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NEVADA STATE EDUCATION ASSOCIATION
2010 CANDIDATE QUESTIONNAIRE
GOVERNOR

Your responses to the following questions are of great importance to the 28,000 members of the Nevada State Education Association. Please answer all questions as completely as possible.

1. What do you believe is the purpose of public education in Nevada and what part can the Governor play in fulfilling that purpose?

Nevada needs to provide an education system that piques our children's curiosity, helps them discover their interests, exposes them to arts and culture, and gives them the confidence they need to succeed. The purpose of public education in Nevada is to produce creative, thoughtful and productive Nevadans who contribute to the new economy we must build here. To create this new Nevada economy we need a well-educated workforce. Our focus, then, should initially be to make sure all students learn basic reading, writing and math skills in the early grades, and maintain those skills through middle school and into high school. We must also provide the type of innovation and creative thinking that will prepare today's students to become leaders in the 21st Century

I want to do more than just improve public education in Nevada. As governor, I want to make Nevada a leader in education. The governor should be the education leader in the state and should propose initiatives to the Nevada Legislature and the Nevada Board of Education that improve the overall quality of our education system and the funding to support it. The governor should seek to meld our education system with our overall goals to diversify and strengthen Nevada's economy, emphasizing programs and curricula that give our students the opportunity to fill the well-paying jobs of the future.

2. Do you believe Nevada's revenue structure is broad and stable enough to provide the revenue necessary to fulfill the purpose of Nevada's public education system as you see it? If not, what is your proposed solution and how would you demonstrate this solution as a priority in your administration?

Nevada's revenue structure is antiquated and too highly dependent on industries that are no longer experiencing the same growth as they have in the past. We need to re-examine our revenue structure with an eye to making it fit the robust economy we are seeking to develop in other sectors, such as broadband and data storage, renewable energy, and transportation. An interim subcommittee of the Legislature's Interim Finance Committee will be conducting a comprehensive review of Nevada's revenue structure, which will be completed in mid-2010 and make recommendations on how we can broaden and stabilize our revenue system.

I will give those recommendations strong consideration when I propose a budget to the 2011 Legislature.

3. Do you believe there is a connection between salaries and having highly qualified educators in our schools?

Absolutely. We cannot attract and retain the best teachers by paying them less than they could earn in other states. We need to determine what those salary levels are on a national basis, taking into account other benefits and cost of living, and offer new teachers salary and benefit packages that are competitive with other states.

4. Do you believe it's the responsibility of the Nevada Governor to create a budget that provides sufficient funding to increase the salaries of K-12 public education employees?

The governor needs to make sure the Distributive School Account is sufficiently funded to allow local school districts to pay teachers the competitive salaries needed to attract and retain the best teachers.

5. Do you believe it is the responsibility of the Nevada Governor to create a budget that offsets the impact of increases in the health care costs for both active and retired K-12 employees?

Benefit packages should reflect the true cost of health care for both active and retired K-12 employees, and we should honor our commitment to present and former teachers to keep public employee benefit plans solvent and able to weather changes in health care costs.

6. What is your position on the federal Elementary and Secondary Education Act currently referred to as No Child Left Behind-and its reliance on a single test score to measure student achievement?

We rely too much on testing as a measure of student achievement and teacher performance. The problem with No Child Left Behind is, not only does it rely on single test, it also hasn't been accompanied by adequate federal resources to help local school districts teach what students need to know to meet testing requirements. In a broader sense, though, I want to see Nevada's K-12 system improved from the early grades forward so our students are capable of passing any proficiency test, and I will work to leverage as much federal funding as possible to match our state commitment to K-12 education.

7. Would you support any legislation that would allow teacher evaluations to be tied to students' standardized test scores?

There are better ways to evaluate a teacher than standardized test scores. I believe teachers should be evaluated on the progress of their students, but that must take into account where students started out in their classrooms and how they finished the school year. There are many factors affecting student achievement, including demographics and language barriers, which are not fairly reflected in standardized testing. A good teacher can have a positive impact on a student that does not show up in a test score.

8. Would you support a bill to require professional incentives -- such as working in an at-risk school and enhanced compensation programs -- to be made available to all educators and bargained at the local level?

Yes. I have talked to teachers in at-risk schools and there is no question that they are asked to do more with less. I believe the state should provide the framework for incentive packages and ensure funding is sufficient to meet them. Local bargaining should take into account the state support that will be available to meet these incentive packages. That should be part of our overall look at reforms needed in our education system in the 2011 legislative session.

9. What is your position on school voucher programs?

I do not favor public funds being expended to support private schools. That detracts from per pupil spending available to our public schools.

10. What is your position on class size reduction for all grade levels and all subject areas?

One of our goals in reforming our education system should be to achieve smaller classes at all grade levels. Too many of our middle school and high school classes have more than 30 students per teacher, and this is not conducive to a good learning experience, especially when we have so many students lagging in their learning when they get to these grades who need more individual attention.

11. Statewide we have more than \$450 million in deferred maintenance in our public schools and facilities. What is your position on providing state funding for maintenance and repairs of these buildings?

I believe we need to maintain our public schools so we provide a good learning environment for our children. This should be a shared state and local responsibility, and I would entertain proposals for long-term bonding with a dedicated revenue source to maintain our schools. I also believe that the private sector should be asked to participate in partnerships with the public sector that will improve and maintain schools.

12. What is your position on the privatization of jobs that are currently held by school district employees?

I do not see any necessity for privatizing jobs currently held by school district employees.

13. Would you support any legislation that would seek to diminish the benefits of the Nevada Public Employees Retirement System?

We need to make sure PERS remains solvent and able to provide benefits to retirees in decades to come. I will not support any legislation that diminishes the benefits of retirees, but we need to make sure contributions to the system by active employees are adequate to support their future retirements.

14. Would you support any legislation that would alter the intent of Initiative Petition 1 of the 2009 Session?

No. Voters in Clark and Washoe counties spoke on this issue of dedicating more room tax revenues to education, and I support that choice and the decision of the 2009 Legislature to include those revenues in our education budget.

15. Do you believe Nevada's friendly tax climate is the main reason corporations choose to relocate to our state?

I believe it is one factor, but I think a more important factor is the quality of our education system – which is why I support improving our K-12 education system as a way of inducing more of the kind of businesses we want to locate in Nevada.

16. How will you utilize communication channels when handling issues that affect the Nevada State Education Association and its goals?

I want to maintain an open and constructive line of communication with NSEA, consulting with their organization as I develop and propose initiatives aimed at improving K-12 education. A hallmark of my administration will be to build consensus on the direction of our state, and you cannot do that without bringing to the table the people who will be affected by what you want to propose.