

2016 Candidate Questionnaire

SECTION I

BASIC CANDIDATE INFORMATION

1. Name as it will appear on the ballot

First Name	Middle Initial or Nickname	Last Name
Benjamin	Judah	Phelps

2. Office sought (include office, jurisdiction, position/district number):

Washington State Representative, 48th Legislative District, Position 2

3. Are you the incumbent? Yes No

4. How long have you resided in this district/city?

20 years

5. How long have you resided in King County?

same

6. Is the office sought partisan or nonpartisan? Partisan Nonpartisan

7. If partisan, please indicate party: Libertarian Party

CAMPAIGN CONTACTS

Campaign Name: Ben Phelps for the House

Address: P.O. Box 7255

City/State/Zip: Bellevue, WA 98008

Campaign Phone: 425-761-5615

Campaign E-mail: benjphelps@lpwa.org

Campaign Website: www.electphelps.com

POLITICAL BACKGROUND

1. Beginning with the most recent position, please list public offices you have held. Include positions on appointive boards or commissions.

Public Office	Elective or Appointive?	Dates Held	Leadership Role (if any)
None			

2. If you ran for public office but were not elected, please list those races below:

Office Title	Year of Run
None	

SECTION II

In this section, we are seeking responses that reflect the four ratings criteria: involvement, effectiveness, character, and knowledge. These are defined as follows:

- **Involvement:** What has the candidate done previously in family, neighborhood, community, volunteer work, employment or public life to suggest readiness to accomplish challenging objectives? How do these activities demonstrate readiness for the challenges unique to the office sought?
 - **Effectiveness:** Has the candidate demonstrated promise of being productive in the office sought? Has the candidate shown the ability to work with other people?
 - **Character:** Do the candidate's personal traits show the ability to take on the responsibilities of campaigning for and holding the public office she or he is seeking? Is the candidate a leader, participant or observer? Is the candidate trustworthy, reliable and candid?
 - **Knowledge:** Has the candidate demonstrated the willingness and ability to learn and adapt? Does the candidate understand the duties and challenges of the office sought? Does the candidate have a firm grasp of the issues important to his or her constituency and their potential effects?
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1. In one page or less, why are you running for this office? (Note: the interview committee will be given a copy of this statement before your interview; at the beginning of your interview you will have the opportunity to expand on this statement in any way you wish.)

I am running for Washington state representative in the 48th legislative district because I believe that we need new leadership and new ideas in Olympia in order to make real progress on the pressing issues of the day, such as education, transportation, and, especially, affordable housing. I believe the politics in the state of Washington have become far too entrenched. The Democrats, as the party in power in the state house, are interested only in maintaining their control and not rocking the boat with new ideas that might risk their power. The Republicans, on the other hand, are often ineffective and unhelpful as an opposition party. I stand for liberty. I believe that if we're going to address our statewide problems, such as affordable housing, traffic congestion, inefficient programs, and criminal justice reform, we need to be willing to start from scratch and rebuild using market positive solutions. One example of this would be zoning law reform. The intended purpose of a zoning law is to prevent neighborhoods, cities, and regions from being overrun by undesirable or incompatible buildings or enterprises. For instance, strip clubs should not operate next to schools and industrial factories should not be built next to apartments. The problem is that our zoning laws as they currently exist are also used to prevent developers from building higher density affordable housing all over the Seattle metropolitan area. This is a particular concern in the 48th legislative district. Over the course of my twenty-one years of living in Bellevue, I have watched as homes and mom-and-pop stores have been replaced by high-end apartments, while low income housing areas in this district have become more and more rare as a proportion of total housing. At the same time, the need for low-wage workers has gone up because of industries like construction. If we want more affordable housing, we need to accept different specifications for housing so that affordable higher density buildings can be built, thereby reducing the artificially inflated housing prices in this market.

2. Describe your most important personal characteristics or traits as they relate to the office you seek.

I am a leader who has served as an executive officer in several organizations. I am a team player and builder, who encourages everyone to speak their mind and who solicits everyone's active participation. I am a competent crisis manager. I am able to stay calm and to triage during high stress, high anxiety situations and to appropriately delegate to staff and colleagues. I am also focused and persistent while utilizing abundant patience. When I undertake a project, I follow through and make sure that it gets done. I am always willing to roll up my sleeves and get to work. As a speaker, writer and editor, I have an eye for detail and an analytical mindset. I pay careful attention to language, consistency of voice, clarity of message, and effective, easy-to-understand calls to action within the text.

Finally, I have a passion for political science, economics, and history. This has led me to have an equal passion for developing and implementing public policy and for public service.

3. Please describe, in sufficient detail, one to three accomplishments or contributions of which you are most proud. These examples should illustrate skills and capabilities you think apply to the office you are seeking. These accomplishments may have occurred at any time in your personal, professional, or public life.

When I was nineteen years old, I participated in a complete rewrite of the constitution of the North American Federation of Temple Youth, one of the oldest and largest Jewish youth organizations in the world. As in many cases of dramatic policy change, the origin of this one was a crisis in leadership. Two members of our five-member North American board were fired from their positions at the summer camp where we all worked as part of our international board positions. However, those of us who remained learned that the violations of our code of conduct that caused them to lose their jobs did not cause them to also lose their positions on the board. Our constitution had no articles regarding breaches of the code of conduct for executive board members. It quickly became clear that our relationships with major donors were in jeopardy as a consequence. Beyond that, we had a moral imperative to apply to ourselves the same rules which applied to participants in our local and regional youth groups and at our various events. The board members in question did resign, and the three of us who remained, along with our advisor, quickly created an ad hoc process for nominating and appointing replacements outside of the regular election cycle. Once we had replacements, we attempted to change the articles of our constitution regarding elections, resignations, and appointments to reflect the policy that a breach of the code of conduct have the same consequences for North American board members as it did for individual members. As we began this process, we realized that our entire constitution showed the clear fingerprints of decades' worth of different voices and different authors. Policies and agendas clashed, and different vocabulary was used from article to article. Ultimately, we chose to rebuild the constitution from the ground up, going over every word with a fine tooth comb to make sure that the resulting document spoke with one voice and contained one strong set of values. To this day, our version of this constitution remains essentially unchanged, and is often consulted and referred to as a model document for other youth organizations.

Another accomplishment and skill set of which I am proud is my record of positive membership growth in every organization in which I played a leadership role. In the two congregations where I supervised and coordinated youth groups, and in my fraternity during my college years where I served as both vice president and president, I was charged with the responsibility for membership recruitment. In all three situations it was my role to inspire and encourage my teenage youth group participants and my junior fraternity brothers to reach out to their peers and to increase

engagement with their respective organizations. I trained them to be convincing and articulate in explaining how participation and membership could bring value to their lives. However, I also emphasized the importance of portraying the benefits of organizational membership accurately and honestly. I'm proud of how this approach significantly increased membership in each organization.

In the summer of 2011 I interned at the Religious Action Center for Reform Judaism in Washington, DC. Among the projects I worked on was creating a transgender rights resource page for grass roots activists to use back in their home communities. Doing the research for this resource page brought to light for me the fact that transgender rights was, and still is, a relatively untouched and deeply problematic issue for society. Here was a minority who faced unprecedented levels of assault, homicide, and suicide with almost none of the structural supports provided to other groups, essentially no protection, and, at the time, no media coverage. Spending my summer diving head first into this issue really changed the way I see minority rights, discrimination, and equal freedoms in this country. This is why, as I have focused on small government and free enterprise solutions to societal problems, I have chosen not to become a Republican, but rather a Libertarian.

4. Please list or describe current and past activities in the community in which you have acquired skills that relate to the office you seek. Include your role in the activity and the year(s) in which you were involved. Involvement consists of many areas such as family, neighborhood, community, employment, or public life.

As a member of the North American Federation of Temple Youth and the B'nai B'rith Youth Organization from 2002 to 2007, I was a consistent participant in such community service activities as Habitat for Humanity builds, food drives, and making and distributing meals for the homeless in Pioneer Square. I also consistently held positions of leadership at the local, followed by regional (Washington, Oregon, Montana, Idaho, British Columbia, Alberta, and Alaska), and ultimately North American level. I spent a gap year before college traveling North America and abroad, speaking to local and regional youth groups about religious pluralism and about how people could form a stronger, more unified community through sharing their different beliefs, practices, and cultures. During my college years (2008-2012), I was both a youth group advisor in Rochester, New York and the vice president and president of my fraternity. I was also a staff member of leadership-based summer camp programs. Post college, following the elimination of my youth worker position due to budget cuts, I worked for Home Depot throughout 2015. One of my responsibilities at the Home Depot was to teach all Do It Yourself classes, of which most of the attendees were recent immigrants and first-time home owners. While this was a paid position and not community service, I found that I was teaching basic home ownership skills to and learning about the very people who are making the 48th legislative district a more vibrantly diverse community every year.

5. Please describe the duties of the office you seek. Which are the most important duties and why?

It is the responsibility of a Washington state legislator, first and foremost, to represent their constituency in all of the tasks one sets oneself. A legislator must balance the collective goals and desires of the people one has been elected to represent and those personal beliefs, skills and knowledge which factored into that election. Consequently, it is paramount that a legislator always has an open door and actively reaches out to the constituent communities to feel their pulse and to understand their values, their concerns, and what is most affecting their day-to-day lives. A legislator must then serve on committees developing legislation, in partnership with the other members of the committees of either party, and produce bills that satisfy at least a majority of committee members and which benefit the people of the legislative district. This role also requires collaboration and honest consideration of each bill from the perspective both of one's personal values and the various communities which one represents. The art of legislation can probably best be summed up by the phrase "principled compromise" versus "compromised principles." An effective legislator is willing to make principled compromises with those across the aisle or aisles, but who knows at which point they would be compromising their own principles and stops short of that. In my case, I value efficiency, effectiveness and evidence. I believe that in most cases, the most efficient and effective way to enact positive change based upon evidence over time is to employ market-based or market positive solutions, or free-market, small government economic policies. I also believe that if a person wants to do something that is not putting other people at risk, and that does not violate someone else's rights to life, liberty, and property, then it is not our business to tell them either to do or not to do that thing. If our rights are not being violated, we do not have the right to violate someone else's. I believe that this sort of live and let live attitude is what has made America, and in particular places like Bellevue, Redmond and Kirkland, great, because we are multicultural communities where people can live different kinds of lives with different kinds of values and where we all benefit from our shared multicultural experiences.