



# WINONA AREA CHAMBER OF COMMERCE 2022 CANDIDATE QUESTIONS

## State Legislature

Eric Leitzen - State Senate District 26

### 2022 ELECTION QUESTIONS

**1. Top priority: If elected, what is your top priority for the 2023 Legislature?**

Tax The Rich and Get Your Money Back. For 40 years now you have workers harder and gotten less. Profits and productivity have gone up, but wages haven't. Everything is more expensive, inflation is out of control, but the rich are richer than ever. How did they get that way? By skimming off the top of YOUR hard work. That is YOUR money. You already worked for it. You deserve it. But you never got it. And I am the candidate to get it back into your pocket and your community.

**2. Why are you running for office?**

I am sick to my teeth of seeing candidate who refuse to even promise to do something for working people. Everything is a committee, or a look into, or a wait and see while the only thing that seems to happen is something that benefits the already rich. We can take care of everyone, and we should, and it's about time we heard an independent set of ideas that aren't bound up in donor or party money.

**3. Budget: The Legislature will be tasked with adopting a two-year budget in 2023 with a surplus. The surplus may grow, but that is uncertain. There has been discussion to use this surplus to increase budget, but is this sustainable? What will be your approach to balancing the budget in terms of reducing spending and/or raising taxes and fees? Be as specific as possible.**

I want to see that surplus shrunk, but only if we can give it directly to the people: higher taxes on the richest, taxes on Wall Street shenanigans, taxes on multiple homes, and lowered taxes on working people's income and purchases. Surplus should go into relief for mom-and-pop stores to pay their employees more, and a basic income to make sure everyone can survive and thrive. We can balance the budget if we tax the rich, and that will give us the added benefit of taking their bloated finances out of the system and sinking it into infrastructure, schools, and your quality of life, bringing down inflation.

**4. Gridlock: What specific measures do you support to reduce the increasing partisanship of the lawmaking process and resulting gridlock? Do you support reforms that would prohibit consolidating multiple subjects into a single omnibus bill?**

The nice part of being a third party is that you get to be a wild card: you're not held to either party's dogma or, more importantly, the whims of their donors. In a senate with such a thin partisan divide, both parties would have to come to ME to get their bills passed, and unlike the career politicians I don't have rich donors to appeal to, I can instead hold legislation up until it benefits you and yours, and make sure government starts working for your communities instead of lining the pockets of the rich.

**5. Mandates: During the COVID-19 crisis, the Governor initiated several mandates to address and attempt to mitigate the negative effects of the pandemic. Time will tell whether those mandates accomplished their goals. Nevertheless, the Governor, non-related to the pandemic, has bypassed the legislature and adopted the California Clean Car's act here in MN. What are your thoughts on these actions and how do they represent the voice of the people and businesses? What steps do you believe need to be taken to ensure that regulations of such magnitude are heard and decided by the legislature first?**

Regulations are necessary, and so is the massive environmental change that is going to have to happen to stave off a climate catastrophe. If people had enough money in their pocket, having to buy a clean car wouldn't be an issue, but instead we're fighting over crumbs while the rich play around. We can't let the aristocrats divide us on things like this, because it obscures the main fact that government should be working for you and should be taking care of you, and whatever mandates are enacted. Business exists to make money, but government needs to make sure that the people are taken care of so both can work harmoniously to make people's lives better.

**6. Education, K-12: COVID-19 caused dramatic changes to the delivery of education. What weaknesses in the system were highlighted by distance learning? Did we identify any best practices that should be incorporated in the post-pandemic era? What are your thoughts on current PSEO funding, and should it be increased? Finally, there has been a recent push for "School Choice" and creating an ESA or school voucher program, what is your position on these policies?**

The biggest flaw shown was that the internet should be public and mandated to be excellent, much like many other countries in the world. We cannot hope that a company will go deep in the red to bring broadband to every corner of Minnesota, so we need to make sure that, in some way or another, it happens as a way to improve people's quality of life. In regard to education as a whole, I would like to implement what I call the Fillmore County System, where each high school in a rural county is retrofitted to a different speciality: STEM, Vo-Tech, Art, College Prep, and Business, with the student given the choice after an exploratory 9th grade year of where to go to see their dreams realized, whether it is graduating as an apprentice to a local plumber or heading off to the U.

**7. Education, higher ed: Businesses are now facing greater workforce shortages than before the pandemic. Lack of qualified workers is one of the largest burdens that we hear from business owners in our community. What steps do you believe need to be taken to assist our higher education system in producing a qualified workforce?**

The pandemic showed that many businesses are operating on razor thin margins, especially small

mom-and-pop shops, and the government needs to start doing what it can to rejuvenate and return our small towns and small shops to their former glory. Workers have figured out how vital they are to the system, not oligarchs, and have every right to exercise that power until higher wages or proper training is provided. It is also our duty to make sure students are graduating ready to go into the workforce with skills they want to learn and be successful with. And all of this is possible if we get your money back from where it currently sits doing nothing in the pockets of those at the top.

- 8. Health care: Health care costs are continuing to rise, and affordable health care remains a concern to many Minnesotans. Do you support expansion of government-run health insurance plans? If so, what should that look like? If not, what options do you support to stabilize health insurance premiums?**

I have been pushing for years, and intend to keep fighting for, universal healthcare free at the point of service. The federal government has made it perfectly clear that they (or their donors) so not even want to touch the idea of giving everyone healthcare, even though it is proven to be better and cheaper than our current system. If the feds won't do it, then, the states will. I am proposing a network of like minded states who will come together and collectively bargain with healthcare companies to ensure anyone within their borders gets healthcare, full stop. This will be paid for by state taxes on the rich across the informal network, which I hope to include Minnesota, Oregon, Washington, California, New York, Massachusetts, Rhode Island, Illinois, Wisconsin, and more.

- 9. Workplace regulations: Mandated paid family and medical leave for all Minnesota employers was debated in 2020. It passed the House but failed in the Senate. Do you support such a mandate? Why or why not?**

Absolutely. We need paid leave for all workers in Minnesota. We can afford to take care of everyone, and so we should, while also being sure to support and encourage new and small shops to make sure we can't get in a system where massive corporations can buy their way into sacrificing employee health for quarterly earnings.

- 10. Transportation: What is your preference for raising additional money for roads and bridges? Or is current funding sufficient?**

I want to see more money for roads, bridges, and water systems. I want to tax the rich to make our roads and transportation options (including more affordable and free public transportation) the best in the nation.

- 11. Energy: Should Minnesota increase its renewable energy mandates on utilities? Or are market forces sufficient to promote sustainability?**

Yes. Minnesota, and specifically southeastern Minnesota, is an untapped goldmine for wind and solar energy. I look forward to some day seeing solar fields and windmills all over the area, perfectly integrated into the natural beauty, and finally getting us away from fossil fuels.

- 12. Police reform: Police reform has become center stage since George Floyd's death and prompted passage of legislation. Did the laws go far enough or too far? Today, many communities across the state have seen many public safety officers leave or retire early from their positions. These same communities are having difficulty re-filling these positions due to negative public perceptions and lack of funding. What steps do you believe need to be taken to ensure that our state and**

**communities' law enforcement are adequately funded and supported so that our Minnesota communities remain safe and healthy?**

The current "tough" approach to law enforcement is like squeezing a stick of butter. All that happens is that the butter slips through your fingers and ruins your dinner. We need a completely different, local, health-focused, well-funded, non-violent, non-threatening approach to law enforcement that sees the people in our communities not as enemies to be defeated, but as neighbors to be helped.

**13. Other issues: Are there other issues you want to address?**

Cannabis should be legal in all forms, with full expungement and forgiveness.

We need to ensure clean water systems for our towns who are struggling with radium, PFAS, and runoff issues.

We need to encourage more small shops in our towns by breaking up the aristocratic grip a few wealthy families have on each of our small towns and neighborhoods.