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**Q1**

Name

Mitzi Epstein

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**Q2**

What race are you running in? (LD? House? Senate?)

LD12 State Senate - Ahwatukee, Chandler, Tempe, GRIC

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**Q3**

Email

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**Q4**

Phone Number

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**Q5**

Children who have year-round health insurance do better in school, are more likely to graduate from high school, are healthier, and earn more in adulthood. There are approximately 161,000 uninsured children in Arizona. If elected, how would you help ensure that all children and families have access to the health care that they need?

I have supported expansion of KidsCare year after year. For as little as \$12 million per year, the state could protect children and provide the health insurance they need to grow up healthy. It would also draw federal dollars back to Arizona, an important consideration for Arizona taxpayers who want their dollars to be invested here. Children's health is imperative to their ability to learn academics and to learn the social and emotional skills they need to build their own success.

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**Q6**

We know that a child's earliest years, birth to age 8, are the most important for the development of their brains. High-quality early childhood experiences can enhance that development. How can the state take a role in helping parents give their children the best start in life?

For school aged children, I facilitated meetings for the AZ Center for After School Excellence to apply for and receive federal funding to establish a network of childcare providers to support high quality learning and care across Arizona. It would be like First Things First in some ways, but for school-aged children. First Things First does excellent work in supporting excellence among childcare providers for children birth to age 5. The state of Arizona should invest in high-quality preschool and childcare to be: affordable and accessible for all families. Childcare support has proven to provide a fantastic return on investment and it should be part of every economic development plan.

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**Q7**

Many families in Arizona are struggling. Housing is becoming increasingly unaffordable, nearly one in four children live in poverty, and resources that used to be available to help families are no longer there. Research shows that when access to safety net resources are low, foster care populations are high. What is your plan to help children and families get the resources and services they need to keep them out of the child welfare system?

Prevention is worth a pound of cure. Too often, the bills and programs and budgets that have been passed by the AZ Legislature have focused on punishing parents instead of supporting them. As just one example, TANF is TEMPORARY Assistance for Needy Families. It is a block grant from our federal tax dollars and the federal law allows it to be used for various purposes to help children. However in Arizona, we put an enormous portion of that block grant toward DCS, to punish parents, instead of using an appropriate amount as cash assistance to families. With cash assistance, families who are temporarily struggling can have a bridge to their next stable place in terms of housing and jobs. Without it, their children suffer. I have worked for moving our TANF funds to more efficient and effective purposes, such as cash assistance, counseling, job training for parents, and other supportive programs.

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**Q8**

Arizona has been among the bottom states in per pupil K-12 funding for the past decade which has resulted in severe challenges including teacher shortages, crowded classrooms, and insufficient student support services. How will you ensure that students in every neighborhood have access to quality, well-funded education in Arizona

As the co-budget leader in the House Democratic Caucus, I have sounded the alarm that we need at least \$740 million additional funding for the K12 per-pupil funding – JUST to cover inflation. Teachers and schools are facing 8% to 11% inflation. That \$740 million is what's needed to cover 8% inflation. For months, I have called for a \$1 billion investment to cover inflation and all-day Kindergarten. If Republican Legislators had not cut nearly \$2 billion from the budget last year, we could meet inflation, AND fund all-day kindergarten, reduce class sizes, hire more counselors, psychologists, and social workers, update books and learning materials, and make building repairs to keep schools structurally sound. I am the Ranking Member in the House Ways and Means Committee. As a member of the minority party, the majority party grants me only the power of my voice to speak up. This committee considers the revenue side of the budget. I chose this committee because Arizona has slashed revenue year after year by passing tax cuts that have largely benefited the very wealthiest few. For example, the most recent tax change enacted by Republican legislators gave over \$1 billion to Arizonans who make over \$1million per year. That change made our tax fairness even worse. A teacher or cashier is likely to pay over 12% of their income in state and local taxes, while CEO s making over a million dollars per year -- they pay under 6%! I am determined to help relieve the tax burden on working families, while providing the services they need.

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**Q9**

Arizona's elected leaders have created a tax code that is upside down and regressive— meaning that those with low incomes pay a much higher share of their income in taxes compared to Arizona's highest income earners. If elected, what will you do to make sure that wealthy and corporations pay their share of taxes?

See my answer to Question #8. I believe that strong solutions require including many and diverse perspectives while developing the plan. I will work with a wide range of stakeholders and convene a work group specifically charged with making Arizona's tax structure more fair, sustainable, adequate, and transparent. We have many options to close loopholes, such as the exemption from sales tax for luxury art and private jets. We have options to make electricity more affordable for home-owners and to gain tax revenue when we sell electricity out of state. We have options to update our tax code so that corporations will pay a more fair share, not just the \$50 minimum that was set in a long-ago generation. I have met with legislators who recognize that this task is complex and they tend to throw their hands in the air and say, "You can never do that." But I like math. I know we can. I know we must do it because our current regressive structure is harming our youngest generations and our retirees.

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**Q10**

As the cost of living is rising faster than wages in Arizona, many households are struggling to afford basic needs. If elected, what are three ways that you will improve economic well-being for Arizonans?

This world-wide inflation has many causes including the war of Russian aggression against Ukraine, the cost of fossil fuels because of that war, and materials shortages and transportation bottle necks that are just starting to improve after the pandemic. Some studies are showing that over half of the increases in prices are due to price gouging. Because demand for goods is high, corporate giants are raising prices far above costs and anybody can see it in their profits. At the state level, we can do two things: 1- Provide help to people most affected by inflation: those with lower income. 2- Not make inflation even worse with bad fiscal policies. To help people in need there are many programs that could be funded including basic food pantries, transportation subsidies, rent support, and childcare support. Systemic inflation should be slowed by the federal government's moves to increase interest rates. At the state level, we can provide temporary palliative help until the system improves globally. To not make inflation worse, the legislature should repeal the harmful tax cut for billionaires enacted last year by Republican legislators. Giving over a billion dollars to billionaires who can pay higher and higher prices does not seem like a smart move, does it?

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