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Kentucky Educators' Political Action Committee
Questionnaire for Candidates

The following are current legislative objectives of the Kentucky Education Association. Please share your thoughts regarding these objectives. Please address:

a) Your beliefs on each objective.
b) What part would you be willing to play in helping us reach these goals?
c) What you believe needs to be done in each of these areas for students and teachers?
d) How you feel these objectives fit into the overall P-12 education program as directed by the legislative process.

1. Provide appropriate funding required to advance the ambitious education reform initiative passed by the General Assembly, (additional days).

I believe that we should spend our education dollars in the classroom on teachers and learning materials, rather than on staff, administrators, bureaucrats, and complying with burdensome regulations. We should keep our overhead costs low. I also believe that teachers, staff, administrators, and bureaucrats should be working together to provide the highest-quality educational experience for our children at the lowest possible cost. Taxpayers expect both effectiveness and efficiency; and I think that this is a reasonable expectation.

Our current budget problems are due to high unemployment. High unemployment has caused the tax base to shrink and spending on social programs to increase. Where do we cut – unemployment compensation, welfare, Medicaid, KCHIP? Unemployment compensation and welfare may be needed to help feed children. Education is a luxury when basic survival is at stake.

Uncontrolled spending and mandates at the federal level put more pressure on state budgets. Some are saying that ObamaCare will hit Kentucky with a $300 billion unfunded mandate in the Medicaid program. This will increase pressure on the education budget even more. In addition, the proposed tax increases at the federal level not only will cause higher unemployment, further shrinking the tax base and making funding problems worse; but also will undercut Kentucky's ability to raise taxes because both are reaching into the same pockets, many of which already are tapped out. Some pay so much in taxes that they do not have enough left over to cover their own needs such as housing. The private-sector economy provides the money to fund government spending. Taxing and over-regulating private-sector businesses are similar to killing the goose that lays the golden eggs.

I will lead an effort to promote job creation to reduce unemployment and expand the tax base once again. This should lessen pressure on the education budget if the federal government can stay out of the economy and out of our pockets. In order to create more jobs, we must make Kentucky the most business-friendly state in the nation (we need around 600,000 more jobs, not just a few tens of thousands). This may require

more sacrifice in the near term until a sufficient number of jobs are created. Will teachers and the teachers' unions support us in this effort?

To balance the budget in the near term, I believe that we should delay construction projects, such as some roads, new buildings, and sewers; eliminate "political" spending, such as renaming roads and "earmarks" used to buy votes and reward political cronies; continue pressure to operate more efficiently; and reduce borrowing. Borrowing simply increases future years' spending unless the resulting "investment" produces a return of its own sufficient to pay the principal and interest.

I also believe that teachers, administrators, and education bureaucrats should take a close look at their current operations and propose to the Legislature changes that will result in less spending that will not adversely affect the students. Can we re-organize in such a way as to reduce the number of staff, administrators, and bureaucrats? What regulations should we change or eliminate to reduce spending?

I will support measures designed to lighten the paperwork burden placed upon teachers and school administrators. I will support less regulation and testing if we can develop an effective alternative. I will support efforts to get the federal government out of our classrooms. I will support efforts to delegate more decision-making to the school districts if it will result in lessening the burden on teachers and lead to improved student performance. I will support efforts to protect the school system from lawsuits if needed to address disciplinary problems in our classrooms. I will support parental responsibility legislation assigning parents a proper role in their children's education if it will help. I do not like "pay for performance" measures that base an individual teacher's pay on student performance because teachers have little control or influence over students' motivation and study habits. I do hold the entire education system accountable for overall student performance, however, as indicated by drop-out rates; student proficiency in reading, writing, and math; and the need for remedial education to enter college.

Regarding adding days to the school calendar, I find it hard to believe that adding 2 days, or 5 days for that matter, will improve drop-out rates or make Kentucky students more proficient in math and science. Everyone must sacrifice in the current economic environment. The key to lessening pressure on the education budget is to create more jobs to expand the tax base and reduce spending elsewhere in the budget in areas such as those listed above.

2. Provide adequate school employee compensation and working conditions to guarantee the attraction and retention of the finest teachers and support professionals.

I will support increased pay and benefits for teachers as part of a comprehensive results-oriented reform that "puts the students first" ahead of political agendas and the pursuit of power and control. We have serious problems with student performance, particularly in math and science; parents are now home-schooling because of the inadequate learning environment in our public schools; some are calling for charter schools; and Hooked-on-Phonics is a successful private-sector business. This would not be happening if our public schools were doing a good job.

I am a product of Kentucky's education system. I attended Cold Spring Elementary School and graduated from Campbell County High School in 1972. I am a professional engineer with a BS in Electrical Engineering, an MBA, and an MS in Economics from the University of Kentucky and an MS in Electrical Engineering from The Ohio State University. I have taken or attended about 30 PhD-level courses in economics, management, finance, and education at U.K.; and have been employed by Procter & Gamble and IBM.

My classrooms did not have air conditioning until I got to high school. We did not have computers or other fancy audio-visual devices – just good teachers with chalkboards. I was taught phonics in the 2nd grade and how to diagram sentences in my English classes. I did not attend pre-K or kindergarten classes. We now build large, pretty buildings; buy all sorts of fancy equipment; and continually increase teachers' pay and benefits; yet we still have serious problems with student performance. What in the world is going on in our schools?

When I was in elementary school math and science were stressed as part of President Kennedy's response to the Russians launching a man into space. This emphasis helped fuel the great technological advances in computers, miniaturization, medicine, cell phones, and other areas that we have experienced over the last 2-3 decades. We now have a new push to stress math and science. What happened? Why did we stop in the first place?

Teachers have controlled decision-making in our schools through site-based councils (SBCs) since KERA began in 1990 yet we have allowed over three-quarters of a million students to pass through the 8th grade without gaining proficiency in math skills (see Bluegrass Institute, www.bipps.org/article/php/2329) and more students entering college need to take remedial classes. We have given teachers pay and benefit increases in the past in order to "hire the best" but we still have high drop-out rates and inadequate student performance. Why have we already not "hired the best" with all of the money we spent in the past? This was an issue in the 2003 gubernatorial race, too, and teachers got raises then. This argument is beginning to wear thin.

With control comes responsibility. Teachers have controlled our schools for 20 years; and they bear the responsibility for poor performance. Teachers' unions, such as KEA and NKEA, also share in this responsibility because one of the responsibilities of unions is to provide a highly-trained, top-performing workforce. I know this from experience having worked with members of trade unions such as the International Brotherhood of Electrical Workers. Unions take responsibility for the performance of their members for good reasons. If union workers are not top-performers, then why should society pay a higher price for their labor? Monopolies in labor markets are just as bad for an economy as monopolies in product markets. How does society gain by granting the privilege of monopoly power to teachers? If society does not gain from union labor, then why should we allow unions to have monopoly power?

Learning is self-rewarding. If students were learning, then fewer would drop out. Could it be that those who drop out due to lack of interest fell behind their peers in elementary school and never caught up? Could the practice of social promotion underlie high drop-out rates? From my experience working at major corporations and smaller ones, I found that the most important skills a person needs in order to succeed are communication and analytical skills. Proficiency in reading and math are fundamental to developing these skills. Writing is important, too, but reading is more fundamental. An individual who can read can learn by himself. A certain level of proficiency in reading and math should be required before moving to the next grade.

In addition, ***no child should leave the first grade without being able to read****. Without being able to read, a child already is behind coming out of the first grade. Parental education prior to pre-school and pre-school education should be oriented toward teaching children how to read. If a child cannot read after the first grade, then he should attend summer school. Perhaps a child may not be able to read because of dyslexia. This should be identified as early as possible and addressed immediately.*

We place socialization above learning and then wonder why many of our children need remedial education in college or drop out of high school. The primary purpose of our schools is to provide an environment for learning; and we should stay focused upon achieving that objective and leave socialization to others. We can apply the mastery learning concept to reading in the first grade and to proficiency in reading and math at all other elementary grades.

At my first job after graduating with my BSEE, one of my more experienced co-workers trying to help me adapt said to me, "Throw away 90% of what you learned in college and take the remaining 10% and start over." That was a good characterization of my experience. Upon reflection, I realized that the objective of our diversified engineering curriculum was to teach us a disciplined approach to solving problems in any job rather than to prepare us for a particular job. Likewise, if our students graduate from high school with a high proficiency in reading, writing, and analysis, then they will be able to succeed in any college or university and our schools will have done a good job.

Are teachers and teachers' unions really concerned about "the children" or about themselves and power and control? Requiring that teachers be certified has the effect of reducing competition and protecting monopoly power. College professors do not have to be certified which seems to indicate that knowledge of subject matter is more important than certification. Also, uncertified college professors have to clean up the mess left by certified elementary and high school teachers through remedial classes that many students must take before entering college. Teachers have controlled the decision-making in our schools for 20 years; therefore, they bear the responsibility for outcomes.

Opposing charter schools has more to do with restricting competition and protecting monopoly power than in the quality of education. A prominent argument against charter schools is that they will drain the better students from the traditional public schools, adversely affecting the education of those left behind. Why the sudden concern? Private schools and home-schooling have been doing this for years. Is it because publicly-funded charter schools are a greater threat to the power of teachers and teachers' unions and the real issue is power and control, not the education of our children? Even President Obama supports charter schools, which seems to indicate that he, too, sees a major problem in our public schools.

Having teacher-controlled SBCs hire the school's principal is counter to good management common sense. The principal's hands are tied by this process. If teachers hire their boss, then who will hold teachers accountable? To those interested in achieving high performance outcomes this practice seems to be a bit ridiculous; but to those who place power and control first this practice is quite logical. I think that we could get better results if superintendents hired and fired principals and we either add one more parent or remove one teacher from the SBC.

While the pursuit of self-interest plays an important role in the success of our society, each of us also has a responsibility to restrain ourselves when doing so is in the best interest of society. When the pursuit of power takes precedence over achieving desirable outcomes it is time to pause and reflect and change. I suggest that teachers and their unions take to heart the following Engineers' Creed (the original source is unknown to me, but it came with my PE license):

> *As a member of an honorable and learned profession, I dedicate my professional knowledge and skill to the advancement and betterment of human welfare; to give the utmost of performance; to participate in none but honest enterprise; to live and work according to the laws of man and the highest standards of professional conduct; to place service before profit, the honor and standing of the profession before personal*

advantage, and the public welfare above all other considerations. In humility, and with the need for divine guidance, these things I pledge.

We should place service before political agendas and the pursuit of power, too.

The current performance of our public schools is unacceptable. Taxpayers spend more and more money and see little improvement in outcomes. Many feel like they simply are pumping money into a black hole. I will enthusiastically work with teachers and teachers' unions to develop and propose a results-oriented reform that "puts the students first" ahead of political agendas and the lust for power and control. The lust, or greed, for power inflicts much greater harm upon people than greed for wealth.

I trust that teachers and their unions will take my comments as constructive criticism and join us in the pursuit of excellence rather than in the pursuit of power. I urge teachers and their unions to adopt the attitude of excellence, which is "no matter how well I may have done something in the past, I can find a way to do it better the next time." Better means with greater effectiveness and more efficiency (lower cost). It is time to pursue excellence in education and improve the performance of our students. I invite you do join us in this effort. Will you accept?

3. Provide quality affordable health insurance for our public school employees and retirees.

The keys to providing affordable health insurance are to reduce the cost of health care itself, reduce the operating costs of insurance companies, reduce the amount of "free care" paid through prices, and reduce "cost-shifting" to private-sector insurance companies from the government by having Medicare and Medicaid pay their fair share of the costs. See The Freedom Plan for Health Care Finance Reform on www.rogerthoney.com for more information.

We can reduce the cost of providing health care by reforming medical tort laws, having insurance companies deal with the patients rather than medical providers, and reducing taxes paid by medical providers. The cost of malpractice litigation goes beyond malpractice insurance premiums because the resulting legal environment has led to the practice of defensive medicine. Medical providers take pro-active measures in preparation for defending a possible lawsuit. These actions can take the form of ordering tests "just to be sure" or performing surgical or other procedures "to eliminate any doubt." If medical providers were to rely upon their experience and use judgment, they risk losing a very expensive lawsuit.

Having insurance companies reimburse patients rather than paying medical providers will reduce the cost of providing health care by reducing the administrative burden on medical providers. It also will establish a "market price" that can be used to prevent cost-shifting from underpayment by Medicare and Medicaid. Profit and payroll taxes are passed along to us as higher prices, so reducing them also will reduce the cost of providing health care.

Health insurance companies must maintain certain capital ratios in order to be considered "sound." This requirement is met primarily through after-tax profit. The greater the amount of claims paid, the greater the required capital base, and the greater the required after-tax profit. The greater the profit taxes, the greater the before-tax profit needed to meet the after-tax profit requirement. In addition, employer-paid payroll taxes increase the operating costs of insurance companies. Reducing the required capital ratio and taxes on insurance companies will reduce the cost of providing health insurance, helping to make health insurance premiums more affordable.

Those without health insurance get the health care they need. If they cannot pay for it themselves, then we pay for it through higher health insurance premiums and higher taxes because medical providers cover their costs by charging higher prices to those who do pay. While expanding Medicaid eligibility will help reduce the amount of free care paid through prices and help reduce health insurance premiums, the medical credit card program proposed in The Freedom Plan for Health Care Finance Reform will be better for education. Increasing Medicaid spending will put more pressure on the education budget because it increases the burden placed upon taxpayers who finance both education and Medicaid; whereas, the medical credit card program is financed by the banking system until a person dies.

Effective solutions to our economic problems exist; but are obscured by those who place political ideology, political agendas, and the pursuit of power ahead of solving problems faced by the people of the world. It is time that the good people of the world step forward and demand that the needs of the people be placed first ahead of political battles over power and control. The intent of the Jefferson Republican faction (see www.rogerthoney.com) is to infuse the principle of "putting the people first ahead of self and party" into American politics. Will Kentucky's teachers and teachers' unions join us in this effort? Are you willing to place health insurance affordability ahead of political ideology, political agendas, and the pursuit of power?