

**March 2, 2021 League of Women Voters Information Session  
Running for and Serving in Office  
Port of Port Townsend Port Commissioners**

*This is a lightly edited transcript of an Information Session recorded live on Zoom, March 2, 2021, at 2:30 p.m. Angela Gyurko of the League of Women Voters of Jefferson County interviewed Pam Patranek (District 1) and Bill Putney (District 2) regarding their experiences and lessons learned while running for and serving in office in Jefferson County, Washington. The document has been edited for clarity and grammar, not the substance of the conversations.*

**AG:** This recording and a transcript of it will be available on our League of Women Voters website and our Jefferson County League of Women Voters YouTube channel within a week of this event. Once again, greetings everyone. I'd like to extend a welcome, on behalf of the Jefferson County League of Women Voters, to Pam Patranek and Bill Putney, two commissioners currently serving on the Port of Port Townsend's Port Commission. Neither Pam nor Bill are running for election this year, which is why they are appearing here today for this election-focused information session. As part of the League's non-partisan policy, we cannot be seen as giving extra air time to candidates in an election year. But we want to talk about the election process. Pam, can you please start by sharing how many years you've served as a Port Commissioner, and why you initially decided to run for office?

**PP:** Hello, I am Pam Petranek. I'm a lifelong resident of Washington State, a commercial fisherman, sailing captain and teacher, and I am starting my second year as a Port Commissioner. I decided to run for Port Commissioner, because I have been actively engaged in the maritime culture and industries, and through that experience, became a citizen advocate with many others in our community, to work with the Port for our mutual success. I've stood beside and on the shoulders of many business and civic leaders in our community. I've worked towards creating positive relationships with our Port staff and commissioners. So my campaign slogan was, "I will work to support the strength and vitality of our maritime trades, our shared maritime heritage, our environment, and living wage jobs for this and future generations.

**AG:** Thank you Pam. And Bill.

**BP:** This will be my fourth and final year as a Port Commissioner. This was the first time I've held elected office. It took me a long time to break out of the bystander mode and break into actively doing something about what was going on around me. At some point you get to a junction in your life when you're just tired of talking back at the editorial page over breakfast and you want to be a little more active and that was kind of where I was. And I guess the reason that I ran really was that I'd been watching the Port for six or seven years before I was elected and I thought there was more potential there. And in fact, the State Legislature gave the Ports a lot of responsibility. And part of that responsibility has always been economic development. And I was concerned that need wasn't being met, especially in my District in the south, and I thought it would strengthen the Port to have that aspect represented.

**AG:** The idea of running for office can seem daunting to many people. Bill, would you share your thoughts on campaigning? How did you initially plan to campaign, how did you actually end up campaigning, and how much does the whole running for office process and campaigning cost?

**BP:** A lot wrapped up in there. This was my second attempt at running for Port Commissioner. The first time I was trounced pretty soundly and didn't make it out of the primaries. That was my attempt to run single-handedly. Put up my own signs. Make my own appointments. No coaches. No keeping a spreadsheet of my costs. And I think it's a lot. If you're running for an office of any substance at all and if you have opposition, you're responsible for being out and speaking and making your hoped-for policies expressed. You really need a team behind you to go out and put up signs, and be your surrogates for places you can't be because of the inevitable conflicts in schedules. I spent about \$15,000 running for the Port Commissioner job. I had an incumbent that was an opponent, and the conventional wisdom is that it's harder to overcome an incumbent's advantage at the ballot. I thought that I probably had to spend a bit more. \$15,000 is a lot of money to me. About 30 percent of that cost was donations. Most of it was among about thirty people who, I think the biggest donation I got was about \$500 from a couple, then I got about \$300 in small donations, \$20-sized donations that don't really have to be reported. Going into this second attempt at being elected, the things that really turned out to be very important were going out and speaking to people one-on-one. I think the meet-and-greets where someone has you in their home and they invite their friends, those sorts of things are where you get a real dialogue started. You can have an open discussion of things that people are concerned about and how you would address them as an official. Those opportunities were really important. The larger group events, the candidate forums, and the group events hosted by service organizations were important, but it's really hard. You're frequently there with your opposition at the other end of the table. You get asked, "How are you going to solve world peace?" and you have three minutes and a one-minute follow-up. Try as you might, it's really hard to address very broad questions in that way. I really preferred the smaller meet-and-greets. But that was about it. The way I decided to run the second time, was a group of people came to me and said, "Would you run?" I said, "Would you help?" That was the end of that meeting, and here I am.

**AG:** Thank you, Bill. And Pam. How did you approach your campaign and how much did you end up spending?

**PP:** My campaign became an extension of the work that I had already been doing, in being a citizen advocate. Campaigning, of course, catapulted this work to a higher acceleration and obligations. I needed a dedicated campaign navigator and team for meeting the myriad of legal requirements of running for office. I needed a team to help me with the advertising, fundraising, photos, voters pamphlet statements, newspaper interviews, creating a website, financial reporting and accounting, logos, slogans, printed communications, signs, and of course, the public forums. I was really lucky to find a campaign manager, Liz, who even though she nor I had ever run a campaign, we organized, focused, and worked really well together. We organized an initial fundraising event to kick-off the campaign, folks contributed throughout the

campaign, and we ended up breaking even in the end. Fundraising wasn't really a focus, I don't really remember what the total amount was, something like around \$9,000. The two big ticket items that really cost a lot in the campaign was mailing out flyers to individual homes and of course the signs. The teamwork doesn't end with the campaign, so I just wanted to put a plug in for all citizens that once election day is over, continue the work of the next four years. And I wanted to put a plug in for banning plastic signs. I would love, and I've talked to so many fellow electeds who would love to not have to spend the money and create the waste of plastic signs. We banned plastic grocery bags here, I think we can ban plastic campaign signs.

**AG:** Pam, thank you very much for that. That's an interesting idea. It is again your turn. Can you give our viewers an idea of how much time you typically spend each week on Port Commissioner duties? Please be sure to mention whether this is more or less time than you thought it would be, and some of the duties that typically take the most time.

**PP:** Bottom line for any Port Commissioner is an average of two days per month for the Port meetings. And along with that, guiding our Port Director, taking part in training seminars, and Port Commissioners divide up a long list of community organizations that we serve on. For example, I am interested and serve on a Food Systems Committee, part of our agriculture focus, and the Marine Resource Committee. Our four intergovernmental jurisdictions meet monthly that we partake in. I spend a minimum of, and this is just me, but I spend about two days, focused days, per week, and an additional scattering of meetings, throughout the week. This work of course takes more time than I thought, but that seems to be how it is for many things that I have ever wanted to do well in my life. For example, I was an avid sailboat racer for over a decade, and when I reached a winning level, I looked around and saw I had put in a lot more time compared to others. I showed up more, I won more. The port things that take the most time are basically what I campaigned for changing, so it's my own doing, it's my own things that I really want to work hard to change. Each Port Commissioner can create their own focus and they can create their own amount of time to dedicate towards it. It takes time to learn and study, and it takes time to stay connected and represent our constituents. I also have a full-time job with some flexibility. During my campaign, I was also co-leading a couple other citizen and business groups, I was preparing and speaking at almost all the Port meetings during my campaign, basically trying to do a commissioner training run, showing up at all the Port meetings. Everything that you have to do in campaigning creates this foundation of knowledge, and experience, and discipline, for becoming an elected official. It's all worth every bit of time you put in. Thank you.

**AG:** And Bill, what would you add to that?

**BP:** To capture Pam's point, if you can spend time observing the official whose job you want, that helps tremendously. It is a new way of thinking when you enter public office. I don't think that in general, the public has an appreciation for the legal and legislative requirements. What you can do. What you can't do. The Washington Public Ports' Association is very good about having an all-day training session, and it's really a cram-course on being a Commissioner, but unless you've sat in that room and watched people work, especially on these three-person

Commissions where you can't have discussions outside of a public meeting, that you can't build a coalition, you can't even do it by accident. There's this thing called a chain meeting where I tell somebody who tells Pam, and it goes back the other direction, that's explicitly prohibited. Building coalition is understanding how your Commission team members think, understanding at least in a broad way, what their hopes and desires are. After four years now, I've worked with four Commissioners. I think in the case of the Port, the thing that all four Commissioners have shared has been that we all want the Port to succeed, and we all want the Port's mission to be carried through in the most effective way. Even though we all look through different lenses at issues and problems to be resolved, we very frequently come with a unanimous vote in the end because I think we all recognize that compromise towards a goal is important. I looked back through my time sheets. This is the first year that the State of Washington has required us to keep time sheets. It's kind of a bad example, I think. When I look back, it was on average 22 hours a month, and that's what I think of as hard time. Those are the amounts of time I write on the time sheet. What I don't write on the time sheet is replying to emails from constituents, reading through all the meeting documents, reading through legislative documents, talking to our state and federal legislators. There's a lot of things that I think are an equal amount of time at least in those soft tasks. To give you an idea of how Covid has impacted our Port Commission, I looked at my January and February time sheets and if I'd stayed on that track, it would have been almost 40 hours a month of hard, reportable time. When I was running, I thought that it's really difficult if you have a 9-to-5 job and you have to be there from 8 a.m. to 5 p.m. rain or shine, it's going to be difficult. You need some flexibility. Pam has quite a bit of flexibility, I'm retired, and short of being on so many other civic duties, like KPTZ and the Film Festival, my time is kind of my own. Some days it's a struggle to make all those time commitments, but the radio station and the Film Festival make allowances for me. I'm not sure an employer would necessarily do that. That's something to consider. Did I expect that? Yeah, I expected that. In fact, Janette Force tried to talk me out of running, but she was unsuccessful, and I seem to have done all right with the Film Festival anyway.

**AG:** Well, continuing on that theme, Bill, what is the most rewarding part of your job? Why do you love it?

**BP:** I think I touched on this. I think it's certainly serving the citizens of Jefferson County. I've told people, this is the hardest job, and the job I've lost the most sleep over, in my entire life. And it is because I have been a leader of small groups, I've had half-a-dozen people reporting to me, and half-a-dozen people that I have responsibility to, where someone gives me a job and I tell them how much it's going to cost, and they tell me to do it or not do it. This is entirely different. People say, there's this problem to solve. I don't care how much it costs as long as I don't have to pay for it. I don't care how you solve it, just get it done. And it can be a very difficult thing. I think of local elected officials and I think of what the framers of the Constitution and the founders of the county thought of when they thought of elected officials. They thought, "These are people who will serve for a while, they'll bring their expertise, their foibles to an office, they'll stand and serve for a while, and then go home." I think with all the flap at the state and federal elections and all of the partisanship that goes on there, people forget what the framers really had intended. I think being an elected official in a local elected office is really

that foundational image and it's important to me that I do well for the people. Paradoxically, it'll be nice (it's like hitting your head against a wall) it'll be nice when it's over. I've learned a lot, I've enjoyed being in the office, I've enjoyed the access and being able to talk to people. I'll miss it, and I won't miss it, when I leave.

**AG:** Thank you. And Pam, what do you love most about your time serving on the Port Commission?

**PP:** I love how many doors it opens in our community that I would never have been able to experience in my other roles in our community as a parent, as a teacher, as a volunteer, as a business owner, as a board member. It's kind of like a golden ticket, like when you get your college degree and you get to do something that you ordinarily don't get to do. But three big things: Number one reward is the community. It's working with my fellow citizens who are taking time along the way to support the work, and it's learning and experiencing more of our community than I normally would have. Number two of what's really rewarding is working with our Port staff and the support they give you as an elected official. Their respect, their dedication, I have such high regards that grow every day for the work that staff does and high regards for the maintenance and haul out crews, the people who are working in the yard every day. Number three reward is having the opportunity to work with fellow electeds in the community that include the County, the Port, the City, and PUD. And we're all just learning and working together and want the best for all.

**AG:** Thank you Pam. So have either of you found times when the actual job turned out to be vastly different from the job you thought you were running for? I'm thinking here of unexpected duties that arose that really shifted the amount of time you had to spend.

**BP:** I've been in the job a little bit longer than Pam has and we had a couple years ago we had a really contentious personnel issue that took a tremendous amount of time. It was very frustrating for everyone that was involved in that. I think that was a time that certainly wasn't something that I had hoped for when I ran for office. I think of the Point Hudson jetty, which is kind of a continuing drama still. At the beginning of my tenure as a Port Commissioner, there were years when the net profitability for the port was something around \$200,000. The reserves were being depleted at half-a-million dollars a year, and we were getting advice like, "Well you should plan for the decline of the Port. The Port just can't sustain itself at this level." It was a lot of heavy lifting, most of it by staff, and by the executive staff. There's only about thirty people that work for the Port of Port Townsend and they do a tremendous amount of work. The Port District is huge. Really, operationally it runs all the way from Port Townsend out almost to Sequim, and from Port Townsend south to Quilcene. What is it Pam, about seven to eight different sites? There's administrative people, there's people that move boats, people that block boats, that keep an eye on the environment, people that do financial analysis, people that do legal and contracts, people that maintain every piece of equipment and every site that the Port operates. And that's thirty people, so everybody is running at 110 percent all the time. I think that we as Commissioners feel a responsibility to those people to make their jobs as possible as possible. If you're thinking about running for an office, Port Commissioner

especially, there's a great paperback book, *The History of the Washington Public Ports*. There is no other organization in the world like the Washington Public Ports. They're very special. They have a very special history. They operate in a very special and specific way, and understanding how they operate will make running for and being a Port Commissioner, so much more rewarding and understandable. It's enough you're going to have to pitch in and learn that's just not broadly public knowledge. But going to Port meetings, watching things happen, reading that little pamphlet, talking with people about what they think the Port can do to make their lives better is what you need to do before you put your name on the dotted line in May. But do it. Running for public office and being in public office is the highest thing that a citizen can aspire to.

**AG:** Pam, would you like to add anything to that?

**PP:** Sure. I loved reading that book. I think there's about 75 different ports in the State of Washington.

**BP:** Some of them don't even have water.

**PP:** Many of them don't. There's such a wide variation in what different ports do. The commissioner role is kind of what I thought it would be. Years before I considered running, I was supporting individual Port Commissioners, and taking an active role in Port business. I assisted two other Port Commissioners with their campaigns, and I came alongside the interview process of two different Port Executive Directors and contributed during that process. I started citizen groups to bring lots of different voices to help work with Port Commissioners. I did the homework to advocate for changes that were implemented and that created positive results, so I saw that happening in the process of being a regular citizen, and that was very rewarding. For years, I was learning how the Port functions, and developing positive working relationships with Port staff and commissioners. I spoke at most public meetings and hearings on behalf of the marine trades and I encouraged commission leadership. The commissioner role provides a bird's-eye window into the bigger picture of how government works, and it kind of pops the Jefferson County bubble that we are an exception or different from the wider politics or challenges that our neighbors regionally, statewide, and nationally face. We are not an exception, and we have many of the same problems as our neighbors. Not necessarily worse, not necessarily better. There is much work to do and advocate for. And I love that it is local leadership, not those in distant capitol buildings, who will guide and make a difference in our place and community. Thank you.

**AG:** With all of this you've shared, what final advice do you have for anyone running for office? Pam, we'll have you go first, then Bill.

**PP:** Three things. Number one, love the boatyard. The Port runs a world class boatyard and facilities providing hundreds of people the opportunity run their own businesses and access the water. I would hope that a Port candidate would love boats, maritime trades and culture, and have had experience running a successful business. Our Port also has other business endeavors,

but what feeds the golden goose are the boats that provide county-wide jobs and tax revenues that go to our county and to our state. Number two, I would hope that you have experience being a citizen advocate and leader in our community in some way, have experience working on a board, have been learning and contributing along the way with the Port Commission. Number three, I hope that you love history and that you value learning our history, both locally and the world, so we don't repeat the same mistakes. Learn and value being a representative of those who know, and not be the one who knows. Just be willing to be changed and humbled. It's really rewarding to serve in a community that has given me so much and is so full of dreams and opportunities. Thank you.

**AG:** Thank you Pam. And Bill, any final advice for people considering their run?

**BP:** Don't be discouraged because the person you see sitting up there at the dais doesn't look like you. You don't have to be an old white guy to hold office. After nearly a hundred years of Port history, Pam has been the first woman to serve as a Port Commissioner, and I think a stellar Port Commissioner. (Don't tell her I said that.) You kind of have to come and make it your own, but don't be discouraged if you're younger, if you're a woman, if whatever you are is not like what you see, people will accept you. This is a very accepting community. Pam says we're not so special. I think we have all the same problems everybody else has. But my personal feeling, and I didn't grow up here, is that this is a very special place, and we have very special people here, and I'm proud every day to serve them.

**AG:** Thank you so much. And I really want to thank you both for taking time out of your busy days to share your expertise. Just as a reminder for everyone watching or listening, Jefferson County's 2021 candidate filing period opens May 17 at 8:30 a.m. and closes May 21 at 4:30 p.m. Complete information on filing as a candidate will be available on the Jefferson County Elections website: <https://www.co.jefferson.wa.us/1266/Elections>. On behalf of the Jefferson County League of Women Voters, thank you so much for being here with us.