

kat swift for City Council District One

**SAN ANTONIO AFL-CIO
CENTRAL LABOR COUNCIL
LEGISLATIVE QUESTIONNAIRE
2007**

1) PAYCHECK DECEPTION – BACKGROUND

Elements of the Right Wing have sought to unilaterally remove the labor movement from the political/legislative process. One method is to seek legislation that would require the labor movement, collectively and each individual union to seek permission from its entire membership to participate in the election process, to lobby legislative and/or local governmental issues. In this legislation unions are singled out for prohibition from participation in spite of the fact that Texas is a right-to-work state which means that union membership itself is voluntary. The labor movement is unilaterally opposed to this legislation.

QUESTION: Will you oppose legislation that unfairly restricts organized labor's ability to participate in the political and legislative process?

YES NO

Explanation: Legislation should not restrict such participation. I am unfamiliar with the bill in question and would like to learn more about it.

2) LABOR'S RIGHT TO ORGANIZE - BACKGROUND

The right of workers in the United States to organize and join a union of their choice has been federal law since 1935. The Right Wing and corporate opposition have led to the creation of laws that severely limits and/or erodes the right of an American worker to join a union. As a result America's middle class is disappearing, good jobs are vanishing and health care coverage and retirement are slipping out of reach. The current system for forming unions and bargaining is broken. Workers are routinely intimidated, harassed, coerced and even fired for trying to form unions. The US Congress recently passed and the US Senate is considering The Employee Free Choice Act. This legislation would change that by restoring workers' freedom to form unions and bargain without management interference. The legislation would strengthen penalties for companies that coerce or intimidate workers, establish mediation and binding arbitration when the employer and workers cannot agree on a first contract and enable workers to form unions when a majority signs union authorization cards.

QUESTION: Do you support the rights of all workers to join a union? Should the City have policies requiring those with whom they enter into contracts for products and services

to abide by the provisions of laws that protect and enhance these rights? Why or Why Not?

Explanation: Yes. Yes. I believe it is fundamental right of workers to organize in order to bargain collectively in their mutual best interest.

3) AN INJURED WORKER'S RIGHT TO CHOOSE THEIR OWN DOCTOR – BACKGROUND

Prior to 1989, the cost of the workers compensation system in Texas was higher than in most other states. That year the legislature acted to solve this dilemma and the system that was created took away an injured worker's access to help in negotiating the system, a system now dominated by the insurance carriers. The 1989 "fix" did not bring down costs as had been hoped, so in 2005 the legislature disassembled the Texas Workers Compensation Commission and moved the care of Texas' injured workers to the Texas Department of Insurance. This new legislation is supposed to contain a trade-off in that networks are to be created to provide quality care and an injured worker can only pick a caregiver within the network. This is a serious abrogation of an injured worker's right to choose his or her own doctor.

QUESTION: This issue is being revisited in the 2007 legislature. Do you support the right of an injured worker to choose their own doctor?

YES NO

Explanation: I am very careful in my choice of doctors, and injured workers should have the right to exercise choice. Not all doctors are created equal, nor do they have the best interest of the injured party in mind!

4) PUBLIC SCHOOL VOUCHERS – BACKGROUND

Average per-student operating expenditures in Texas public schools fall 21% below the national average, even as our public schools are expected to deliver ever-improving student achievement. Yet some want to take taxpayer dollars in ever inventive methods away from public schools and want to send those dollars to pay for private education.

QUESTION: Will you oppose the use of state tax dollars for vouchers, tuition, tax credits, home schooling, or other equivalent measures to pay for private preK-12 education?

YES NO

Explanation: Public Education is fundamental to an educated populous. If our educational system focused on training our children to be independent thinkers who learn more than just how to pass a "skills assessment test" and reinstated vocational education at the secondary level, then the programs we are having to pay for in post high school remediation would become unnecessary, and workers would have better opportunities for higher paying skilled labor jobs. I attended all public schools from K through 12.

5) SCHOOL FINANCE – BACKGROUND

Texas faces a crisis in the funding of public education. A rapidly growing student population, including many educationally disadvantaged children, must pass tougher state tests and harder courses to achieve promotion and graduation under state law. To give all of these students a high-quality education will require increased investments of public funds. Yet most school districts are at or near the state-imposed ceiling on local school property tax rates, meanwhile the state share of spending for public education has fallen. Our equalized funding system has expanded educational services. Much of the problem stems from an outmoded state tax structure that does not keep pace with growth in the state's economy. If the state merely collected the same percentage of total income in 2005 that was collected in 1991, we would have \$15 billion more the next biennium-enough to cover major educational needs and more.

QUESTION: (A) Will you support legislation to modernize the state's tax structure, so that tax revenue keeps pace with growth in state population and income? YES NO _____ (B) Will you support legislation to maintain and enhance the state's commitment to school finance equity, so that the funding available for a child's education does not depend on where in the state that child lives? YES NO _____ (C) Will you pledge to work to find the least regressive tax possible to ensure an equality of burden? YES NO _____

Explanation: Texas' regressive property tax based public school funding method has been further undermined by excessive use of tax abatements to wealthy corporations. Corporate income or gross sales tax should be implemented to ensure equal funding per student for all districts in the state.

6) TELECOMMUNICATIONS – BACKGROUND

Competition between all local exchange providers and long distance providers should be fair and equal to ensure jobs in Texas. Growth of these companies will provide jobs in this state for those who work in this industry. Telecommunication companies who come into this state and prosper should remain here and not move to foreign countries.

QUESTION: Will you vote for and support fair and equal competition for all telecommunication companies? YES NO _____

Explanation: Corporations must be prevented from creating monopolies, and we should exercise our rights to reign in corporations in general. Personally I have always felt that telecommunication companies should be socialized, as they are a public service.

7) PRIVATIZATION ISSUES – BACKGROUND

Organized Labor believes this Right Wing agenda item translates into lost jobs and reduced wages. It is an idea often driven by the corporate world, using private for-profit firms for the provision of public services. We firmly believe that the so called savings generated from a move to privatize, be it in public education, in local governmental bodies, or in any of the state

agencies, must be measured against its true cost. We see those costs as a decline in the quality of work, lost accountability, reduced investment in an experienced workforce, and increased opportunities for corruption.

QUESTION: Do you support efforts to privatize public services by Government at any level (national, state, local)? YES _____ NO X _____

Explanation: Public Services must remain public in order to ensure accountability to citizens and workers.

8) COLLECTIVE BARGAINING – BACKGROUND

Organized Labor believes that all employees, public or private, should have the right to a collectively bargained contract. We oppose “employment at-will” by the state or any political subdivision. Currently, police and firefighters in local communities can negotiate contracts with their city employers (after passage of a referendum) and we believe that this right ought to be extended to all other public employees. Short of permitting collective bargaining, we endorse the use of “meet and confer” negotiating for public sector workers.

QUESTION: (A) Will you support lifting the ban on collective bargaining? YES X NO _____ **(B) Will you support the use of “meet and confer” as a negotiating tool?** YES X NO _____

Explanation: Collective bargaining is necessary in order for workers to be protected from the unbridled greed of the owning class. Weakening of collective bargaining has now led us to the greatest disparity in income between executives and workers since before the Great Depression.

9) STATE PREVAILING WAGE LAW – BACKGROUND

Texas’ prevailing wage law assures local contractors who adhere to local prevailing wage rates a fair chance to compete for government projects without being undercut by firms using cut- rate labor. In recent years there has been an eroding of the prevailing wage concept on major state projects. Additionally, the law provides that wages for a particular geographic area must be surveyed and updated periodically; however, many jurisdictions have been lax in the timely surveying for wage rates.

QUESTION: Will you support continued use of the prevailing wage rate and better enforcement of the state’s prevailing wage law? YES X NO _____

Explanation: I have witnessed the destruction of small and medium sized businesses, as well as loss of contracts because of cut-rate labor. I will not support any contract that does not pay the prevailing wage and require that the wages be disclosed during the term of the contract.

10) CORRECTIONAL OFFICER ISSUES – BACKGROUND

Currently, the Texas Department of Criminal Justice cannot fulfill its primary mission, namely providing the citizens with security and reducing recidivism rates through reasonable and proven rehabilitation measures. We have a vastly under funded penal system particularly in regards to employee wages, training, and professional accountability and development. Our correctional officers are the lowest paid in the South and 4th lowest paid in the nation. A high turnover rate has led to reduced training to rush fresh officers to the front lines. Some believe the solution to the problem is to totally privatize the system; we are vehemently opposed to further privatizing of the system.

QUESTION: (A) Will you support restoration of the full training, the development of a long-term training program which promotes career development? YES X NO _____

Explanation: Absolutely, as I stated previously, privatization of public services does a disservice to the citizens and workers. We also need to implement effective rehabilitation methods and reduce the number of individuals put in jails who might only need drug/alcohol rehab, mental health services, etc.

11) VOTER IDENTIFICATION – BACKGROUND

Given the fact that barely half of the eligible voters actually participate in the process, we are alarmed at the right wing agenda item that would suppress the voting rights of the elderly and minorities. This attempt in the last legislative session was to require more than one form of identification in order to be issued a ballot. The totally unsubstantiated claim is that there has been massive voter fraud that must be stopped. As untrue as the claim is, there is a determined effort to create what amounts to a poll tax on potential voters.

QUESTION: Will you oppose any legislation that would create a poll tax or in any way force potential voters who have already established their identification with the issuance of a voter certificate to have to provide yet another form of identification to be eligible to cast a ballot and have that ballot counted? YES X NO X

Explanation: I do not support any manner of poll tax; however there are serious problems with our current voting system and a better method of accurately establishing identification of eligible voters is needed, as well as other reforms. I would be interested in discussing alternatives you might suggest that would not provide hardship. I believe there are also great things we can do to increase voter participation and I'm happy to discuss those as well.