



On Running in These Times

A personal essay from Maya Morales about her candidacy.

May, 2025

As we face down the biggest threat to small "d" democracy that most of us have ever experienced in our lifetimes, electing strong representatives who do not back down or compromise on the issues that matter is key. It's also vital that we have *representational* leaders who understand the urgent need for direct self-advocacy in our elected officials, rather than charity-advocacy. Leaders from marginalized communities with real policy chops and skills, and direct lived experience with social and systemic injustice(s) are worth fighting for. Our voices change the process, shape the discussions we need to have as whole communities, and change outcomes in important ways.

I have a strong record of public service in community through local, state and federal legislative advocacy and electoral work. I currently serve as one of your three elected Whatcom County Charter Review Commissioners for District 2, having earned the highest vote numbers in our district among eight candidates, and the second highest number of votes for a progressive candidate across our entire county to fill this role!

I'm running for County Council because I have seen what a lack of renters and progressive workers on our Council does. I've worked hard for *five solid years* to build the skills and know-how to be able to successfully run for, and serve, in office. For a working-poor, non-home-owning person, this has been a **HUGE LIFT**, and ***none of it has been paid work***. All of my experiential learning has been service. But, here's why I persist: because *I know* that the vast majority of us are hungry for more direct representation in our government by renters, workers, LGBTQ+ and BIPOC people, and younger generations who understand what it's like *not* to be handed leadership or opportunities on silver platters. Those of us who have had to fight for every second of space to speak and be heard, to even be in the room, let alone at the table, only to be tossed scraps and moldy leftovers when we demand equity? We lead differently, *because we know that we deserve different leaders*.

While this administration's violence against immigrants, LGBTQ+ people, Black and Brown people, poor people, is horrifying, I'm grateful that I can offer our district my work as a thoughtful, well-prepared, and committed Latiné leader at a time when our leadership is sorely needed at all levels of government.

Please check out my values platform, and the issues I will continue to center as I work to ensure a more representative democracy locally, and strive to open doors and collaborate with community members and other elected and appointed leaders to make our county government work for all of us! If you think I'm missing something in my list of issues, please email me! Representing people means having many conversations about what we all need.

I have been so honored to have your support as I worked to bring the voices of our District to the table in my current one-year elected role on our Charter Review Commission, and I humbly ask for your support to continue this work as a Council member!

For a working-poor local candidate, running for office shouldn't, *and really can't be*, about raising obscene amounts of money, sending out many glossy mailers, or running what mainstream politics has long-considered a "perfect" campaign. We don't tend to have those first 5-10 people we can call who will immediately write us a \$1,200 check for the maximum primary campaign contribution. We just don't. Why? Because we live in a class-divided society where wealthy people don't hang out with poor people. That's just *#FACTS*, and the sooner our communities understand this about politics, the sooner we can figure out how to work together to build working class power, and elect more representative leadership, without the necessity of only running candidates who are paid non-profit organizers, or labor leaders, with an already-built-in base in order to run. We need all kinds of different leaders at the table, with different skills sets.

Working poor candidates trying to smash through brick ceilings just have to prioritize. We simply cannot do all of the things, so we have to choose wisely which things we *can* do. As a grassroots candidate from multiple marginalized communities, I am already pushing the bounds of what is possible to just survive and thrive on a daily basis, while performing an unpaid elected role, continuing to show up in legislative and community advocacy work, and navigating most of the same hardships other poor people do. Making my own slow food and coffee, because I can't afford to eat out. Mending clothes or thrifting clothes. Doing my own car repairs. Handling all of my own cleaning, cooking, yard work, and chores. Our electoral system was basically created for wealthy white men with housewives and servants. That is literally the structure of our system, and who it was created for. Over 200 years later, we are still fighting to change that, and to create structures that actually encourage *modern* and diverse representation! When you run as a working-poor woman and/or LGBTQ+ and/or BIPoC person, nearly everyone tells you that you're too poor to run for office, and you should just sit down. You're not worth their effort, you're not worth fighting for, you're not worth their work, time, or money, and they'll probably also add that you're doing everything wrong. Meanwhile, you're over here working day and night, plus overtime, all for free, to just step up and serve. I've heard it all, often with the afterthought, "*...but, still, you know, thank you so much for running, Maya.*"

Every working-poor woman and/or LGBTQ+ and/or BIPoC person who *has* actually run for office knows: that is total bullshit. And, it's really a function of our communities being so used to mainstream politics as usual, that in many smaller, local communities in particular, we have no idea how to *actually* support working-poor candidates. But we ARE worth fighting for, because it's actually the people—it's *US*—that we're fighting for, not the candidate as an individual. It's a trap to think that working-poor candidates will do all the same things, behave in the same ways, and tick the same candidate boxes as wealthier, white, cis candidates. The structural barriers we face are real, and many of us *are* going to have to do most of our campaign roles and work ourselves until we actually build a viable working people's party. The gas-lighting of working poor candidates that people uncritically engage in is what actually *keeps* working-poor people *out*, and/or ensures we don't win. Election cycle after election cycle. It's far easier to place blame on the candidate herself, and point to *her* imperfections, *rather than critique how we actually just aren't showing up for our own grassroots peaceful warriors in the electoral space*

as working class people, when they/we step up. This needs to change, and I know we change it by electing a first, and then another, and another, until we are well-represented in office!

I'm here to tell you that I didn't learn electoral politics in school, or as political theory. I learned about direct democracy by doing it! A few years ago, while working on my first ballot initiative campaign, I caught *myself* feeling critical of a working-class candidate for not doing more in *their* run for office. Two years later, I ran! And *wowza*, I immediately and deeply understood how wrong I had been: running for office is literally one of the hardest, roughest, toughest, and in some ways loneliest experiences someone from multiple marginalized communities who is also working-poor, can sign up for. Candidates are trained to "run a great campaign" and make the whole thing look like a party. And, while parts of it *are* super joyful and fun –like talking to people at their doors– the reality is that it's also hard AF. Why? Because it's exhausting! Our working-poor communities don't really know how to support us into office, they don't understand what we need by way of support, and very often they don't really understand the impact their support will have, because it's new to them. Our relationship to democracy *and each other* shouldn't be that way. We either have to change that, or we don't stand a chance at a government that works for *us*.

Building an alternative to established wealth, power, and politics-as-usual will take time. It will take long-term, consistent efforts to build the skills and understanding among working-poor people we need to for folks to run. and *win*, one campaign at a time. The majority of working-poor people can't afford to donate to campaigns, or are so overburdened with economic stressors, that it's just a bridge too far to keep up with local electoral politics. That's why I brought forward a County Charter Amendment to enact Democracy Vouchers, which is a way for lower income voters to contribute to campaigns. It's also why I began working on seeding a Working Families Party collective/chapter here last fall (2024), and asked a group of WFP-interested people to consider endorsing my candidacy for County Council! In May, they voted by supermajority to strongly recommend endorsing me as a Working Families Party Candidate.

So, please get involved (link at the top of website), **because the people, united, will not be defeated.**
If we want to change outcomes for working people, we've got to get into formation!