

2016 Washington State Gubernatorial Race Candidate Questions on Homeless Policy

Submitted by:

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SAFE SEATTLE: *Do you see homelessness as a problem that the governor should be addressing on a statewide level? If so, what will you do that hasn't already been tried?*

BILL BRYANT: Homelessness is a problem affecting communities across Washington, and one that cries out for gubernatorial leadership. Even though state homelessness funding has doubled under Gov. Inslee's administration, homelessness has increased and spread to communities that never before had to deal with its challenges. What the governor is doing is failing.

As governor, I will lead. During my transition, I will bring local officials, homeless advocates, law enforcement and neighborhood organizations together, and provide a statewide plan. It will be founded on six initiatives:

1. A zero tolerance for unauthorized camping on state property.

2. Giving local law enforcement the authority to make arrests in camps on state property.
3. Auditing how cities are spending state homeless funding and withholding state funding from cities that permit camping in public spaces.
4. Reevaluating building codes to encourage development of permanent and extended-transitional housing.
5. Building community based mental health and drug counseling facilities.
6. Consolidating all homeless programs in the state Department of Social and Health Services (DSHS) and hold DSHS accountable for coordinating state and municipal programs and focusing those programs on achieving quantifiable objectives. For the first time, we will actually evaluate what results our homelessness programs are getting and measure our compassion not in dollars spent, but in the number of lives lifted off the streets.

JAY INSLEE: Yes, it's something I've been working on since I took office. Though we've made a lot of progress in four years, I know there is more for us to do. We're going to continue to do what we know works. We've seen great success through my rapid re-housing initiative which focuses resources to find permanent housing for families that are on the verge of, or have very recently become homeless. In addition to that we've seen great success in helping our county partners to learn best practices from one another and better coordinate services through our 100 day challenge in partnership with the Gates Foundation. Beyond that, we will continue working with our city and county partners to get them the resources and the support they need to deal with the unique challenges they face at the local level. I am proud to have recently received an award from the Association of Washington Cities for my work in support of our local leaders.

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SAFE SEATTLE: *In one of your debates it was mentioned that Washington is ranked 50th in the nation for addressing mental health issues. We know there is a relationship between mental illness and homelessness. What plans do you have to address that specific aspect of the crisis?*

BILL BRYANT: Building community based mental health care facilities is an integral part of my approach to resolving homelessness. Under Gov. Inslee, our mental health system has crumbled. Even though funding has increased significantly for mental health, including Western State Hospital, Gov. Inslee's rudderless mismanagement of DSHS and Western State have left both our mental health and foster care systems in shambles. This failed bureaucracy (DSHS) results in people not getting the services they need and deserve, and results in people being

abandoned onto our streets.

Here is how I will fix it:

First, I will embrace the bipartisan reforms the legislature passed that would have reformed our state's mental hospitals. Second, I will invest in community based mental health care that deliver services in the field, rather than waiting for people to come to a clinic. This outreach approach is working in Longview, WA and needs to be explored on a larger basis. Third, I want to empower registered nurses with post certification psychiatric or psychological training to fill some of the patient care needs in state hospitals and in community clinics.

JAY INSLEE: We've begun to reinvest in mental health services that were cut so deeply during the great recession. In addition to rapid re-housing, we are working to integrate mental health with physical health care, since we know this will lead to better treatment for people. Our first example of this has been in southwest Washington. The early results are very positive and I intend to expand this approach across the state.

This summer I commissioned a study of how we could divert people with mental health illnesses from our jail system, where too often they are incarcerated instead of receiving the services they need. I expect to act on the results of that study in my coming budget.

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SAFE SEATTLE: *Opioid addiction also plays a part in homelessness. There is a movement underway by King County and Seattle to create a constellation of "safe injection" sites where addicts can get drugs under controlled conditions. This is a logical outgrowth of Seattle's L.E.A.D. program, whereby addicts are allowed to stay on the streets until they choose to get into treatment. Do you support these initiatives? Why or why not?*

BILL BRYANT: I oppose "safe injection" for three reasons. First, families who have lost members to addiction and overdose have asked me to oppose safe injection sites. Parents of addicts who are living in tents have pleaded with me not to give their child a "safe place to shoot up" and enable them to remain addicted. It's hard for me to support an initiative that would sanction behavior that has caused the addicted and their families so much harm. Second, heroin use is a felony and I am uncomfortable ignoring the law. Third, preliminary data suggests this is not as successful an approach as some thought. In some areas in British Columbia where safe injection sites are available, illicit drug overdose deaths increased more than 60%.

JAY INSLEE: Opioid addiction is a growing problem in our state. Too many families have lost a son or daughter to the disease of addiction and I believe that we must come at this problem with empathy and compassion for the suffering of those individuals and their family members that are trying to get them help.

I recently signed an executive order to coordinate our efforts on this issue statewide. In that order, I directed state agencies to focus on four goals in fighting the opioid epidemic:

Goal 1: Prevent inappropriate opioid prescriptions and use

Goal 2: Treat people with opioid use disorder and connect them to support services, including housing

Goal 3: Save lives by intervening in overdoses

Goal 4: Use data to focus and improve our work

I am looking at the data provided by the experts in the recent county report on safe consumption sites to be sure that before we take such a significant step we are confident that it is something that would be beneficial in our fight against opioid addiction. Ultimately, this strategy should be led by the communities it will serve.

However, beyond that one proposal, we'll continue coordinating with communities to focus our efforts on the goals I mentioned and, by doing so, I am confident that we will turn the tide in the fight against opioid addiction.

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SAFE SEATTLE: *Homeowners, renters, park users . . . these groups are all affected by homelessness, yet they are frequently underrepresented in the policy making process. What would you do to make sure ALL stakeholders are heard?*

BILL BRYANT: As governor-elect, during my transition, I will convene a conference of mayors, city council members, law enforcement, homeless advocates and neighborhood leaders who are struggling with increasing homelessness in their communities. In my administration, homeowners and park users will not only be heard, they will have a seat at the table.

JAY INSLEE: I have and will continue to make sure my office has an open door for anyone who wants to help improve our state. My staff regularly meets with stakeholders interested in homelessness as an issue. This includes tenants groups, homeowner organizations, parks and housing advocates, city officials, and many more.

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SAFE SEATTLE: *According to Mayor Murray, Seattle spends \$62 million on homelessness, the most per capita in the nation, yet homelessness has gone up 42% in 2 years. What is Seattle doing wrong?*

BILL BRYANT: In a commendable moment of honesty after a shooting in The Jungle, Mayor Murray admitted Seattle did not know which programs were working and which were not.

What they're doing wrong is that they don't know what they're doing wrong. Two consultant reports have provided examinations of the problem and the broad consensus is that there are plenty of programs in place, but many are no longer working and the ones that are working are struggling to get the resources that the more politically connected programs absorb. Seattle's real failure is the absence of quantifiable objectives for homeless programs, the absence of review and accountability, and a willingness to let ideology, rather than data, drive decision-making.

I support, and Governor Inslee opposes, the state auditing how cities are spending state homeless funds. Let's use this audit to identify programs around Washington that are working, and let's use those successful programs to develop best management practices and requirements for the expenditure of state funds. The purpose of every state funded homeless program should be to put itself out of business, not to perpetrate its operation.

JAY INSLEE: While I believe we should always look to improve our performance, I also think we need to look at the causes of homelessness. We know that when rent goes up by an average of \$100 there is a corresponding increase of 15% in homelessness. I believe that one of the major reasons we've seen an increase in homelessness in the Puget Sound area is due to the economic boom in Washington that has led to an increase in wages and an increase in employment, but has also pushed up housing prices at an astonishing rate. In the face of the tens of thousands of new people moving to this region and the incredible growth in the economy, there is a massive demand for more affordable housing. That's one of the reasons I support raising the minimum wage.

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SAFE SEATTLE: *What connection do you see between housing affordability and homelessness? What will you do to improve affordability?*

BILL BRYANT: There is a correlation between increasing rent and increasing homelessness, but Gov. Inslee's suggestion that rising rents cause homelessness betrays his limited understanding of the issue. Few people who cannot afford rent in Seattle move into a tent. Most move to a suburban neighborhood where rents are lower, and then they commute into the city. Rising rents do make it harder for homeless people to save first and last month's rent and pass financial credit checks, but those problems constitute barriers to rehousing more than they cause homelessness.

As someone who has volunteered as a homeless shelter night manager, I've come to understand the many different reasons people are homeless. Washington's high drop-out rate (20-25% of our ninth graders will not graduate), a foster care system that abandons teens

without a support system, and a mental health system ranked 50th, are all much bigger contributors to homelessness than are rising rents.

Reevaluating building codes to permit permanent or extended-transitional housing such as tiny house villages (see www-quixotevillage-dot-com as an example), is part of my homelessness program and integral to providing affordable housing.

JAY INSLEE: As I mentioned in my answer to the previous question there is a documented connection between housing affordability and homelessness. That’s why we have made affordable housing a high priority during my term as governor, but it’s important to note that we started out at a deficit after seeing many of these housing programs reduced during the great recession. I have been proud to secure over \$125 million for the state’s Housing Trust Fund which helps leverage private and federal funding to build and improve affordable housing. I am also proud to have secured over \$55 million for the Housing and Essential Needs program which provides rent assistance to low-income residents.

I am also proud that we were able to save the Document Recording Fee, which is the largest source of state support to cities and counties for homelessness programs and was threatened by some Republican legislators in during my first term.

I will continue to work with cities, counties, realtors, builders, housing advocates, as well as homeowners and renters to ensure the state is an active partner in providing more support for affordable housing going forward.

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SAFE SEATTLE: *How would you respond to a person who is homeless but refuses services and/or treatment?*

BILL BRYANT: The state has no obligation to allow someone who refuses shelter to live in public spaces. Enabling someone to live on the margins of society is not progressive, it’s cruel. In too many cases, a person who refuses shelter has underlying mental health or addiction issues and is not in a position to make a rational choice. To address this issue, I want to work with the legislature on reviewing Washington laws with the intention of making it easier for family members to help a mentally ill sibling or child get the counseling and care they need.

In other cases, people refusing shelter are using the tent villages as cover for drug sales or prostitution. This should not be enabled or tolerated.

JAY INSLEE: My agencies work hard to connect individuals with the services they need. There are a lot of reasons why someone may turn away from services offered, particularly if they have experienced trauma, but our first responders and state staff receive extensive training to help individuals based on their particular needs. In addition to that, my Department of Commerce

has expanded the flexibility for state homeless programs to better respond to the specific needs of communities.

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SAFE SEATTLE: *What will you do to address illegal homeless encampments?*

BILL BRYANT: I will have a zero tolerance for unauthorized camping on state property. I will seek the authority needed to withhold state homeless funds from cities that permit camping in public spaces. This zero tolerance must be accompanied by rebuilding our mental health and foster care systems and ensuring there is extended-transitional/permanent housing options for those who want them.

JAY INSLEE: Encampments are not a permanent housing solution, nor are they a substitute for safe, stable housing with appropriate supports. We need to provide people with the opportunity to shift into more stable housing. We will continue to ensure that Washington state agencies are good stewards of their facilities and lands, and public safety, while providing the services Washingtonians expect.

We are working with communities and partners around the state in a respectful and compassionate way to alleviate homelessness for children, veterans, low-income workers and those with substance abuse or mental health issues.

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SAFE SEATTLE: *What's wrong with your opponent's approach to homelessness?*

BILL BRYANT: My opponent, the governor, has no approach. He has provided no leadership and no direction on this other than saying we need more money. The governor got more money and the problem grew worse. There is no accountability, no plan, and no leadership.

JAY INSLEE: I'm the only candidate in this race with a track record on fighting homelessness and who has the endorsement of respected organizations on this issue like the Washington Housing Alliance Action Fund.

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SAFE SEATTLE: *Where do you and your opponent agree on these issues?*

BILL BRYANT: We agree on the need for more integration of behavioral and physical health care. We agree on the need for long-term sustainable funding of services. We agree that opioid abuse and mental illness are part of the problem. The difference is one of us will act and get results. Gov. Inslee has had four years and hundreds of millions of dollars to spend. It's not

working. It's time for a new approach (and a new governor).

JAY INSLEE: I recommend you compare our records on this issue, but again I'll note that I'm the only candidate in this race with a longstanding track record of working to address homelessness.

SAFE SEATTLE: *Gentlemen, thank you very much.*

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Special thanks to Matt Reigelsperger and Jamal Raad. Good karma to both of you!

Candidate Photos: Twitter (Bryant) and the *Columbian* (Inslee)