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**OPINION**  
Citizens Agenda

## CDN endorses: Larsen for Congress, Rands for District Court judge

*GOP challenger for 2nd District seat not up to task*

October 5, 2022 at 5:55 a.m.

By CDN Editorial Board



Especially in recent turbulent times, Arlington native Rick Larsen has been less than a favored son in some local halls of civic life in this northernmost part of the sprawling Second Congressional District.

For that reason, some political wonks had relished the notion — for the spectacle itself, if nothing else — of a serious challenge to the 11-term incumbent from his own political left, given Washington’s top-two primary system. Those hopes were dashed when labor-supported Democratic candidate Jason Call failed to make the leap over GOP challenger Dan Matthews in the August primary.

That turned the Nov. 8 general election into what’s likely to be a cakewalk for Larsen, who earns the confident endorsement of Cascadia Daily News for his strong track record on key local issues — and also for our concerns about the suitability for office of his challenger.

The degree to which Larsen is the obvious choice is best illustrated by the many reasons Matthews is not.

Matthews’ campaign pledge to “return civility and statesmanship” to a



Second Congressional District U.S. Rep. Rick Larsen answers questions during a candidate interview on Sept. 8. *(Andy Bronson/Cascadia Daily News)*

country in “crisis” is a noble goal. But even the most accomplished statesman needs a sensible game plan, and Matthews lacks a coherent one.

Our own interactions with Matthews, a combat veteran pilot and retired Air Force Lt. colonel, reveal a candidate who is well-intentioned, patriotic and passionate about helping people in general. But he also seems to be stuck in a political/sociological time warp, with an America populated almost exclusively by nuclear families facing none of the myriad problems of modern society.

While Matthews does not exhibit all the telltale traits of the most extreme leaders of the party under whose banner he runs, his positions are out of step on the full range of subjects identified as critical by our readers.

Matthews blames homelessness primarily on “enabling” progressive ideology and calls a woman’s right to reproductive choice a matter of “personal expediency” — only one of his several disturbing positions on abortion. Matthews said he supports increased funding, source unknown, for a fanciful “win-win” system in which even a pregnant child might be surrounded by a circle of love and understanding by fellow citizens, allowing that child to “choose life.”

Asked if he supports exceptions for rape and incest in full abortion bans advocated nationally by his own party, Matthews said, “I’m not God,” and suggested such choices should be made at least in part by the guiding hand of a physician. He acknowledged his preference to “choose life” in almost every such instance.

“Unashamedly, I am a man of faith,” Matthews said. “My faith informs what I do and what I believe.”



Dan Matthews, the Republican contender for the Second Congressional District seat, was interviewed by the Cascadia Daily News editorial board on Sept. 23. *(Hailey Hoffman/Cascadia Daily News)*

He acknowledges Joe Biden as president. But when pressed on questions of electoral integrity, Matthews shifts to conspiratorial notions that the 2020 election was marked by what he characterizes as suppression of vital information by “tech bosses” and “prevailing media.” In his imagination, the 45th president was somehow handicapped by a lack of tools to communicate with the public.

Matthews expressed no interest in common-sense gun control measures, but endorses magnetometers, in-room electronic surveillance and “concealed carry” permits for school personnel, as well as “qualified immunity” for law enforcement officers. He calls the current U.S. health care system “the best ... in the world” simply because it’s ostensibly based on a free market, failing to acknowledge ample evidence to the contrary.

Perhaps most tellingly, Matthews in an interview with CDN expressed grave concerns about “The 87,000” — a reference to a debunked rumor about the Biden Administration hiring a new army of intrusive IRS agents.

It all adds up to a less-than-balanced ideology — one we can see comfortably slipping further into the non-reality-based, authoritarian bent of current national GOP leadership.

Voters should deliver a second clear electoral pass to Matthews, whose admirable passion for service would be best applied elsewhere, and at the local level.

### **Larsen's clear contrast**

Larsen, by contrast, has a solid track record on issues of concern to local voters.

As a key member of the House Armed Services and Transportation and Infrastructure committees, Larsen has been an effective leader on a broad range of local issues, especially transportation and aerospace, over his 11 terms in Congress.

Like him or loathe him, it’s clear where Larsen stands on most issues. A Pacific Lutheran University graduate and former lobbyist for the dental profession, he’s more policy wonk than firebrand — a good thing, in our view, in the current heated political climate.

In post-Dobbs-decision America, the congressman's resolute defense of reproductive rights alone is almost enough to earn our nod. Larsen boasts a 100% pro-choice voting record and advocates a Congressional codification of the previous *Roe v. Wade* standard for reproductive rights.

He aggressively condemns politicians and others espousing the Big Lie about the 2020 presidential election. He calls on his peers and other patriots to do the same.

In a time of heightened terror caused by mass public shootings, Larsen supports a slate of gun-control measures supported by a majority of Americans. Those include universal background checks, a ban on large-capacity magazines, safe-storage laws, and raising the legal age to buy semiautomatic rifles to keep them out of the hands of disturbed teenagers.

He has forged a middle way, of sorts, on health care, eschewing calls for a single-payer structure while consistently advocating for enhanced measures such as a public insurance option, left on the table by his own party leaders during the passage of the Affordable Care Act under the Obama Administration.

That and other Democratic-centrist positions deemed by some to be too cozy with corporate interests — especially given his acceptance of generous PAC campaign financing — have earned Larsen the ire of many on the left. He has been a longstanding, often enthusiastic participant in the care and feeding of the U.S. military-industrial complex — a subject near and dear to the hearts, no doubt, of many of his constituents in Snohomish County.

But his tendencies can be grating to some constituents in the current northern border of his district in Bellingham. And in coming years, given redistricting that will place all of northern Whatcom County in Larsen's district, this could be of increasing concern to rural residents who feel needlessly occupied by a large and expensive post-911 federal border and Homeland Security presence that seems due for re-evaluation.

To his credit, Larsen concedes that the nation's \$750 billion annual military budget, continuing an upward march from levels seen at the height of the Cold War, is not justifiable, and perhaps ill-aimed at modern-day threats better combatted by cybersecurity and electronic warfare resources than traditional military might.

Larsen points to his recent “no” votes on defense-spending increases as evidence of his concern.

“I don’t think those are justified,” he said in an interview with CDN. “The only thing worse than giving the Pentagon too little money has been giving it too much, because it will piss it away.”

It is our hope that in coming years, the congressman will apply his obvious policy acumen, experience and political savvy to make future defense spending designed and scaled to address more modern threats. Given the coming expansion of the Second District, Larsen is the obvious D.C. point man for that task.

He also should embrace the role of leader on the vital needs of Whatcom County farmers, and on matters of environment-related funding and policy. Given the sometimes competing interests involved, this is no small task. But a leadership role here is one that Larsen — who, refreshingly, believes in the science of human-caused climate change — must have on his legislative front burner, be it fueled by natural gas or electricity.

### **Rands gets nod for District Court judge**

The contest between local attorney Jonathan Rands and deputy county prosecutor Gordon Jenkins offers up a true rarity — a judge’s race with a news hook beyond the election itself.

That’s owing to candidate Rands’ campaign platform centerpiece: a plan to institute a “community court” that would consume much of his District Court docket if elected.

Community courts are a known commodity, with mostly successful track records across the country, including Spokane and areas of both King and Skagit counties. The goal is to use the courts to get people charged with misdemeanors — including trespassing charges often levied against homeless individuals — connected to programs to get them food, shelter, treatment for mental health or substance abuse issues, or education. Its aim is to apply existing community services to divert people charged with misdemeanors into programs that will reduce their chances of entering a spiral of criminality.

“These issues are real issues for people, so we solve these issues,” Rands told CDN’s editorial board. “But more importantly, we don’t send them down the hall to talk to a probation officer who’s behind the



Jonathan Rands is running for Whatcom County District Court judge. Rands led the polls in the primaries, with 42.3% of the vote. He was interviewed by the Cascadia Daily News editorial board on Sept. 16. (*Hailey Hoffman/Cascadia Daily News*)

glass wall that hands him a piece of paper that says, ‘Here’s your resources,’ because if you can’t read, that’s not going to do any good.”

He said the program, which can be funded through a state 0.1% sales tax already available to Whatcom County, is faithful to the traditional, “therapeutic” role of district courts, which are the first encounter many individuals have with the criminal justice system.

Rands’ opponent, Jenkins, agrees that the idea has merit, but questions whether, given the need for expediting cases requiring a more-traditional justice approach, it should consume as much time and resources as the program envisioned by Rands.

That’s a valid concern. But in our view, not a sufficient reason NOT to give the program a trial run in Whatcom District Court, which handles both criminal and civil cases, including misdemeanors, civil cases related to personal property, contract disputes and small claims. Rands is the right person at the right time to not only champion but implement the program.

In addition to this court reorganization plan, Rands boasts a remarkably diverse set of endorsements, from citizens and organizations across the Northwest Washington political spectrum. Notably, law enforcement and prosecutorial supporters who have endorsed him do not dismiss his community court concept as “soft on crime.” Rands is favored by cops, social workers, a broad group of labor leaders, current and former judges and attorneys, and political leaders and public office holders from both parties.

Jenkins, a prosecutor with experience as a defense attorney, emphasizes his acumen with difficult cases such as drug offenses, homicide, domestic violence and sexual assault, with well-rounded experience as a prosecutor and defender. He touts his experience in drug and mental health court programs and emphasizes his attention to victim’s rights issues.



Gordon Jenkins is running for Whatcom County District Court judge. He met with the Cascadia Daily News editorial board for an interview to discuss his platform on Sept. 16.

*(Audra Anderson/Cascadia Daily News)*

Jenkins shares many of Rands’ concerns with the alarming local rise in mental health/substance abuse problems, often leading to personal and property crimes. He said a community court, which he calls a “restorative justice-type court model,” has a place in the local system. But he believes it’s likely to be appropriate for only a “relatively small part” of cases the court will see.

That’s a difference of degree, but a critical distinction.

This is a race with two well-qualified candidates, both in terms of experience, temperament, outlook — and local sensibility. (Where else in the U.S. does one see a judge’s race featuring two recreational snowboarders?)

Jenkins is a capable jurist who wants to be a judge; that might yet lie in his future. But Rands seems like that rare candidate in the exact right place at the right time with the right idea to give a potential boost to help solve pressing societal problems.

Rands has risked a successful private practice to enter public service as a judge, and CDN believes he is a sound choice for election to the District Court bench.

*CDN endorsements are made by consensus of the CDN Editorial Board: Publisher Cynthia Pope and Executive Editor Ron Judd. Dean Wright, the newspaper’s ethics consultant, acts as a nonvoting adviser and facilitator. Look for state legislative endorsements here next week, with summaries and a CDN sample ballot in a special Voter Guide published on Oct. 19.*

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