a region has several responsibilities with regards to the economically disadvantaged, though our responsibilities as a county are more circumscribed.

King County is the central actor in planning to ensure an adequate housing supply at all levels of need. We must make sure that we actively work to improve access, including ensuring that the ten-year plan continues to be implemented. People should not sleep under bridges in the richest country in the world.

Making sure that our economy is robust, and that we are proactive in attracting new employers to the region, especially ones that pay a market wage. This requires careful work with the cities on land use, water supply and coordination with the state on economic development efforts.

King County is the backstop provider of human services to people in need, from medical to mental health. Too often this help is provided through our criminal justice system. It's cheaper for all of us

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and better for those suffering from mental illness and drug addiction if we provide diversion programs to help resolve issues, rather than exacerbating them in a jail setting.

King County does not have responsibility for running the education system to help people out of poverty in the long run – this belongs to the state. We should help where we can, but the state should provide here.

I have read this questionnaire and understand and approve the content and all provided information.		
Printed Name		Date
Signature		