

## Norm Miller Dinner

Good evening Benton County Democrats! It is such an honor for me to be here today with all of you! Thank you!

You know, when democracy wakes up, justice wins.

This was definitely true in my election last year and definitely true in the legislative session this year.

As some of you may know I am new to politics. Last year was my very first time being involved in a political campaign. As my husband says, go big or go home so I decided to go big.

But in all seriousness, the question I get asked the most, is why did you decide to run for office. Like many of you, our national election was a huge shock and a wakeup call for me. It really made it clear to me that none of us can afford to be bystanders any more. We have to get involved. Then two very specific things happened. As a prosecutor, I got involved in hate crimes after 9/11 when a Sikh cab driver was assaulted in Seattle. So, when the local mosque in Redmond had a safety seminar in December, I was there. I was there with all 6 police chiefs from our area and a large auditorium full of people. It was really eye opening for me to hear from that room full of people about how scared they were. They didn't know if they should buy a car, buy a house or whether they would even be allowed to live in this country anymore. I was sitting there thinking, I don't ever remember feeling that way growing up. Two days later I was at the Indian Association of Western Washington hate crime seminar and it was the same thing. This time

with a room full of Indians. I heard from people from Bellevue, Redmond, Issaquah that their children were being told that they would be deported back to India. That evening, my husband and I spoke and we realized that it is so crucial for our democracy to represent each and every one of us and so we decided that I was going to run for this seat.

And you know, this was a tough campaign. A lot of money was spent on this race. A lot! And a lot of it was spent by people outside our community, bent on dividing us against each other in hopes of moving their own political agendas forward. Somewhere along the way, those people started making this election about “us” vs “them.” And I don’t have to tell you – in that story, I was the “them.”

This playbook is being executed all over our country right now. When you see the politics of tribalism, misinformation, and mistrust happening around you, when you see the hate and the fear and the division walking around unafraid, it can be scary. It can be depressing. And it can hurt. And when nearly \$2.5 million gets spent to aim those attacks at you, personally – I mean, I’m a prosecutor, I’m a pretty tough person. But that’s still not ok.

But even in the face of all those attacks, I never lost courage. And do you know why? It’s because what I’ve learned from our community during this campaign is that when we are attacked with fear, divisiveness, and dishonesty, we respond with love. We respond with integrity, honesty, and a commitment to solving problems, together. And these are not values that are bound to any particular party or identity. These are values that we as Washingtonians, and as Americans, believe in.

I learned the power that love has, to deliver justice, long ago, through my own family history. In 1947, when colonial India was legally separated along religious lines into what are now India and Pakistan, communities were ripped apart by religious violence, and tens of millions of Hindus, Sikhs, and Muslims became refugees overnight. My family members were fortunate. But instead of staying inside and keeping their heads down, the women of my family decided to go out into the refugee camps and help migrants of all religious stripes on their journey.

But this is not just a story of my family. This is the story of what makes us human. This refusal to let politically motivated divisions turn people against their fellow human beings is a power rooted in love, and it's one that I know will win, and it's what I've seen over and over again during the course of this campaign.

Last year, I met a man in Duvall, which is a small city in the 45<sup>th</sup> LD. He told me he was a small government Republican and had voted for Trump, but he was still going to cast his vote for me. When I asked him why, he said that the weekend before, one of our volunteer canvassers had knocked on his door. It turns out this woman was a local teacher whom he knew and admired. She told him that she really respected me, and that was enough for him.

When it comes down to it, this is what democracy is about. It's not about agreeing on everything and pretending we're all the same. It's about being honest. It's about respect. It's about disagreeing and debating, but it's also about listening and moving forward. It's about inviting that parent from your kid's soccer team whom you know is on the "other side" of the political spectrum into your kitchen for coffee, and knowing that even if he thinks schools should be funded by property taxes, and you think they should be funded by a capital gains

tax, tomorrow, you'll still be cutting orange slices and cheering your kids on together. In this fight against misinformation and distraction and division that feels so surreal at times – it's real relationships between real people that will save us.

And it's not just political conversations and neighborly debate that a healthy democracy enables. It's also care, for and by each other. Last year, I had a conversation with a self-identified Libertarian who opened his conversation with me by saying, "Well, I don't believe the government should be interfering in people's lives." We stood on his porch for about an hour, talking about the role of government in a free society and what that means. Finally, the thing that won him over was when I told him about one of my proudest accomplishments in the King County Prosecutor's office – the establishment of the Regional Veterans' Court. We have veterans, people who have sacrificed their lives, bodies and minds for us. Veterans, who are homeless and involved in our criminal justice system. And this is simply wrong. Often, they end up incarcerated because of untreated drug and alcohol issues, poverty, homelessness, or PTSD. When the government supports them by establishing a specialty court for addressing these root needs – that's not a handout. The goal of Veterans' Court is not to make veterans dependent on government. It's to give them the support, services and care they need, so they can get the opportunities they deserve to stand on their own again.

These values – communicating with each other with curiosity and with integrity, honoring and supporting each other with compassion, and learning to solve problems together in a spirit of independence and creativity – these are the

values that I bring with me to Olympia. I hope to build a state government that empowers every single person in Washington to feel like they have a voice, like they have a role to play in making our democracy thrive.

How many of you have seen the last Star Wars movie? There's a great line, spoken by Rose, a mechanic played by actress Kelly Tran. Rose has just put her life in danger to save the life of another character, Finn. And so Finn yells at her, "Why did you do that?" And Rose says, "That's how we win. Not fighting what we hate. Saving what we love."

That feels true to me. But not everyone has the privilege or power to put themselves on the front lines so publicly.

But all of us can find someone or something we love, and we can save and celebrate that. And that is exactly what we have been doing in our Washington.

Unlike the other Washington, here at home we are making a difference. We are saving what we love. We are leading the nation in so many important issues and showing the rest of the world what a progressive government looks like. What a functioning government looks like and what it means to put people first.

We made national headlines last year, but what's more important is the impact on each and every one of you, of the work that we did this year.

In a short 60 day session, which ended on time, with no special sessions, we passed meaningful policies. Policies that improve the lives of people. I am so pleased that so many of the issues I raised in my campaign are now law:

A package of bills to prevent and reduce gun violence, including banning bump stocks and other common-sense reforms including removing guns from

perpetrators of domestic violence; While we made progress and took steps in the right direction, we still have a lot more work to do to keep our communities and children safe.

We satisfied the Supreme court decision on McCleary—finally, fully funding education, with over a billion new dollars and standing up for educators and those who work hard to give children the opportunities they need to flourish.

But we still have more work to do—A fully funded public education system is the foundation of our democracy. It is what gives each child an equal opportunity to succeed and we have to ensure that, that foundation is strong, robust and resilient. We cannot afford to have any cracks in that foundation.

I envision a school system that has all the tools and resources it needs to develop an individualized plan for success for each and every child.

We removed barriers to accessing Democracy by passing the Voting Rights Act; Same day voter registration and automatic voter registration. All, to ensure that our democracy can represent each and every one of us.

We addressed the burden of our regressive tax structure by reducing the Republican imposed property taxes from last year. All the while adding 2 Billion dollars to our rainy day fund. But we have more work to do.

And we passed and not just 1 capital budget but 2—one from last year and 1 for this year.

Yes, one vote does make a difference. One vote in our Senate allowed these and so many other bills to move forward. Bills that reflect the values of this country, of our state and all of us—compassion, integrity and responsibility. Bills that

prioritize inclusion, that invest in our children, our families, and that strengthen our communities.

Strengthening communities is what I believe in, and strengthening communities remains my priority as we move forward. When I look around this room, I see that strong community; the community that stands up for each other.

There is so much more we can and must do for the people of the state of Washington and for the generation stepping up to lead.

We must do more in Olympia to reduce gun violence in our communities.

Strengthening communities also means we have to do more to invest in mental health and substance use services—we cannot sit by and allow people to suffer on our streets who can and should be treated and helped to get back on their feet.

Strengthening communities means we continue building the infrastructure and transportation we need, to move our region's economy and commuters, continuing to demand accountability and delivery of projects that best serve our families and businesses.

I am excited to continue leading on these and other critical issue. I know my colleagues in Olympia are ready to push forward on issues that unite our state, show the other Washington the right way to govern, the right way to build strong, safe, and inclusive communities.

Thank you again for all that you do, and for being here today!

Because when democracy awakens, justice wins.