

Wyoming Tribune Eagle Interview

Questions are written as asked via email from Owen Houtakker on July 31.

Answers are written as submitted via email August 4.

● Explain why you're running, and why people should vote for you. Give me your outlook on why you think you're the candidate to vote for in this primary.

The people of this district that I have met during two different campaigns are amazing people. They embody true Wyoming values, and many talked with me about their conservative principles. I was so honored that they put their trust in me to uphold these values for them in the legislature. When I investigated the other candidates that were running for Senate District 5, I did not think they held the same values that the people of the district do. I want to listen to and represent the people of this senate district, and I have a voting record that proves I share these values.

● What led you to want to run for the senate and not the house? As your former district, district 42 is up for reelection again also.

I did not think that the House District 42 seat would be uncontested. But at some point, I had to make a decision on what seat to run for. Ultimately, I did not want to see this senate district seat filled by someone who was not as conservative as the great people that live in it.

○ With you already having experience in the state legislature albeit in the other branch, what does that experience provide to you?

My experience in the legislature taught me that you have to work very hard to keep Wyoming the place that we all love. There are attacks on our Wyoming way of life coming from every direction all the time. I am ready to pick up where I left off and work to keep bad policies from coming into this state like they have crept into others.

○ You also reference many of the bills you sponsored or co-sponsored do you think that maybe speaks to voters differently than simply having positions?

I sponsored bills to prohibit pornography in schools, enhance private property rights, help businesses and promote Wyoming jobs, protect first amendment rights, stop woke transgender ideology, and increase government transparency. My entire voting record is available to download on my website, www.benhornokforwyoming.com. When I send a mailer or talk to someone about my positions, I can back up what I say with actual

experience and a totally transparent record. There have been negative mailers and information put out about me that has twisted my record or not stated the facts about my bills or how I voted, but I am not going to change the way I vote, and people can trust that I will push conservative republican values for Wyoming.

● How does your experience working in the construction industry, oil fields, and on a ranch, the backbones of the Wyoming economy, inform your understanding of those industries?

Working in these industries you meet people that are trying to work, raise a family, get ahead, earn an honest living, and enjoy their weekends. I have seen firsthand how government policies directly affect these industries and the people that work in them. These industries are the first to suffer and the last to recover from the heavy hand of government policies. We also have a huge part of Wyoming's population whose work is connected to these industries. We need to be very careful with policy and law to fight back against what harms these industries and lift regulations to help advance these industries.

● On that note how has starting your own business helped your understanding of what small businesses need in Wyoming and the challenges they face?

I was finally able to start my own business after years of developing the trade skills and learning the management side of running a business. The licensing process is difficult, the tax burden is outrageous, the labor market is small, the paperwork is complex, and the capital investment required is huge. Every business faces these challenges and more. In Wyoming, the legislature needs to work on ways to reduce these challenges for businesses and create an environment where we encourage businesses to start and expand and make it as easy as possible to be successful.

● "The government closest to the people governs best" - how do you plan to strike that balance between government doing everything people need/want of the government while also ensuring it is not overreaching and interfering in people's livelihoods?

Right now, we see examples of the local governments doing some of the overreaching through things like forced annexation and zoning changes that local communities don't want. Our laws are not favoring people's liberty, and the legislature should step in and find ways to help. Ideally, local government will listen to the people and not allow things like gambling establishments, wind farms, power plants, data centers, or man camps in places where the local community does not want it. Or the local governments will find ways to

work with and listen to both the developers and the citizens for a mutually beneficial outcome.

● You talked about governing with transparency, What does that look like to you and how do you plan to do that should you win?

Go to my website www.benhornokforwyoming.com and you can download my entire voting record as a pdf. There are also links to bills I sponsored and cosponsored. I want to be transparent with my voting record. Also, in 2024 I sponsored a bill to ensure that Wyoming's checkbook remains transparent. That bill was signed into law in 2025 which means you will always be able to go online and see all the checks the State Auditor writes. Taxpayers in Wyoming should always know how their money is being spent.

● Do you have a plan if the 50% property tax deduction is implemented to ensure services such as police, education and other essential services are not cut back and remain effective

Police and education are essential services that the government is required to provide. Buying real estate or spending millions of dollars on renovations is not essential. Government agencies and various programs tasked with economic development are also not essential. Government-led economic development often includes massive tax breaks or other subsidies for certain industries while the residents and other industries get no such special treatment. There are plenty of ways that our governments, both on the local and state level, can make cuts to bloated spending practices and fully fund essential services. The politicians might be forced to cut back on non-essentials or how much goes into their rainy-day fund. What the local governments should have been doing over the last six years when property taxes have skyrocketed was to lower the mill levy on property taxes and live within their means. Instead, many have gotten used to a windfall of revenue from property taxes and have found ways to spend it.

○ On this note how can you balance wanting to provide meaningful tax relief while fully funding schools and government social services responsibly?

Combine Laramie County and the City of Cheyenne's financial picture for last year and you see that they had a surplus larger than their total property tax revenue. Property taxes brought in \$43 million while they had a combined \$44 million surplus. This means that if they refunded all property taxes paid last year, they would still have one million dollars left over after paying for schools and all government services that they provided. Tax relief is possible and should be immediate because taxpayers are overburdened.

● How do you plan to protect Wyoming energy producers from the uncertainty of changing administrations? What does that legislation look like in practice?

I once asked a mining lobbyist what could be done on the state level to help them. Their answer was nothing. The policies affecting them are a result of federal regulations, not state regulations. This is true, but indirectly Wyoming can look at tax rates and policies that would benefit these industries. We can fight other states or the feds in court on behalf of these industries. We can reduce regulations and red tape to make housing more affordable for those that work in these industries. We can encourage more trade skill education in our schools to build a skilled and ready workforce. We can privatize workers' compensation to allow for open market competition and not a monopolistic state-mandated insurance pool. We can fight off bad policies such as the legalization of marijuana and Medicaid expansion that are harmful to working-age adults. There is a lot we can do to help.

● You note you are opposed to medicaid expansion, healthcare accessibility and affordability are massive issues for wyomingnites, how do you plan to bridge the coverage gap that exists and what can be done instead of medicaid expansion that addresses these issues?

It is totally incorrect to say that healthcare will not be accessible and affordable if we don't expand Medicaid. In fact, it is exactly the opposite. Medicaid expansion creates shortfalls in revenue to the providers that private insurance must then backfill. Government Medicaid programs do not ever pay the full hospital bill while private insurance bills are much more than the actual hospital costs. The premiums for private insurance reflect this payment disparity and healthcare would be more affordable for everyone if government were not involved. Hospital margins might be smaller, but they would also try to compete for services and greater patient access if the Medicaid carrot was not leading them. Instead, there is a lower incentive to expand services, provide cutting edge medical practices or provide any pricing transparency. Also, Medicaid expansion targets working-age adults and encourages or forces them to maintain an income near the poverty line to keep their medical benefits. We need to look into ways to expand our healthcare market by partnering with other states to help lower the premiums. We should encourage job skill development, education and entrepreneurs, not a reliance on government programs.

● And how do you plan to make yourself available to your constituents to hear their voices?

My cell number and email address are on my mailers and the cards I hand out to people, and I tell them to reach out and ask me questions. After session I held town halls and talked to people about what happened and why I voted the way I did. These things won't change and I hope to hear from anyone in my district that has questions.

● What makes you different in this primary? What makes you stand out opposed to the other candidates in this race?

I am the only candidate with a proven record of conservative values. I have seen how government policies and regulations actually affect our daily livelihoods. I know that government expansion is never the answer to our problems, and the issues with our current government departments and programs are not going to be solved with more money and less oversight. I have held the line on republican values that make Wyoming such a great place to live. I will continue to listen to the people of my district and value their opinion on policy matters. I am not doing this for myself; I just don't want to see Wyoming go the way the rest of our nation seems to be going.

● Is there anything you feel is important to mention?

Senate District 5 residents are becoming very aware of how elected officials impact their lives, and so I cannot emphasize enough how important it is to be an informed voter. I know it isn't easy, but it is vital to maintaining liberty.