

2010 UCW-CWA Candidate Questionnaire

We are United Campus Workers—Communications Workers of America (UCW-CWA). Thank you for taking the time to participate in our 2010 Candidate Questionnaire for candidates for Tennessee state legislative office.

We are made up of over 1,100 higher education staff and faculty who work for Tennessee's public colleges and universities, and are part of the Communications Workers of America, which represents over 700,000 members in the United States, Canada, and Puerto Rico.

Our mission is to advance and defend the interests of all Tennessee higher education staff and faculty, as well as promoting solidarity, democracy, and advancing social and economic justice in our workplaces and in our communities.

In these tough economic times, the threat of budget cuts and layoffs in needed public services worsens as we get closer to falling off the edge of the stimulus funding cliff. The negative impact of cuts on our students and communities has already been felt and we worry about the inability to recover from the deep cuts that have been guaranteed in 2011, unless action is taken.

We invite you to answer the following questions to help us better understand your position on the issues that are critical to Tennessee's future. This same questionnaire is being made available to all candidates running for state office in Tennessee, and the results will be made public through our website and newsletter.

If you have any questions regarding this survey, please email <mailto:fairness@ucw-cwa.org> or call 1-877-292-3865.

There are 3 ways you can take this survey. Option one is to go to our website and take it there: <http://www.ucw-cwa.org/candidatesurvey>.

Option two is to fill it out in this Microsoft Word Document, save it and give it a unique name (for instance, "RepXsurvey") and email it back to fairness@ucw-cwa.org or print off the completed survey and mail it to the address below.

Option three is to print out the survey and fill it out by hand and mail it back to us.

Our mailing address is:

UCW-CWA
PO Box 3814
Knoxville, TN 37927

Name:

Address:

Phone:

Email:

Tennessee legislative office sought:
Please include the legislative district with this submission.

Campaign Website:

Please list and explain your current occupation, your background, and any other biographical information you would like to share:

Section One- Revenue/ Spending

The demand for public services, including higher education, is at an all-time high, yet funding for those services is the lowest it's been in years, and cuts are looming. At the same time, major corporations doing business in Tennessee routinely use creative accounting practices to take their profits out of state to avoid paying taxes that fund our state services. Twenty-one states have enacted combined reporting to stop this drain on their state budgets and to level the field for locally owned small businesses.

Do you view Tennessee's budget crisis as one of revenue, spending, or both?

_____Revenue

_____Spending

_____Both

Explain:

Do you see cutting public services to reduce expenses as a better solution than increasing revenue?

_____ Yes

_____ No

Explain:

Will you support legislation to (check all that apply):

_____ Enact combined reporting

_____ Close corporate tax loopholes

_____ Eliminate the sales tax exemption for cable television providers

_____ Eliminate the sales tax cap for single-item purchases

Other:

Section Two: Living Wage

Thousands of higher-education employees earn salaries that are at or below the poverty level. There are full-time employees, many with years of service, who qualify for public assistance.

Will you take steps to bring all state and higher education workers up to a living wage?

_____ Yes

_____ No

Explain:

Below are some concrete steps that could be taken by legislators to support a living wage. Please indicate your support:

_____ Sponsor, co-sponsor, or sign legislation enacting a living wage policy

_____ Speak to the media about the importance of a living wage

_____ Support equal-dollar raises rather than percentage raises in future university and college budgets

Please list and explain other steps you would take to support a living wage:

Section Three- Employee Support

Tennessee state civil service employees have a standard, defined, grievance procedure (http://tn.gov/dohr/employees/pdf/Employee_Handbook.pdf). Employees at the public colleges and universities do not have a consistent policy, much less standard procedures.

Which of the following measures would you support to extend rights to higher education employees?

_____ Sponsor, co-sponsor, or sign legislation to extend civil service grievance protections to higher education staff (exempt and non-exempt)

_____ Sponsor, co-sponsor, or sign legislation that would allow a worker to bring a representative of his/her choice to disciplinary hearings

Please list and explain other steps you would take to support extending rights to higher education employees:

United Campus Workers works to defend the rights of individual workers who have grievances with the university. When going through university channels to effect change hasn't worked, we have turned to our allies in the Tennessee General Assembly to appeal to university officials to rectify injustices.

If asked to support an employee who has a legitimate grievance, will you:

_____ Join delegations to appeal to university administrators

_____ Make phone calls to university administrators

_____ Send letters to university administrators

_____ Speak to the media about the situation

Please list and explain other ways you would support an employee who has a legitimate grievance:

Section Four- Complete College Act

The Tennessee Legislature passed the “Complete College Tennessee Act,” in an effort to increase the number of Tennesseans who hold post-secondary degrees. This act ties both the base funding formula and performance funding to retention and graduation rates. It acknowledges: “the demand for postsecondary is at an all-time high and public resources for the enterprise... are at an all-time low.” It asserts that “[a]n operating assumption of the 2010-2015 planning cycle is that there will be few to no new state dollars with which to pursue quality enhancements,” and further, that increases in degree productivity must be generated “with available resources... with no decrease in instructional quality.” For further analysis of this act, read Dr. Tim Gaudin's critique at <https://ucw-cwa.org/critiquing-tennessees-race-top>.

Do you support linking funding to graduation rates? What concerns do you have with the possible outcomes of this legislation?

What do you see as the role of public higher education in the state of Tennessee?

What do you think should be the state's role in supporting affordable public higher education?

Section Five- Doing More With Less

State funding levels for our schools continue to decrease year after year, while students and their parents are asked to pay more and more just to keep funding for education constant. By July 2011, it will have been four years since higher education employees have seen a salary increase. Additionally, we are seeing community colleges like Pellissippi State move away from students being taught by instructors to more web-based instruction in core courses such as Math and English. Maintaining quality education at our institutions of higher learning demands the funding to do the job right.

What specific steps will you take to ensure that quality education is maintained at our public universities and colleges?

We face job losses – potentially in the hundreds – when stimulus money runs out. As outlined above, quality higher education must be paid for with strong support of students, staff, and faculty at our colleges and universities. This state, its students, and its citizens simply cannot afford to have their future shortchanged.

Do you support saving these jobs?

_____ Yes

_____ No

Explain:

If yes, what steps would you take to save these jobs?

Section Six- Outsourcing of Jobs/ Privatization

Many colleges and universities across Tennessee have privatized areas of their physical plant to private contractors who often “rehire” the displaced workers at lower pay rates, without health insurance or other benefits, and scheduled for fewer hours. In many areas there has been a decrease in the quality of work done by these contractors, including instances of U.T. Physical Plant workers having to fix work just completed by such private contractors. Additionally, many of the basic services and functions of the university, including general-education instruction, are likewise shifting away from full-time tenure-track faculty to contingent employees (“adjuncts”).

Will you oppose efforts for further privatization and outsourcing of university jobs?

_____Yes

_____No

If yes, how would you oppose efforts?

If no, why not?