Shelli Yoder, Democratic Candidate for Indiana State Senate District 40
Responses to questions from the Greater Bloomington Chamber of Commerce
For the Nov. 3, 2020 General Election

The COVID-19 pandemic will have a significant impact on the state budget. What issues or priorities will guide your budgetary decisions in the next legislative session?

Making prudent budget decisions as we recover and rebuild from the COVID-19 economic downturn will be key to maintaining Indiana's competitive posture in the region. It will be important that our state budget pay particular attention to low-income families. We know that recessions disproportionately affect people with low incomes, who will need public support such as access to health care, income for food, or housing assistance. Even as budget cuts will be necessary for non-essential projects and programs, expanded access to unemployment insurance and Medicaid services will be critical to meeting the survival needs of many Hoosiers. I am committed to growing our local economy inclusively and balancing the burdens that will be borne by the difficult economic landscape on the horizon. Moreover, I will be particularly focused on state policy decisions that have an adverse impact on people of color. Systemic racism and ongoing forms of discrimination leave people of color, on average, with much less income and wealth than their white peers, and we know that state policies throughout our country have contributed to these inequities. We have an obligation to make progress in reversing them, even during the difficult economic times on the horizon.

Many local businesses are struggling in the wake of the COVID-19 pandemic. What state financial aid, programmatic assistance or other actions would you support in the coming months to strengthen economic recovery?

As our State Senator, I will fight to provide economic support for local businesses navigating economic recovery. One specific policy, which has been adopted by our neighbors in Illinois, Michigan, and Ohio, would be expansion of workshare programs, which permit businesses to temporarily reduce the hours of their employees, instead of laying them off during economic downturns. Technically referred to as short time compensation, the goal of worksharing programs is to reduce unemployment, thereby benefiting businesses, workers, and the state. Businesses retain their trained workforce, making it easier to recall to full-time status when the economy turns around. Workers keep their jobs instead of being laid off and collect reduced unemployment benefits to partially replace their lost wages. The state would save money by paying only partial unemployment claims, instead of paying full benefits to laid-off workers. Additionally, as a faculty member at Indiana University's Kelley School of Business, I am keenly aware of the power of education to build our workforce. Because many jobless Hoosiers will seek additional training and education to expand their skills during a weak job market, we need to ensure that our network of community colleges and public universities are as affordable and accessible as possible.

Other than the current crisis, what will be your top 3 priorities in the state legislature that relate to the business sector?

Leading with empathy and guided by science, my priorities for the 2021 Legislative Session include:

1) Developing and strengthening a framework that supports the needs of people living in Monroe County as we rebuild from COVID-19:

A.   investing in rural telecom for gigabit connectivity so Monroe County can engage in e-learning, working from home, and telemedicine successfully;

B.   nurturing innovative activity, workforce retraining, and entrepreneurship through capital access for our undervalued communities and people of color;

C.   paying our public education teachers dignified, living wages.

2) Implementing sustainable, mitigative, and adaptive practices to address the climate crisis and improve the health and wellbeing of Hoosiers:

A.   protecting water infrastructure, including Lake Monroe, and supporting renewable and cost-effective energy sources;

B.   increasing resources for mental health and addiction services;

C.   advocating for ways to reduce health care costs for businesses and expanding health care access for all.

3) Building greater citizenry engagement and government accountability:

A.   promoting policies and initiatives for greater voter participation, including making no-excuse absentee voting permanent;

B.   push for an independent redistricting commission (by 2030) and ending the partisan extremism that results from gerrymandering;

C.   supporting universal public Pre-K and advocating the importance of early childhood education, the foundation of both whole person development and citizenship.