

1. Tell us about yourself: what is your background, and why are you running for elected office?

To start, I am a member of SEIU 775. I serve on our negotiating team and we have been able to ratify our first collective bargaining agreement with Consumer Direct MT. My family is a Union family. My father was a member of and worked for the Montana Education Association and the National Education Association. My son is a member of the American Postal Workers Union.

Laura Nicholson MD MPH and I have been married 40 years and we have made Billings our family's home for the last 21 years. Billings has been a good home for us, our bio kids, Margie and Kaj, and for our developmentally and physically disabled foster daughter, Justy, who has aged out of the foster care system and continues to live in our home.

I am a retired physician. I am a past president of the Montana Academy of Family Physicians and the Montana Psychiatric Association.

During my first 11 years in Billings I worked for the Mental Health Center and much of my work was with the Program for Assertive Community Treatment (PACT). We treated some of the most severely and chronically mentally ill individuals in Billings and helped them keep their homes, stay out of the hospital and stay off the streets.

As a family physician and as a psychiatrist, I have put in a lot of nighttime hours in hospital emergency departments.

2. What made you want to run for city council?

I am running for city council because Billings is our home. It is a good home and we can make it better. To do that, I want to work on policies that promote housing that families can afford and that minimizes increases in the city's costs of providing utilities and public safety. I also want to work on transportation policy. The city council seems to have adopted a transportation policy that promotes streets that encourage illegal unsafe speeding and discourage pedestrian and bicycle travel. I want streets that work for everybody, whether they are driving a car, riding a bus, peddling a bike, rolling a wheelchair, pushing a stroller or

walking to the grocery store. I also want to promote policies that prevent crime. We certainly need to enforce the law but we also need to do what we can to prevent crime. In my career as a psychiatrist, I treated mentally ill people who were homeless and at risk of homelessness and I would like to work on that issue as well.

3. What is your leadership style and how do you intend to bring a consensus to the council?

As a psychiatrist, I made a career of listening to people and I will use that skill with other council members and with the public. I believe that any initiative that the council undertakes needs to have a constituency that is willing to demonstrate their support for that initiative before the city council.

4. What do you see as the role and/or function of city government?

The most fundamental role of city government is to provide public safety which means fire protection and police protection. Public safety also means enforcing building codes and designing and maintaining safe streets and transportation management. It includes the provision of safe drinking water, and the management of wastewater, storm water and solid waste. The city also has responsibility to see to it that the city is a pleasant place to work and live.

5. What is the number one issue facing Billings for the next city council, and how do you intend to address it?

The city needs to address its budgetary constraints and will need to identify and implement every reasonable efficiency. If those measures are not sufficient to cover the city's needs, we will probably have to ask the citizens of Billings to approve levies, which will be a very heavy lift.

6. How would you determine and consider the agendas of other council members to be the most productive and prioritize the conflicting demands of Billings?

I am not sure I understand this question but let me say this. Listening to understand is a key skill in the political process and finding a way to consensus is the best outcome. It always helps, indeed it is essential, for concerned citizens to express their concerns before the council. In the end, however, the most important number for the city council is 6, the number of votes needed to pass or stop a council initiative.

7. How would you work with other entities to balance asks of the public for funding through levies and bonds?

At the present time, residential taxpayers are reluctant to vote to raise taxes. That being said, if we do have to ask the voters to approve additional taxes, we will have to approach every civic organization, every local union and anybody else we think of to weigh in for support.

8. What do you see as the role of the Union in representing the 144 members of Local 521?

As a member of SEIU 775 who serves on a bargaining team, I am, of course, in favor of the Union playing a large role in the workplace. The Union, of course, is essential in negotiating collective bargaining agreements but the union should also be involved in setting workplace rules, representing workers in disciplinary actions and assuring that workers have an effective grievance procedure.

9. Currently Fire Station 5 is undergoing a renovation that is long overdue. There are four other stations that need considerable renovations and a growing need for a new station to support growth. What is your stance on maintaining what is currently in use versus building new stations?

I would like to see renovations of existing for stations done before we build new stations in anticipation of growth. Because of the serious budgetary constraints the City of Billings is facing, I think the city should be extremely careful about expanding the geography that we ask our firefighters to cover.

10. The men and women of Local 521 currently respond to about 18,000 to 20,000 calls for service each year. Departments throughout the nation that respond to a similar number of calls have between 200 and 250 members taking those calls. Currently L521 has 144 members. What do you see as solutions to add staffing?

The shortage of firefighters is a nationwide problem. The City of Billings needs to have a competitive wage and benefit package for firefighters and good working conditions. The city also needs to have an effective recruitment and retention program.

11. Firefighters face significant risks from cancer, PTSD, and other occupational hazards. How would you support initiatives to improve firefighter health and wellness programs?

I would hope that the Union would propose what health and safety measures and education firefighters need for inclusion in the collective bargaining agreement. The Union and management should have a joint health and safety committee that meets regularly if one does not already exist.

12. How will you approach contract negotiations with Local 521 if elected to city council?

I would insist that the city negotiating team negotiate in good faith as I expect the Union team would do. I would like the city to share budgetary information with the Union negotiating team and give serious consideration to any alternative budgetary allocations the Union might suggest. I trust the negotiating process and I do not think that the Union should have to have further negotiations with the city council after concluding negotiations with the city negotiating team.

13. How would you support community risk reduction initiatives such as fire prevention education, wildfire preparedness, and public health partnerships?

As a physician, I fully understand that preventing a disease is better than having to treat the disease. I believe that the city needs to identify potential problems and needs to identify the risks we can reasonably expect to face in the future. Where ever possible, we need to mitigate those risks. To that end, the city budget needs to lead Billings in community risk reduction and include a sufficient level of funding to do so.