

Q1

Please provide your name:

Jim Cooper

Q2

Which office and district are you running for?

State Senate District M

Q3

What is your vision for Alaska when it comes to reducing sexual assault and domestic violence? What steps are you prepared to take to get there?

As you know, Alaska has been ranked number 1 or near number 1 for sexual assault and domestic violence in the Nation for 20 years. This has to stop. Even though there are a number of agencies that are trying to stem this tide, the State has been remiss in underfunding or not adequately funding them so they can actually make a difference. Alaska is unique in that "you can't get there from here". Travel to outlying villages requires an enormous amount of resources that agencies typically don't have. There needs to be a larger outreach program or programs that can help assist in curtailing this, what I call an epidemic. I would try to ensure that all the agencies are funded to the fullest so this "epidemic" can be stalled.

Q4

What responsibilities do you believe the Legislature and other elected officials hold in advancing efforts to intervene in and ultimately eliminate domestic violence and sexual assault in the state?

The Legislature is responsible for funding the agencies who are trying their best to help people who are subject to these outrageous crimes. The State court system provides "protective orders" but many times that is not enough, the State provides compensation to victims of these crimes, that too is not enough. An office/department/division needs to be established at the State level that will actually work in tandem with the agencies/organizations already helping with education and assistance. There needs to be offices throughout the State so people in remote areas can reach out to a local area and not have to travel to a larger municipality to receive assistance. There also needs to be a system in place where the perpetrators can also receive assistance.

Q5

Victim/Survivor services in Alaska have been flat funded for many years and are facing a potential shortfall in future years due to decreasing federal funds. What are your thoughts on state funding to provide support services for victims of domestic and sexual violence?

As stated in previous questions, I firmly believe the State has an obligation to fully fund the services that are out there trying to provide assistance to victims and perpetrators.

Q6

Alaska Native women are disproportionately affected by domestic violence and sexual assault. What are your thoughts on supporting Alaska tribes' ability to strengthen local responses for survivors?

When I mentioned the State has an obligation to fully fund the organizations/agencies that are trying to assist in these crimes, I also am including everyone, all Alaska tribes and their organizations as well. The tribes are doing the best they can but additional help can bring them closer to the "top". Too often we overlook all Alaskans and assistance needs to be all inclusive.

Q7

Children are a particularly vulnerable population and may be traumatized by living with an abusive person and witnessing violence perpetrated against a parent or caretaker. What remedies might you suggest to provide protection for these children?

There should be some type of education provided to our younger generation so they can learn what domestic violence is and not think that "this is the way I am supposed to treat others". There also needs to be trust between adults and children so the children realize it is okay to tell other adults that there is a problem in the family. This is another reason why statewide offices need to be established so there is an opportunity for the younger generation to reach out for help. An additional trained individual or teams of individuals can be dispatched to schools to talk and listen to children should they need someone to share their concerns with.

Q8

What is your opinion about an adult over the age of 30 having sex with someone that is only 16 or 17. Should it be a crime?

I think that anyone over the age of majority having sex with a minor should be convicted of a crime. In a lot of States, it is considered rape. I know that Alaska has recently passed a bill that will allow 16 years old to get married, I believe that should be raised to 18.

Q9

Do you believe reproductive rights should be the choice of an individual? If you do not, do you believe there should be choice for victims of incest, sexual and/or domestic violence?

ABSOLUTELY! and with no exceptions. Reproductive rights belong to an individual and maybe their doctor. In no way shape or form should the government be telling a woman what to do with her body. It is and should always be a personal choice.

Q10

The state of Alaska is experiencing a housing shortage statewide. This is impacting domestic and sexual violence survivors' ability to move forward with their lives. What would be your ideas to address this?

Again, with State funding, "halfway" houses or domestic shelters can be built to provide a safe space for victims to be able to move out of a dangerous space and to a place where lives can be rebuilt. At a

minimum, monies need to be provided to agencies that already have housing so they can provide more or be able to build more or new facilities and provide trained staff to help assist the victims.

Q11

Currently, the domestic violence response is largely a criminal justice response. Please share any ideas you have of other types of responses.

As stated earlier, the State provides courts or compensation boards to address the issues. This is more than a criminal justice issue. Maybe that is why we remain number one in the nation. We need monies to be provided agencies and create offices throughout the State to be able to provide more education and more assistance BEFORE it becomes a criminal justice response. There obviously is a need for criminal justice but that is always after the fact. We need to be proactive and less reactive if we are to stop this travesty that is happening to our people.

Q12

Currently there is no dedicated funding for programs to provide services to engage individuals who have abused their families. What would be your ideas to address how to provide services to people who choose to cause harm to their partners? Do you feel this is the responsibility of the government?

Again, there are agencies trying to do this but they are underfunded; more monies would help that somewhat. But the State needs to step up and assist not only with funding but provide programs where the abusers can receive help as well. It is good to be able to help the victims but if the abusers aren't helped, the cycle is not broken.

Q13

Are you familiar with local programs that provide domestic violence and sexual assault services to victims across Alaska? Have you recently visited your local domestic violence/sexual assault shelter or victim services program? What is your plan to support these programs?

There are a number of services that provide help to victims: Alaska Family Services, Victims Rights Office, STAR, Catholic Social Services. The only one visited is Alaska Family Services. I am on the Board of Palmer Community Foundation and we recently provided funds for them to build a safe space for their residents. They all are doing a good job but they need funding to continue their efforts to try and stop this violence. Again, there also needs to be a State office where these agencies can come for other assistance if needed.