



**Candidate Questionnaire for Monroe County
Auditor's Race**

About DFMC

Democracy for Monroe County (DFMC) is a political action committee dedicated to recruiting, training, and supporting fiscally responsible and socially progressive candidates at the local and state levels. DFMC is part of a nationwide coalition of grassroots groups allied with Democracy for America, the political action committee inspired by the presidential campaign of Howard Dean. We meet every first Thursday of the month. For more information about our organization, visit our website at www.democracyformonroecounty.org.

DFMC: Building and training the progressive grassroots.

Please return this questionnaire to chair@democracyformonroecounty.org by Monday, March 22.

About You

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Question 1

Why are you running for office?

My primary reason for running for office, or specifically for the Auditor's office, is that this office needs to be served by a qualified candidate to make it effective for the people of this county. I am that person. The role of the county Auditor is not just to manage the office and its employees, but to be the chief financial officer for the county and also its chief internal auditor. The education, experience, and skills that are required for someone to be fully successful in this role are very specific, and I fully meet each one.

It personally has saddened me to see and hear what is said about county government in the newspaper and in everyday conversation, especially the Auditor's office. While I do not want to focus on the past, we cannot deny that there have been issues that have damaged public trust. Nevertheless, that trust can be regained. The way to do that is to elect someone focused on solving the current problems as they exist, while establishing accountability and ensuring transparency going forward, all while being a positive public face for the office. Last summer the county commissioned a report issued by Hartman and Williams that identified 12 findings and issued recommendations for correction of each finding. As someone with a background in accounting and auditing, it was clear to me from the report what needed to be done to move this office forward. Changes are needed in internal controls, workflow, processing and reporting of information, and especially in communication both internally within the county and externally with the public. My desire to run for this office is built on my ability to affect these changes while establishing programs and processes that build that accountability and transparency to rebuild public faith in this office.

Simply put, as a private citizen I want my government to be as effective as possible. For that to happen we need the most qualified and driven people to be running it. My qualifications are exactly what this office needs, and as a long time public servant, I want to continue to serve the public in a way that my qualifications are best utilized. I can move this office in a positive direction to make it work as well as possible for the people of Monroe County and make it an example for other counties in the state of Indiana, and that is why I am running.

Question 2

List your political experience (here and elsewhere), including any grassroots activity in which you participated or led.

I grew up in a political household. As a son of a working single mom, I spent a lot of time at my grandparents' house and with other close family. My grandfather was the head of the union for the Indianapolis Star newspaper. I witnessed firsthand how organized labor can affect people. My grandfather's siblings and their families were, and are, strongly politically involved. My mother's cousin Maria Cantwell, now a US Senator, was beginning her political career while I was in elementary school. Sen. Cantwell's father Paul served as Rep. Andy Jacobs' chief of staff, among other elected offices he held. Between my grandfather's experiences with labor and his (and my) family's direct political experience to which I was often exposed, I became involved in politics very young. I helped several family members involved in campaigns (including my cousin Louis Mahern in his Indy mayoral run when I was 10) as best I could while taking in what they were doing and learning about issues important to people.

I was an officer of the College Democrats at Xavier University in Cincinnati. While living in Cincinnati, I helped in the 2000 election campaign of Mr. John Cranley to the US House (he did not win, unfortunately, but is now the mayor of Cincinnati). I knocked on doors, worked polls, ran signs to houses, and other duties as needed. I got a good feel for what a volunteer experiences in a campaign.

I have since held public sector jobs at both the federal and state level. The combined skills gave me the knowledge of how to read and interpret complex documents, as well as negotiating favorable

results and reporting findings. These positions also taught me how to work with people who may not agree with my position or approaches to topics, yet still be successful and get a favorable result. I also have learned the skills to take extremely complex data, process it, and package it into an understandable and useful output.

I currently serve on the DFMC board. I ran for this board because I feel it is and should continue to be a positive voice for progressive issues in Monroe County. It is important that we have an organization that is inclusive of all who wish to participate, and grows and supports candidates based on values. Regardless of the outcome of this election, I intend to continue serving and do my best to continue growing DFMC as a resource for other political candidates and for valuable political discussion. I also attended and graduated from the Bloomington Citizens' Academy in 2012. This experience taught me the inner workings of local government and had a strong influence on my running for local (albeit county) office.

Question 3

In what way(s) do you consider yourself socially progressive?

I think "progressive" is a difficult term to define that means something different to everyone. Progressive to me means moving forward in a positive way. In my view, being socially progressive means wanting to work towards fairness and equality for all. In that way I am socially progressive. For example, I have witnessed firsthand the effects that sudden unexpected illness can have on people from a financial standpoint, and I believe that healthcare should be a basic right of everyone regardless of their "ability to pay". I believe the same is true for education. It is hard to say what we as a society has lost when a smart young person is unable to afford to go to college. I believe taxation should be fair and simple, and that the wealthy should not be given breaks not afforded to the middle and lower class. Whether it's women's rights, income equality, political funding of campaigns, or whatever the issue, I always will default to the solution that levels the opportunity to succeed for everyone and gives equal access to needed resources.

I also believe it is not possible to disconnect being socially and economically progressive. Economically, there is no such thing as a "free market". There will always be government influence, and it will always benefit some more than others. I believe in pursuing more of a "fair market", in that those influences work more to level the playing field for all. Government influence should come in promoting incentives for the creation of real products and services that benefit society, not building wealth that benefits the few. Do not subsidize some industries but not others, and eliminate loopholes that favor some over others. Effective auditing and financial management can root out waste and fraud and ensure public money is used efficiently and effectively for the public good.

Question 4

Describe your ideas for engaging citizens in more active participation in our community and our government.

I have learned that people will always look for the easiest path and will not spend time or effort on things they do not believe in or understand. We can take that knowledge and apply it to community involvement. If people will not do something that they do not believe in or understand, then simply put we must help them find things they believe in and understand or help them to believe in and understand the things happening around them.

The first step is to make it easy for people to gain access to the system. For example, engage people and make them feel they are being heard. I pride myself on being responsive and making myself available to the public in my day job. In the Auditor's office, I intend to open the literal doors to anyone that wants to come in and see how things are run. In my office the public will always be welcome to speak to me personally if they so choose. I will not hide in my office. I have championed transparency as one of my platform points, which I believe is how citizens can involve themselves in an easy way. That can mean both in access to the office as well as in access to its data. I intend to push for a portal similar to what other counties have created and what Mayor Hamilton has pushed for the city of Bloomington that shows how money is flowing into and out of the county. Such a portal will be easy to access and the information will be easy to understand so there will be no question on how money is being both received and spent.

I would also like to see the county provide an easier way for citizens to find opportunities to get involved. The county itself has many volunteer opportunities including participation in boards and commissions. I call for these boards and commissions to meet at times that are convenient for people to attend, inviting both participation on the board itself and a way to provide feedback to its members for those not serving. Many more people would get involved if they knew who to talk to and how, and the county can facilitate that.

Ultimately, the easiest way to involve people in government is to make government more transparent. If people know what is happening with their local government they are more likely to comment and participate. People need to feel they are a part of something to get involved in it, and leaving the door open is the best way to invite people in.

Question 5

Do you pledge to publicly support all Democratic Party nominees, including your primary opponent(s), should he/she prevail in the May Primary Election?

Public support pledges run counter to my personal beliefs and professional training in auditor independence. My loyalty is to my community and supporting candidates that will positively reflect progressive values, and I do not blindly support anyone without understanding their positions. As an example of how they have no meaning, the oaths that the Republicans have been pushing in their presidential primary have no credibility after the campaigns they have run.

That said, I have no reason at this time not to support all the Democratic nominees that are on this primary ballot. I expect to support all winners in the general election, including the winner of my own race if it is not myself. I would never support an independent candidate or candidate from another party.

Question 6

What do you consider the top three duties of the Auditor's Office?

The three top-level duties of the Auditor's Office are financial in serving as the chief fiscal officer, property and taxation, and secretarial for the commissioners and council. Each is equally important in its own way and I would not want to say one is less important than the others.

If I were to pick specifics, the financial side has numerous duties that have caused issues in the past for this office. The public, employees, and other officials rely more on the financial side being correct than anything else the office handles. An error free, prompt preparation of the annual budget is vital

to the county. Payroll of the county, discussed below, is another vital responsibility of the office that hundreds of people in county employment count on being correct without question and without issue. The county counts on disbursements of tax funds in order to fund operations. Actually auditing records coming into and out of the office is important to monitoring fraud and mismanagement.

Overall, the top three duties are financial management, property and taxation management, and secretarial responsibilities for the council and commissioners.

Question 7

What specific plans do you have to fix the beginning of the year payroll problems that have plagued the Auditor's Office for the last two years?

A considerable amount of finger pointing happened following the payroll issues in the previous two years. Regardless of the true cause of the issues, the Auditor's office is responsible for ensuring it is correct and that issues are prevented.

Two years ago, based on discussions with those involved, it appears the issue traced to the Auditor authorizing payment on the first paycheck at 2015 rates despite some of the hours having been worked in 2014 under the 2014 ordinance. This is an easy payroll fix; follow the rules and do not do that.

This past year's issues are a bit more complicated. There was a change in vendors that required the new vendor being supplied by the Auditor's office with information in a timely manner, process it, and supply the results to the county in a timely manner for input into county systems. Each blames the other for the timeliness of its data received. Ultimately, this comes back to the Auditor's office again.

First, the office should be ensuring that data is compiled and passed along in a timely manner so there is no question of the county's responsibility. Second, the Auditor must keep in constant contact with its vendors to ensure they are both receiving data needed in a timely manner to complete their objectives and are given oversight and pressure to complete their tasks in a timely manner. The need for the latter can be lessened by writing and negotiating a proper contract, something I also have expertise in from my professional experience.

There are a number of changes to the practices that should be implemented to improve the situation. First, the Auditor should be adept at contract negotiation and administration, and should be holding vendors responsible for fulfilling their obligations. The Auditor should continually work with its vendors as a contact that maintains open communication and is constantly aware of the status of projects, even requiring status update reports, a common practice in other government environments. Second, the county should consider shifting to a practice implemented by most other public and private entities in making changes to salary, benefits, etc effective the first day of the first applicable pay period beginning on or after January 1. Third, any new software or processes should be tested and corrected prior to going live. I have advocated this for the change to the Low system from the Harris system, and I would do so for any such change. It would have lessened the likelihood of this issue happening with payroll in 2016.

Lastly, there has been discussion on outsourcing payroll to a third party such as ADP. I advocate looking into the pros and cons of such a change and would be in favor of such a change. It cannot solely be based on numbers. Some of the considerations are intangible, such as pushing responsibility for timeliness to another company that does this for entities all over the country (and world in some cases). Another is the potential loss of a paid county job. I would weigh all of these when I saw the final options.

Question 8

What financial experiences do you have that will assist you with managing and accounting for the County's tax money, and how will you ensure that the tax dollars are spent in a responsible manner?

I have a background in accounting and financial matters both in my education and in my professional experience. I have a bachelor's degree in Accounting. I have a master's degree in Business Administration that focused on financial management and strategy. Professionally I worked as an auditor for the Department of Defense, performing both financial and operational audits.

I have experience in setting and overseeing budgets. In my audit position, we had specific audit budgets in the form of time and dollars to spend to complete an audit. Each auditor was responsible for managing his or her budgets, and we always had multiple budgets at once to manage. In my private sector contracts specialist position, I was a contracts administrator responsible for tracking and reporting project budgets. I worked closely with project managers to ensure we were properly tracking and reporting all expenses, and I assembled the reports and worked with the customer on reporting and in making changes. In my current job, I am my own office. I am responsible for my own budget for my office. My skill level in handling budgeting has led the state director to seek my help in crafting the annual budget for our statewide agency, which I have done now for several years.

One underappreciated aspect of financial management is the ability to understand the technology behind the office. I have a positive reputation for quickly learning unfamiliar technology systems. In most jobs, I have been tasked with teaching others the system within a year of hire. The Auditor's office is dependent on having someone who is technologically savvy in order to detect fraud and simplify very complex information for public consumption. With accounting systems, I have progressed in my career from using them, to auditing their proper setup, to now consulting with companies to assist them in properly setting them up for government reporting. If there should be a shortage in staff such as what happened in the Treasurer's Office, the Auditor must be adept at using the system to not allow vital time-sensitive reporting to fall behind as happened in that office.

The Auditor for the county is a department head responsible for its own budget. In that way, it is accounting for responsible spending of the tax dollars funding the office. One of my first acts of office would be to review the internal controls and workflow of the office to improve efficiency and oversight.

Most important in ensuring tax dollars are responsibly spent is transparency. I will work for the creation of a countywide financial portal where all money flowing into and out of the county's accounts is documented and presented in an easy to understand way. I would establish programs to regularly audit all costs, such as travel claims, flowing to the office. I would work tirelessly to ensure that every county dollar is accounted for, tracked, monitored, and reported.