



2007-2008
American Federation of Teachers
CANDIDATE QUESTIONNAIRE

*For Candidates for the U.S. Senate
and U.S. House of Representatives*



A Union of Professionals

American Federation of Teachers, AFL-CIO
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American Federation of Teachers, AFL-CIO

The AFT represents more than 1.4 million working and retired teachers, school support staff, higher education faculty and staff, nurses and other healthcare professionals, and federal, state and municipal employees. Our mission is to improve the lives of our members and their families, to give voice to their legitimate professional, economic and social aspirations, to strengthen the institutions in which we work, to improve the quality of the services we provide, to bring together all members to assist and support one another and to promote democracy, human rights and freedom in our union, in our nation and throughout the world.

Please complete and return the candidate questionnaire to:

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Signature: _____ Date: _____

1. **NO CHILD LEFT BEHIND**

The No Child Left Behind (NCLB) law is seriously flawed and needs to be completely overhauled including replacing the accountability system with one that gives credit for progress.

- ***Do you believe that the current law's mechanism for holding schools accountable – the adequate yearly progress (AYP) formula – needs to be replaced so that it allows states to utilize growth models?***

Yes, I support changes.

No, I oppose these changes.

The AFT supports NCLB's goal of ensuring that all students - particularly those in high-poverty school districts - are taught by teachers who know their subject matter and how to teach it and who are supported by well-trained paraprofessionals. There are proposals in Congress that would offer bonuses or performance pay as a way to incentivize teachers to work in hard-to-staff schools. However, these bonuses would be limited to only those teachers rated as exemplary based on standardized test scores—a “pay to the test” standard. The AFT believes that the components used in such a rating system should not be mandated by the federal government and should be developed on the local level with meaningful input from teachers.

- ***Would you oppose the federal government mandating the use of standardized tests for evaluating teacher performance?***

Yes, I would oppose.

No, I would support.

- ***Would you support proposals to require the methods for evaluating teacher performance to be developed on the local level with meaningful input from teachers?***

Yes, I would support.

No, I would oppose.

A commitment was made to provide enough resources to fund the new accountability provisions for student achievement and teacher quality when NCLB was passed. These critical programs covered by NCLB include Title I, which represents the federal government's largest financial commitment to the education of disadvantaged students, and Title II, which addresses teacher recruitment and professional development.

- ***Do you support full funding for NCLB, including Title I and professional development programs?***

Yes, I support.

No, I oppose.

➤ *Do you support federal requirements for the provision of training and on-going professional development for paraprofessionals at the state and district level?*

Yes, I support.

No, I oppose.

QUESTION 1 COMMENTS:

2. HEALTHCARE

Healthcare issues will dominate the next Congress. The AFT is working with the AFL-CIO and with other groups in a concerted effort to secure high-quality, affordable healthcare for all Americans. However, the lack of affordable, quality healthcare in America continues to grow in scope and severity. Premiums are up more than 80 percent since 2000, compared with inflation growth of 18 percent and wage growth of 20 percent. The number of uninsured has grown to nearly 47 million. This growth in uninsured is driven primarily by a decline in the share of employers offering health insurance – from 69 percent of firms in 2000 to just 61 percent in 2006. Those firms that continue to offer coverage are asking workers to bear a greater share of the cost on their own in the form of higher co-pays and deductibles. For retirees, the picture is even bleaker. The share of employers offering retiree coverage has dropped substantially, from 66 percent of all large firms in 1988 to 35 percent in 2004. Without this coverage, retirees who do not qualify for Medicare have very limited options for obtaining affordable coverage. Unless Congress acts to address the growing cost burden on employers, U.S. companies will continue to be at a competitive disadvantage in the global market.

Yet for all we spend on healthcare, there is growing evidence that compromised quality is costing us too much in lost lives and lost money. More than 100,000 Americans die each year due to avoidable medical errors, and patients have a 50-50 chance of getting the right care at the right time. And about one-third of all healthcare spending pays for poor quality care.

Unions bargain to provide health insurance for more than 40 million Americans—that is one out of every four Americans with employment-based coverage. For more than a decade, working families have lived through a vicious cycle of reduced healthcare access and higher costs. The AFL-CIO and the AFT supports measures that provide comprehensive, affordable, quality healthcare for all Americans and strongly opposes any measure that will exacerbate the problem of the uninsured and rising healthcare costs.

- ***Would you work to enact comprehensive healthcare reform that will guarantee quality, affordable healthcare for all Americans?***
 Yes No
- ***Would you support a plan modeled after an improved Medicare, with shared financing that doesn't penalize the companies that have been providing good coverage, or use an individual mandate to shift the burden to working families?***
 Yes, I would support. No, I would oppose.
- ***If elected, would you support legislation that shores up retiree health benefits by either providing help for employers for catastrophic healthcare costs or allowing 55-to 64-year-olds to buy into Medicare?***
 Yes, I would support. No, I would oppose.
- ***Until we have guaranteed coverage for all Americans, would you oppose legislation that would undermine coverage for 160 million Americans who are insured through their employer by opposing efforts to shift costs to workers through the following methods:***
1. Establishing Health Savings Accounts and high-deductible health plans?
 Yes, I would oppose. No, I would support.
 2. Imposing a cap on the amount of health benefits that are excluded from taxation?
 Yes, I would oppose. No, I would support.
 3. Allowing Association Health Plans to sell insurance that is exempt from state rules and coverage guidelines, thereby driving up premiums for most workers in small firms that already offer coverage?
 Yes, I would oppose. No, I would support.

QUESTION 2 COMMENTS:

3. VOUCHER PROPOSALS

Several versions of “school reform” proposals have been introduced around the country that call for the use of taxpayer money to support private and religious schools at the elementary and secondary school level. These proposals take many names, including:

- Vouchers – Permit the use of taxpayer dollars to send children to private, often religious, schools;
- Opportunity scholarships – Like vouchers, use taxpayer dollars to send children from low-income households to private, often religious, schools; and
- Tuition tax credits – Provide a tax deduction or credit on corporate and/or individual federal income tax returns to cover tuition for private, often religious, schools.

Voucher proponents claim that these programs will generate school competition, thereby improving student achievement. The three most notable voucher experiments, in Florida, Milwaukee and Cleveland, however, provide strong evidence that vouchers do not improve student achievement. In addition, they drain millions of dollars from the public schools.

➤ *Do you oppose the use of vouchers and/or other proposals to allow taxpayer dollars to be used at private and religious schools at the K-12 level either as a limited experiment or as a full-scale program?*

Vouchers

Yes, I oppose.

No, I support.

Opportunity scholarships

Yes, I oppose.

No, I support.

Tuition tax credits

Yes, I oppose.

No, I support.

QUESTION 3 COMMENTS:

4. ACCESS TO HIGHER EDUCATION

Until recently, a number of higher education authorization and appropriations bills reduced the purchasing power of Pell Grants while increasing federal loan programs. Some observers believe this is misguided – that we have a national interest in increasing grant aid so that low- and middle- income students can go to college without assuming excessive debt. Other observers believe it is appropriate to rely primarily on loans because the student is the major beneficiary of a college education and should pay for it.

➤ *Do you support an expansion of grant aid to students for higher education?*

Yes, I support.

No, I oppose.

QUESTION 4 COMMENTS:

5. FEDERAL INTERVENTION IN HIGHER EDUCATION

Federal law has traditionally placed strict limits on the federal role in dictating the education policies of colleges and universities. Some legislators have argued that the federal government needs to step in to stop biased professors from imposing sanctions on students who do not agree with them. Others believe that the problem of government intervention in college curriculum and teaching far outweighs any individual problems that may arise on campus.

➤ *Would you oppose legislation imposing federal control or oversight on what college professors teach and how they grade students?*

Yes, I would oppose.

No, I would support.

QUESTION 5 COMMENTS:

6. **EARLY CHILDHOOD EDUCATION**

We know from research that high-quality early childhood education programs like Head Start, preschool programs and full-day kindergarten increase the likelihood that young children – especially those born in poverty – will have the language and preliteracy foundation upon which later school success is built. Yet, too few children have access to such programs.

➤ ***Do you support a role for the federal government in facilitating and leveraging funding for universal access to noncompulsory early childhood education?***

Yes, I support.

No, I oppose.

QUESTION 6 COMMENTS:

7. **INDIVIDUALS WITH DISABILITIES EDUCATION ACT (IDEA)**

All students have a right to receive a high-quality education. Congress, however, has been shortchanging school districts that educate students with disabilities by providing just a fraction of the promised federal funding. As a result, school districts have been forced to absorb the shortfall, taking money that could otherwise be used for smaller classes, teacher pay, school building upgrades and other important efforts.

Bipartisan legislation has been introduced that would require the federal government to fully fund its share – 40 percent – of the per-pupil cost of educating children covered under IDEA.

➤ ***Do you support full mandatory federal funding for IDEA?***

Yes, I support.

No, I oppose.

QUESTION 7 COMMENTS:

8. EDUCATION FOR WELFARE RECIPIENTS

As the reauthorization of the Welfare Reform Act is considered, tens of thousands of welfare recipients have attended two-year community and technical colleges to get the education and skills they need to stay permanently off public assistance. The Welfare Reform Act of 1996 and pending legislation have placed significant restrictions on the ability of states to support welfare recipients while they complete their degrees, generally restricting students to 12 months of training.

➤ *Do you support efforts to enable welfare recipients to receive up to two years of training at the community college level?*

Yes, I support.

No, I oppose.

QUESTION 8 COMMENTS:

9. SCHOOL INFRASTRUCTURE

Legislation pending in Congress proposes a federal tax credit over five years to develop a partnership among all levels of government to repair and modernize old and unsafe schools and build new schools where necessary. The proposed tax credit would subsidize more than \$25 billion of local school construction bonds. Although this represents only a part of the necessary \$300 billion needed to fully address the deteriorating infrastructure of America's schools, the proposal addresses a portion of the crisis facing our nation's schools. For example:

- 38 percent of urban, 30 percent of rural and 29 percent of suburban schools report at least one inadequate building;
- 7 million students attend schools with safety code violations;
- Nearly 16 million children attend schools without proper heating, ventilation or air conditioning;
- 12 million children go to schools with leaky roofs; and
- 6,000 new schools are needed by 2006 to maintain current class sizes, with even more needed to provide desirable class-size reductions.

➤ *Do you support a federal tax credit as described above to aid state and local school districts to repair crumbling schools and build new schools where necessary?*

Yes, I support.

No, I oppose.

QUESTION 9 COMMENTS:

10. BLOCK GRANTS

Many proposals have been made to consolidate federal education programs into block grants under the guise of providing greater flexibility in running education programs. The AFT opposes this block granting because it often leads to funding cuts, reduced targeting on special needs populations and reduced accountability.

➤ *Do you oppose efforts to provide block grants for federal education?*

Yes, I oppose.

No, I support.

QUESTION 10 COMMENTS:

11. ALTERNATIVE SCHOOLING

Poll after poll tells us that the public expects schools to provide high-quality education for children. We know this is not possible without safe and orderly classrooms where students can concentrate on learning without constant disruptions or incidents of violence. Unfortunately, nearly 40 percent of teachers report losing a lot of instructional time to address disciplinary problems with students.

To ensure student safety, prevent disruptions and provide appropriate help to disruptive and violent students, alternative educational settings and programs need to be supported. Successful programs have indicated that providing such settings is not cheap, but it is cost effective, resulting in more effective learning in regular classrooms. The expense of providing the necessary settings is beyond the financial capacity of most school districts that are already facing extraordinary demands on their budgets. Federal assistance is necessary to provide funds for effective alternative schooling.

- ***Do you support the use of federal funds to provide quality alternative schools for children who are chronically disruptive or violent in the traditional school setting?***

Yes, I support.

No, I oppose.

QUESTION 11 COMMENTS:

12. MEDICARE

The Medicare program, providing health benefits for more than 42 million Americans, was fundamentally changed in June 2003. The major change was the addition of a prescription drug benefit program, known as Part D. AFT believes that the implementation of Part D could be improved by allowing Medicare to negotiate with pharmaceutical companies for lower drug prices – similar to what the Veterans Affairs Administration does.

- ***Would you support legislation that would repeal the provision in the Medicare law that prohibits the federal government from negotiating lower drug prices with drug companies?***

Yes, I would support.

No, I would oppose.

The cost of prescription drugs in the United States is the highest in the world. Many Americans buy their drugs from Canada, thereby lowering their average cost by 40 percent. Unfortunately, this is not allowed under existing law. There is proposed legislation that would legalize the purchase of such drugs.

- ***Would you support legislation that allows the purchasing of safe drugs from Canada and other industrialized countries?***

Yes, I would support.

No, I would oppose.

Under current law, private Medicare Advantage plans currently receive an average subsidy 12 percent higher than traditional Medicare plans. Although only one out of every five Medicare recipients are in such plans, every recipient pays an additional \$2 per month to support this subsidy. If continued, this overpayment will also bring about the insolvency of the Medicare Hospital Trust Fund two years earlier than projected.

- ***Would you support legislation that would phase out the overpayment to Medicare Advantage plans?***
 Yes, I would support. No, I would oppose.

Many have supported a nationwide prescription drug plan administered by Medicare as an option under Medicare Part D as a way to bring down drug costs. However, the 2003 Medicare law explicitly prohibits a Medicare administered plan.

- ***Would you support legislation allowing Medicare to offer such a plan?***
 Yes, I would support. No, I would oppose.

QUESTION 12 COMMENTS:

13. SAFE NURSE STAFFING

Nurses working in U.S. hospitals report they can safely care for an average of five patients at a time, but they are currently caring for an average of eight. Inadequate nurse staffing has been found to be a factor in one out of four unexpected hospital deaths and injuries caused by medical errors. More than 30 research studies have shown a relationship between the number of nurses on duty and medical errors, negative patient outcomes and even patient deaths. In addition, thousands of nurses leave hospital employment each year because of the stress that results from inadequate staffing. In a recent national survey, 82 percent of nurses agreed that legally mandated limits are the best way to protect patients.

- ***To improve patient safety and retain our nursing workforce, do you support federally mandated limits on the number of patients that can be assigned to nurses?***
 Yes, I support. No, I oppose.

QUESTION 13 COMMENTS:

QUESTION 15 COMMENTS:

16. EMPLOYEE FREE CHOICE ACT AND COLLECTIVE BARGAINING RIGHTS

We know from more than 70 years of experience with the National Labor Relations Act (NLRA) that there is one proven way to give working people freedom to make their own choice: it's called "majority sign-up." The NLRA has always allowed workers to form unions through "majority sign-up," that is, when a majority of employees sign cards authorizing the union to bargain on their behalf with management. Since 1935 majority sign-up has been shown to reduce conflict, coercion, harassment and delay, as compared to the NLRB election process. But under current law, workers can only form a union through majority sign-up if their employer agrees to recognize the union. This makes no sense. Management should not get to dictate whether workers can use majority sign-up or whether they have to go through the NLRB election process, which typically triggers an inherently coercive anti-union campaign. Workers should be allowed to form unions through majority sign-up regardless of whether management agrees, as they did in the early years of the NLRA. We know from experience that, while majority sign-up promotes employee free choice by reducing coercion and intimidation by management, it has not resulted in any significant problems over the past 70 years.

The Employee Free Choice Act, introduced by Sen. Edward Kennedy in the Senate and Rep. George Miller in the House, would require employers to honor their workers' decision to join a union after a majority of them signed a union authorization card or petition ("card check"); establishes first contract mediation and arbitration; and creates meaningful penalties against employers who interfere with, coerce or fire workers for attempting to join a union. This bill passed the House by a vote of 241-185 on March 1, 2007, but was blocked by a Senate filibuster in June, 2007 (the Senate failed to invoke cloture by a vote of 51-48 vote).

➤ ***If elected, would you cosponsor the Employee Free Choice Act legislation allowing for card-check recognition?***

Yes, I would cosponsor. No, I would not cosponsor.

➤ ***If elected, would you vote for the Employee Free Choice Act legislation allowing for card-check recognition?***

Yes, I would support.

No, I would oppose.

QUESTION 16 COMMENTS:

17. **RESPECT ACT**

The National Labor Relations Board's rulings in the cases popularly known as "Kentucky River" could mean that millions of workers who nominally oversee the work of others on an irregular or sporadic basis but do not have the authority to hire, fire, suspend, discipline or adjust the grievances of fellow employees may be classified as "supervisors." The impact of this decision is to deny the ability of nurses and other workers to fully participate in a union and to receive the protections of the National Labor Relations Act. This result is clearly contrary to the original intentions of the Act's authors.

The RESPECT Act is intended to clarify the definition of "supervisor" and preclude the need for case-by-case litigation of each individual's job duties.

- *Would you cosponsor and vote for the RESPECT Act and the restoration of rights and protections for nurses and millions of other workers who could be mis-classified as "supervisors"?*

Yes, I would support the act.

No, I would oppose the act.

QUESTION 17 COMMENTS:

18. THE BUDGET AND TAX REFORM

The federal budget deficit – even before the unexpected costs of disaster relief and the war in Iraq – could reach more than \$500 billion.

The need for infrastructure repairs, education, healthcare and other essential services will compete for scarce federal and state resources.

The possible full repeal of the federal estate tax would leave a gap of \$1 trillion over the next 10 years. With the federal government funding 30 percent of each state's budget, the full repeal of the federal estate tax will severely affect the ability of the federal government to help state governments meet the needs of their citizens.

- ***Do you oppose the full repeal of the federal estate tax that increases the federal deficit by \$1 trillion over the next 10 years?***

Yes, I oppose.

No, I support.

There are a number of federal laws and regulations that affect the collection of state taxes. One area that costs the states billions of lost sales tax revenues is their inability to collect state sales taxes on products and services that are sold over the Internet. These Internet sales are increasing dramatically each year. With cuts in federal funding, economic decline, and lower tax revenues, states have to find ways to support state-funded programs.

To remedy this situation, states have joined together to develop a streamlined sales tax collection system to collect state sales taxes on Internet sales. Twenty-two states have adopted this approach. Federal legislation to implement this new collection procedure is required because these sales occur in interstate commerce.

- ***Do you support federal legislation that would allow states which adopt a streamlined sales tax collection system to collect its state sales tax on products and services sold over the Internet?***

Yes, I support.

No, I oppose.

Federal legislation is also now being considered to establish a federal business activity tax. This new proposal would limit and proscribe the business activity that may be subject to state business taxes.

- ***Do you oppose any federal legislation that would limit a state's ability to establish its own state business income tax?***

Yes, I oppose.

No, I support.

QUESTION 18 COMMENTS:

19. OCCUPATIONAL SAFETY AND HEALTH

Currently, 8.1 million public employees (school, state, municipal, county and local employees) in 27 states have no federally certified OSHA coverage. According to at least two studies, public employees have some of the highest work-related injury and illness rates in the country. Yet these at-risk workers are not legally guaranteed safe and healthful work environments, as are employees in the private sector and public employees in 23 states. Legislation was introduced in both the House of Representatives and the Senate that would entitle all public employees the same OSHA protections and rights as all other employees in the country.

- ***Do you support legislation to extend full OSHA coverage to all public employees throughout the country?***

Yes, I support.

No, I oppose.

The National Institute for Occupational Safety and Health (NIOSH) is the only federal agency that researches the impact of work on the health and safety of American workers. This agency has seen its budget cut significantly and its position within the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention diminished.

- ***Do you support improved funding for NIOSH?***

Yes, I support.

No, I oppose.

Many children in this country are being educated in sub-standard public school buildings, say reports, including one produced by the U.S. General Accounting Office. As you may know, children have no statutory right to a safe and healthy school environment. There are also no national standards for selecting new school building sites, and schools have been built on old Superfund sites and brownfields.

- ***Do you support the argument that there is a federal role for establishing guidelines or standards for children's health and safety in school?***

Yes, I support.

No, I oppose.

QUESTION 19 COMMENTS: