

**2024 Pierce County Democrats Endorsement Questionnaire
-Pierce County Sheriff-**

Candidate Name: Craig Gocha

Position sought: Pierce County Sheriff

Date submitted: 3/13/2024

For endorsements, the Pierce County Democratic Central Committee (PCDCC) seeks to endorse well-qualified candidates with the education, experience, ability, and temperament to provide public safety to the citizens of Pierce County. We also have an interest in working to make the system more understandable, accessible, and equitable for all. When deciding whether to recommend endorsement, the Endorsements Committee may consider the candidate’s dedication to Democratic Party values and principles, the viability of the campaign, and the candidate’s qualifications for office, among other things. The Endorsements Committee screens candidates and then makes endorsement recommendations to the PCDCC.

The PCDCC may withdraw endorsement of any candidate if they determine the candidate has acted in conflict with the answers provided during the screening process.

*You may respond N/A (not applicable) if appropriate. Expand or decrease space as needed.

Questions

1. Why are you running for this position?

The Pierce County Sheriff’s Department needs a Sheriff that will bring accountability, transparency, and a vision. This will provide for better trained, focused Deputies to serve the citizens of Pierce County.

2. What are your qualifications for seeking this office, and what was the nature of your law enforcement background and experience? I spent over 11 years in law enforcement spanning Yakima, Puyallup, and Pierce County. In that time, I held a variety of positions from driving instructor, Training Officer, SWAT Team Member, Violent Offender Task Force, Detective, and Scuba Dive and Swiftwater Rescue Team. I also served as a negotiator on contracts for the union. I served as Union Vice President for the Pierce County Deputy Sheriffs Independent Guild. I have my master’s in public safety leadership and administration – executive police administration. I currently serve in the Washington Army National Guard where I am assigned as the First Sergeant of an Information Operations Company. I will have 20 years of service in of April 2024

3. What are the most important issues for the jurisdiction you would serve or for the court you seek to join? The top three important issues are Property Crime, inability to book criminals due to current booking restrictions, staffing issues that have caused a spike in violent crime cases closed without any investigation.

4. Why should the Pierce County Democratic Party support you for this position? While the Pierce County Sheriff is a non-partisan position, I think it is vital to present my views and philosophy to all members of the community I aim to serve. I bring experience and skills from both public and private sector. I have the knowledge and experience to reduce costly grievances from the Unions while also providing better communication with the unions to help mitigate problems. I have academic experience in Public Administration to understand the research and seek data to help inform decisions. I understand process streamlining and efficiency improvements.

5. Please list your key endorsements:
Puyallup Police Association.

6. How would you make the transition from the rank and file to the role of Pierce County Sheriff?
I have brought on a well-respected 32-year command staff veteran of the Pierce County Sheriff's Department, Jim Heishman, as my Undersheriff, if elected. Further, I know that I will focus on the vision and strategy of the department while empowering leaders within the department to handle their aspects of the job.

7. Please explain your philosophy about the state of violent crime in our County, and what changes you would make work on this issue? Violent crime in Pierce County is out of control. This is due to numerous issues. I will have a zero-tolerance policy on violent crime and Deputies will be empowered to seek out these people and bring them to jail. I will work with the Prosecutor to understand their issues with cases and decisions being made to help provide better, more complete cases for them to bring justice to victims.

8. Please explain your understanding of systemic racism, and what the Sheriff can do to mitigate inappropriate actions by the department? While racism still exists, I have not personally seen systemic racism within any department I have worked. I understand what it is and it will not be tolerated in my Department. Holding employees fully accountable for their actions, no matter the violation, is my promise. This starts by not trying to tip the scales in the investigation and allowing the legally binding process to take place before a decision is made. Departments have had to retain or rehire numerous Officers because administrators failed to follow a simple process and that has forced arbitrators to rule in favor of the officer that violated policy.

9. Crime by youth has been rising at a fast rate. What, if anything, would you do to engage youth and offer alternatives? There has been no accountability for youth crimes for a while in Pierce County. For lesser crimes, alternatives may be beneficial for the youth and the public, but I have not seen an effective system in Pierce County for it. Remann Hall is separate from the Sheriff's Office but I think it will be very important to work together with them to build a mutual framework that helps solve youth crime. The current SROs do a good job engaging in the schools but there is a gap for youth that have left the school system or are homeschooled. There may be an opportunity to have more engagement with that group.

10. Gang activity is prevalent and increasing in Pierce County. What would you do to combat this?
Re-focus on partnerships with other agencies in the county/region to rapidly communicate activity and concentrate on enforcement and mitigation efforts to reduce the prevalence. This requires engaging community organizations as well as other law enforcement agencies, as gang violence does not stick to jurisdictional lines.

11. Please explain your views on community policing?
The model of Community Policing has morphed over the past several decades. My goal and thoughts to engage the community more stems from three main efforts:

- Implement a comprehensive public awareness campaign emphasizing the role of residents in helping law enforcement root out criminal elements.
- Encourage an engaged community by promoting active citizen involvement in crime prevention.
- Provide effective transparency and communication with the Public through multiple mediums.

12. How would you engage and educate and inform the public about law enforcement?
I am a big fan of openly communicating with and engaging with the public. I would use different mediums to provide information and transparency to the public. Things like, town halls, videos on current issues, involvement in community meetings have been shown to work well here.

13. What would you do to lower the overall crime rate in Pierce County?
I plan to engage in strategic partnerships with local, state and federal agencies to enable different methods and resourcing to assist with the problem. The Sheriff's Department can no longer sit in its bubble and hope that criminals will not cross into their jurisdiction. Working with neighboring counties to help reduce cross-county crime rings can yield results just with better communication.

14. Do you believe law enforcement produces different results for different demographics? If so, what would you do to remedy that problem? I have not personally seen this occur at any agency I have worked in.
Please see question #8 for my promise to hold employees accountable should an incident be brought to my attention.

15. Do you support or oppose alternatives to traditional policing as mental health clinicians riding with officers, alternatives to arrest, etc. What changes would you make, if any?
I fully support many alternatives. I know, as a Peace Officer, I am not an expert on mental health and am not the best person for that job. Having Mental Health Professionals able to respond to these challenges provides the higher probability of a positive outcome.

16. Is there anything else you would like to share with the Committee? Just that I appreciate your time on this matter.