

Q1

Candidate Information

- Candidate Name: Melanie Williams
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Q2

Are you aware of an agency of state government – the Nebraska Arts Council (NAC) – whose mission is to support the arts, humanities and creative activities in Nebraska?

- Very aware

Q3

The Nebraska Arts Council invested \$1.5 million in FY2019-20 state general appropriations in grants across the state to support arts programs and access, arts education programs, and supporting local arts councils and organizations. Most grant dollars required a 1:1 match. With which statement do you most agree?

The NAC should receive an increase in state funding in the coming fiscal year.

Comments:

- Arts and humanities are constantly under attack and face budget shortfalls year after year. The arts are a vital part of a healthy democracy, help improve mental health, provide for unique ways to communicate big ideas that can be received differently by each individual. With the increase in standardized testing and homogenous education plans, opportunities for art, music and theater in schools are at risk. I would like to see a significant expansion in our state's support for the arts.

Q4

Research has shown that arts education increases achievement across all academic disciplines, enhances student engagement, and fosters development of critical thinking and learning skills. How important do you think it is to have access and participation in arts education for youth in Nebraska schools?

- Extremely important

Comments:

- For many children - as it is with adults - if vibrant and healthy arts programming is not a part of the educational experience, there is less chance for developing critical thinking and interpretation skills, not to mention the ability to build appreciation for uniquely individual means of communicating. My now-grown son told me that if he hadn't had the chance to look forward to choir and musical theater every day, he likely wouldn't have found as much incentive to finish high school. So, I can attest to the fact that access to the arts keeps kids in school. I am a strong proponent of supporting robust art programming to be built into the educational curricula of every school.

Q5

The State of Nebraska has curriculum standards in the fine arts, which includes art, music, theater, dance, and media arts. How important do you think it is for schools to have content-specific certified teachers in the arts?

- Essential

Comments:

- For all the reasons stated above, I believe education, access to, and participation in the arts in all forms are essential for the healthy development of children (and adults). The many various forms of art require specialized expertise and experience - like for any other specialized training. We must understand and support the unique ability to impart understanding and passion that a trained and experienced instructor of the specialized arts can offer to the developing talent of learners, who may also wish to pursue a particular art form as a professional career.

Q6

According to data from the Creative Economy State Profiles, the U.S. Bureau of Economic Analysis reports that arts and cultural production accounts for \$2,943,343,023 and 2.4% of the Nebraska economy, contributing 28,735 jobs. The Nebraska Blueprint report recommends investing in “community vibrancy” projects to attract businesses and workers, increase tourism, and generate revenue for state and local government. How important do you feel state appropriations and policies to advance Nebraska’s creative industries (an example is this year's LB943) are in relation to creating a strong economic future for Nebraska?

- Extremely important

Comments:

- YES! and yes yes yes. I read through the bill and testimony introduced by Sen. Hunt, and I strongly agree that there are creative ways ;) for our state to support and promote the arts within our communities.

Q7

In 1998, the Nebraska Legislature established the Cultural Preservation Endowment Fund to join the Nebraska Cultural Endowment to create a private-public partnership for providing stable funding for arts and cultural programs in the state. These funds must be matched dollar-for-dollar by private contributions. The earnings from both the state and private sides are then distributed to the Nebraska Arts Council and Humanities Nebraska to fund grants and programs all across the state. As a candidate for the Nebraska Legislature, what is your position in supporting this investment in Nebraska’s rich arts and humanities assets?

- Strongly Support

Comment:

- As a candidate, I would be in favor any bill that provides improved (especially stable) funding for the arts. It is a shame that the NACH of Nebraska cannot count on robust and stable public funding from the state, rather than having to find private interests to keep public arts funded. But just as public education has been under attack since its inception, so, too, have the arts - which are seen as non-essential, but also threatening and historically empowering for the public.

Q8

Nebraska adults have one of the highest the highest participation rate in the U.S. in annually attending an art exhibit or arts performance. Is there a specific arts or culture organization in your part of the state that you or your family particularly enjoy, or do you have an artistic talent or hobby?

- Yes

If yes, please list your talent/hobby and your favorite organization(s) here:

- I came from parents who were professional actors - first in Minneapolis, and then here in Omaha, when friends opened the Sweetness & Light Theater in the Old Market back in 1971. Our son grew up singing in the Des Moines Children's Choruses, before we moved back to Omaha. He graduated from Omaha North High School in 2005, where he participated in the choir, show choir, and musical theater. He graduated with two full-ride scholarships and the Fine Arts Scholarship. When Broadway Songbook came to the Holland Center, Nick auditioned and was accepted. That once-in-a-lifetime opportunity to work with a Broadway producer/composer was a tremendous experience. One of our daughters participated in spoken word poetry during speech competitions throughout high school, which played a critical part in her developing confidence and a sense of herself. Another of our daughters grew up as a dancer and has now been a dance instructor for several years. As a child, she was chosen to attend a prestigious weeklong Broadway theater camp with another Broadway composer, which culminated in delivering prepared monologues on a New York off-Broadway stage for producers and casting directors. I am a visual artist, and a political and children's book writer. I've done some acting when I was young. My now grown baby sister just graduated from UNO's Fine Arts program with a Masters degree in Poetry. Honestly, the arts have touched all of our lives in so many unique ways. I would be hard-pressed to believe this isn't true for every person living.

Q9

We welcome any additional comments or experiences you would like to make with regards to the arts in Nebraska. Please use the space below. Your comments will be posted on the Nebraskans for the Arts website and in a voter guide of survey results received, sent to the network of arts advocates in the participating organizations.

- I have been so happy to see more maker spaces, pop-up art exhibits and an increase in small art galleries and indie film shops. We need more! I have enjoyed the education and opportunities presented by Omaha's annual Film Festival, as well as the Louder Than a Bomb program that is so amazing for young people to participate in - learning about

stage presence, pacing, voice control, memorizing lines, acting, and building confidence to use their voices in powerful ways ... All of it helps youth to apply these skills to anything they choose to do in life. I will do all I can to make sure the arts are always a priority for our communities.