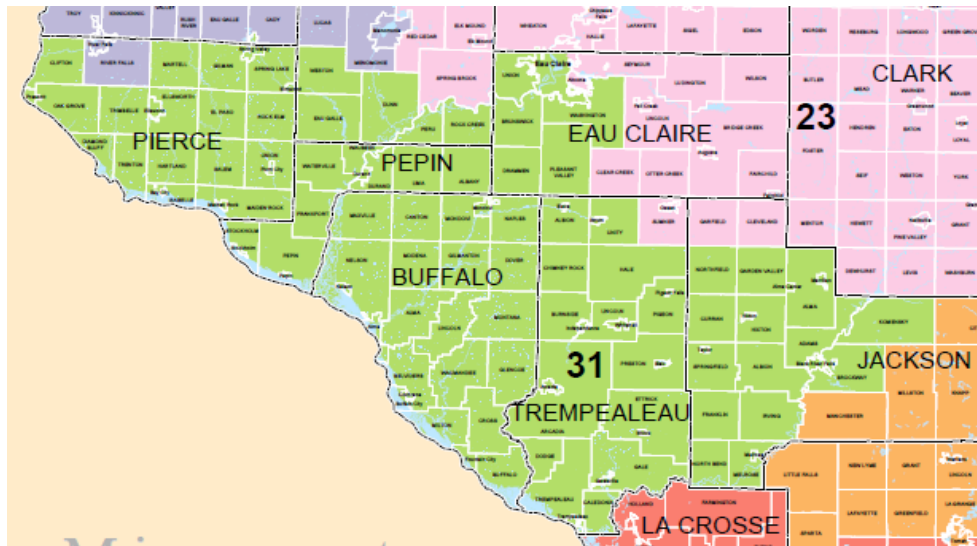




Eau Claire Area Chamber of Commerce
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Wisconsin 31st Senate District Legislative Election Questionnaire



When: Tuesday, November 6, 2018; polls open 7:00 a.m. to 8:00 p.m. Find your location: myvote.wi.gov. All absentee ballots must be requested by November 1st and be turned in to your municipal clerk by November 4th at 5 pm.

What it's about: The Democratic Party, the Republican Party, and the Wisconsin Green Party each held individual primary elections last Spring. Now, their nominees are running against each other to determine who will represent the 31st Senate District in the next legislative term.

Who can vote: The election is open to all eligible voters, and you are free to vote for any candidate, regardless of the party to which you belong.

Where you vote and who is on your ballot:

- Go to myvote.wi.gov
- Enter your voting address to learn which races are on your ballot and where you vote.

Why this questionnaire: The Good Government Council (GGC) is a committee of the Eau Claire Area Chamber of Commerce dedicated to encouraging voter participation and providing members of the business community with non-biased information about candidates' positions on important issues. Although the Chamber is active in policy issues, it is non-partisan and does not endorse political candidates.

Who is running in the 31st Senate District: In the primaries, the Democratic Party nominated Jeff Smith, the Republican Party nominated Mel Pittman, and the Wisconsin Green Party Nominated Aaron Elaine Camacho.

Q1. Why are you running for this office, and what are the top three priorities you will emphasize if elected to the next session of the legislature?

Jeff Smith (D):

My reasons for engaging in politics has always been the same for me. As a member of the state assembly from 2007-2011, as a political organizer and now a candidate for state senate it has always been about leaving behind a better state and community for my children and future generations.

I will emphasize fair elections, funding for our rural school districts, broadband, and healthcare access for rural citizens.

Mel Pittman (R):

It's about giving back to the community, caring about succeeding generations so they can have a positive future. To keep Wisconsin on the right track and moving forward.

1. Infrastructure—funding for roads, bridges and broadband.
2. Education and school safety.
3. Job training, apprenticeships and welfare reform.

Aaron Elaine Camacho (G):

Our need for greater diversity within Wisconsin government inspired my run for office. As a daughter of WI, I recognize the necessity of equitable values. Being the only non-establishment, female and indigenous candidate running in Senate District 31, I bring a valuable perspective needed within legislature.

Our communities are diverse. Currently, our diversity is not reflected within Madison's binary representation. This duopoly perpetuates a divisive nature within our political discourse and must be challenged for the health of our Republic. People must be valued over party lines and corporate influence.

This begins with providing equitable access and funding of our education. Access to government needs strengthening with automatic voter registration, rank choice voting, prohibiting gerrymandering, enabling broadband services in rural WI, upholding our civil rights and ICWA. Lastly, our environment is second to none. Without a healthy, sustainable environment we cannot support our economy and communities for generations to come.

Q2. The primary sources for transportation revenue, including gas taxes and registration fees, have been growing slower than transportation spending, leading to shortfalls in revenues vs. planned expenditures and increasing levels of debt. What measures would you support to match transportation fund revenues with the state's transportation needs?

Jeff Smith (D):

Transportation, despite the needs of municipalities and outcry from citizens, has been largely ignored by this current legislature and governor. My first comment on this question is always that the politicians in power in 2005 should never have repealed the automatic indexing that had been in place to avoid the politics of raising taxes. I would also agree that our registration fees are relatively low in Wisconsin and we may want to consider a value based system (registration based on the value of the vehicle). Of course toll roads always become a part of the conversation and, although I am not in favor of tolls, it must be part of the discussion. With the continued advancement of electric vehicles and better gas mileage, there really needs to be some creative thinking around new ways to raise revenue related to transportation.

Mel Pittman (R):

1. Gas taxes—I would consider up to \$.05/gallon increase.
2. Vehicle registration—Increase registration to cover alternative powered vehicles but only as high as to double the registration fees.
3. GPR dollars if there are extra available.

Aaron Elaine Camacho (G):

Measures taken should begin with implementing more equitable methods of vehicle registration. If one's vehicle is a significant tax on the environment regarding roads, air quality, and more they should not pay the same as one whose vehicle is more sustainable or less sustainable. More importantly, legislature cannot be tapping into funding at its convenience as it causes shortfalls and undue hardship within local budgets.

Our communities cannot afford to allow that continued practice. With diverse communities, transportation budgets need to reflect that. Funding roads, public transit, military transit, air or rail travel, motor vehicle alternatives such as bike paths and public walkways must be addressed equitably.

A gas tax is already the largest contributor to our transportation budget and I would not vote for an increase. I would support increases on rail traffic. Specifically, on traffic that endangers our communities such as "bomb trains", fine particulate or sand transportation.

Q3. Given recent trends in the financing of all levels of public education in Wisconsin, how should education funding be structured in the next budget to assure appropriate financing for every level of public education?

Jeff Smith (D):

The funding formula, which is based on property values, does not work and must be revamped. The frozen revenue limits placed on school districts since 1993, the broken promise of 2/3 state funding and now using public dollars to support private schools through vouchers has put a terrific strain on our public school districts. Under the "parental choice" program, participating private schools will be paid a guaranteed \$7,747 or \$8,393 per student this school year, depending on the grade. By comparison, public school districts in the area receive anywhere from \$500 to \$6,500 per student depending on the formula. We now fund around 700 schools out of the same pot of money we used to fund 424 schools. We can't afford to fund two school districts and it is time to end the experiment of the voucher system and fully fund our one public school system. There must be consideration of sparsity aid for our vital rural school districts or they will no longer be able to function. We need to also address transportation costs for rural districts. While some urban districts have very little transportation costs and can put the vast majority of their funding into the classrooms most rural districts have very high transportation costs which diverts from classroom investment. We need to address this inequality in funding.

Mel Pittman (R):

Funding has been increased significantly for this school year (2018-2019). More work needs to be done to fund schools more equitably between districts and city vs. rural schools. Additional state GPR dollars put towards education is a possibility.

Aaron Elaine Camacho (G):

First off, education should be equitable and safe. Funding needs to be a priority, which includes maintaining reciprocity for higher education and maintaining its tuition freeze. The recent voucher system needs to end. Public funds must not benefit private educational institutions at an undue cost to WI student's access and quality of public education.

Almost 40% of K-12 students are economically disadvantaged and over 85% of our students attend public schools amidst a teacher shortage. Nearly half of WI school's funding comes from property tax and is a good reminder of how much our residents value education. Funds allocated must reflect our needs.

I agree with increases in funding towards mental health, aide workers and pupil services. Also, supporting sparsity and transportation aide within our Senate District 31 is essential. Early childhood and summer education is only an investment in our future along with supporting measures that benefit our teachers.

Q4. Our region faces several significant workforce challenges, including a “skills gap” between employer labor demands and the available workforce, as well as demographic issues related to the size of the workforce and the ability to recruit and retain employees to the area. What should be the state’s role in solving these issues?

Jeff Smith (D):

In the 31st Senate District we are faced with spotty internet access. It is imperative for economic growth and survival to have broadband access. Not only do businesses from retail to farms need fast and dependable broadband it has become a necessity for personal use. If we hope for the next generations of entrepreneurs to work here in western Wisconsin broadband is a must. The skills gap has been written about and talked about but we haven’t addressed it. The legislature must gather information from our technical schools along with the UW system and then follow recommendations as to how we can make our economy grow through training and educating our next generation of workers.

Mel Pittman (R):

Need to focus on additional efforts and resources on Tech School education and encourage youth there are good paying jobs that won’t set them back financially too bad for the education. The state needs to maintain a positive business environment to keep employees/workers here in Wisconsin.

Aaron Elaine Camacho (G):

We need to ensure businesses in the region reflect the needs of our community. Enhancing our sustainability is essential. Attracting businesses that are willing to provide a livable wage, eliminating wage gaps among their employees should be a priority.

We need trade skills within the work force, but must not minimize educational opportunities. Our state’s legacy is rich from our strong education system. We must not lose our wide scope concerning this when also valuing disciplines that develop an industrial career path.

The State’s role is supporting facility improvements and programs that serve our community equitably. Maintaining IRIS and STPC programs are a great example of this in our region regarding our communities of varying abilities. In Senate District 31, residential assistants and nurses are greatly needed. This is especially so in our rural areas. Immigration reform is also essential with our large agricultural community. WI must act on this.

Q5. The UW Board of Regents recently approved a budget proposal containing funds to build a new UW- Eau Claire science building. What is your view on this project, and what level of priority should it take among the Chippewa Valley legislative delegation?

Jeff Smith (D):

The Phillips Science Hall has outlived its usefulness. It is inadequate for the needs of the world we live in. This building should be a priority for any legislator from the Chippewa Valley who may find themselves on the Building Commission.

Mel Pittman (R):

I have visited with representatives of the UW system about this matter. It is important to have the learning/laboratory education for students to stay abreast with industry demands and needs, I am generally supportive of the new science building.

Aaron Elaine Camacho (G):

My views are in support of enhancing the educational opportunities of our sciences in Western WI. Considering rural WI is in need of professionals within health services, this project should be a priority for our legislature. It would not only make UW Eau Claire more competitive among other institutions, but this has the potential to address issues with an aging and declining population in Senate District 31

This project has the potential to lessen the recent exodus of educators from our state. Educators are needed to train and prepare health care professionals. This would attract them and their families having a ripple impacts benefiting our economy and future workforce.

In an era of increasing climate challenges, science provides a framework to understand and best plan for our changing reality. Supporting the sciences while encouraging sustainable efforts and disciplines is again, an investment in our future. Supporting this is forward thinking.