A stark contrast between candidates on educational issues

November is your chance to elect friends of public education

Canditates for the top two statewide elected offices provide a stark contrast in their proposals for how best to educate Texans.

Texas AFT’s endorsees—Democratic state senators Wendy Davis (for governor) and Leticia Van de Putte (for lieutenant governor)—have long championed public education by fighting cuts in funding, advocating the restoration of funding, promoting universal pre-K and reining in the misuse of standardized testing. Their opponents have a long record of opposition to that agenda.

For a more detailed look at where the candidates stand on the issues, along with key election dates, see page 4.

See “Election” on page 4

Workplace bullying policy approved in Houston after local union push

A lengthy campaign by Houston Educational Support Personnel (HESP) yielded what’s believed to be the state’s first policy against workplace bullying in a school district, after the Houston ISD School Board unanimously approved the policy in August.

HESP President Wretha Thomas and her team in the AFT Leadership Education and Development (LEAD) program held town hall meetings on the issue, distributed member surveys to assess the extent of workplace bullying, and took their proposal through the consultation process.

The final language was added to the district’s policies on standards of conduct and employee welfare, and the process for addressing violations will follow the existing harassment policy.

HISD’s representative from the Human Resources Department expressed pride at passing the policy, noting that HISD is a “trailblazer” in this arena.

Houston ISD employees now will be better equipped to handle problems with their bosses and coworkers.

See “Workplace” on page 3
Your opportunity to decide who’s going to fight for you

In my column and in my conversations with fellow union members, I have reported to you year after year about our school funding cuts and jobs that have been lost and outsourced to private companies because school boards think they can save money. And I have recounted how jobs are lost to attrition because district administrators were asked to cut costs in their departments by up to 20 percent.

We have shared each other’s pain on poor working conditions and times when we’ve been overwhelmed trying to do the job of two or three people.

Now it’s time to have the most important conversation. Brothers and Sisters, it’s time we take a stand and make our voices and vote count. I worked the registration table at our annual San Antonio Central Labor Council’s Labor Day Breakfast, and I also had the opportunity to hear two great women speak—Sen. Wendy Davis (candidate for governor) and Sen. Leticia Van De Putte (candidate for lieutenant governor). Let me tell you, was I pumped up!

If you have not had the chance, please review the amazing agendas for Texas children and education on both these great leaders’ Web sites. And if you view their opponents’ positions, I do believe that you’ll see a stark difference in the two camps’ view on education. (See page 4 for a comparison).

In the governor’s race, there is no question in my mind that Senator Davis will have all our support in November, as she and Van de Putte have been endorsed officially by Texas AFT.

Davis’s ideas for education are all about what we live and work for as school employees. For example, she proposes having a stronger pipeline for teaching excellence by hiring more new teachers and increasing educator pay. (Please note: Increasing teachers’ pay at the state level leaves more funding in the local school district budgets to adequately fund support personnel jobs and cover the cost of a living wage.) And just as Davis fought to stop funding cuts in 2011 and restore a good portion of the cuts in 2013, she can be counted on to fight for adequate and equitable funding for our schools.

Her opponent, Attorney General Greg Abbott, talks about wanting to make Texas the nation’s leader in education, but he continues to defend the indefensible—a school finance lawsuit by 600 districts over the $5.4 billion in public education cuts in 2011. A recent ruling by District Judge John Dietz went against the state in the lawsuit, but Abbott plans to appeal that decision.

Set the example for your families, coworkers and communities by educating yourself about the issues, registering to vote (if you haven’t done so already) and taking a stand for true friends of public education.

Please do not let another opportunity go by to help decide the future of our state; take your civic responsibility seriously. Your vote does matter, and it does count. As support professionals we are the support to the system, we are the pillars of the communities we live and work in, and we are looked up to and respected when we fight for our rights and work together.

Quoting Wendy Davis, from the Labor Day breakfast: “On Election Day ask yourself, who’s going to fight for me and my family.” In response I say to you, Wendy will, she will fight for me and my family.

So, let’s get out the vote, and let’s fight too.

We make schools WORK
Texas AFT Paraprofessionals and School-Related Personnel

There are hundreds of thousands of paraprofessionals and support personnel across the great state of Texas. They share a pride in their work and our schools, but their students are always first in their minds and hearts.

Find out more about PSRPs and the vital role they play on the school team by downloading Texas AFT’s brochure, “We Make Schools Work,” at www.texasaft.org > News > Publications & Reports. (Printed copies also are available. To order, call 800-222-3827.)

Support Report

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Additionally, the union has requested training for employees on the policy.

HESP’s efforts also were intended to spur changes statewide with the adoption of workplace bullying policies in other districts across the state.

“HESP has done a tremendous job of gathering research, taking employee feedback and garnering support with school board members to get a workplace bullying policy in place,” said Texas AFT President Linda Bridges. “Our intent is for other local unions and school districts across the state to follow in their footsteps and create a better working environment—and thus a better learning environment for students.”

HESP President Wretha Thomas noted that the policy is another example of successful collaboration between unions and school districts. “We responded to a problem, did our homework, involved our members and then worked with district officials to set some clear expectations for workplace behavior,” she said. “This is a win-win for everyone.”

Back to School means backpacks!

Above, Nikki Cowart, president of Cy-Fair AFT, presents a new backpack to a child at the August 23 back-to-school rally co-sponsored by the union. Pictured top right distributing backpacks is Donnie Riggs from Alief AFT. At right, handing out T-shirts are Pamela Davis-Duck Ben Brinkman of Cy-Fair AFT.

Download the Texas AFT app!

Want to receive instant notice when there’s an Action Alert on issues that affect you as school employees? Need quick access to the Legislative Hotline, Texas Teacher, PSRP Report and breaking news? Download the Texas AFT app for iPhones, iPads and Droid devices at iTunes or Google Play.
Texas AFT has endorsed State Sen. Wendy Davis for governor.

On the issues that matter for schoolchildren, education employees, and working families, Davis is right, and her opponent, Attorney General Greg Abbott, is dead wrong.

School Funding
Davis has fought to block the cuts and restore and increase school funding. She also was a key player behind the increase in state contributions to your pension fund.

Davis would use increased state funding to expand educational services, increase education employees’ pay, and restore worthy programs like college scholarships for educational aides studying to become teachers.

Abbott as attorney general has defended the cuts. Abbott’s party platform declares its goal is to cut education funding at all levels, from preschool through college. Abbott proposes to save money by expanding online instruction.

Pre-K
Davis wants every child to have access to full-day pre-K.

Abbott wants it only for some, on a pilot basis, pretending we don’t already know it will work. And he thinks it would be appropriate to use state standardized tests to gauge success—for preschoolers! Wendy Davis thinks that’s totally inappropriate.

Private-School Vouchers
Davis staunchly opposes vouchers. Abbott supports “choice” (code for vouchers and charters).

Privatization by other means
Davis wants to strengthen neighborhood public schools, not tear them down or turn them over to private operators. She opposes contracting out of support services based on faulty cost-benefit analysis.

Abbott touts online learning, with fewer teachers and more students parked in front of computers, as the model of “efficient” education. We call it the “stack ’em deep and teach ’em cheap” model. All the benefit would go to low-quality private operators like K12, Inc., harming struggling students who most need individualized attention from a real, live teacher.

Abbott also has praised the “home rule” push to “charterize” and hand over Dallas schools to private operators.

Health-care funding
Davis thinks it is nuts for Texas to reject $100 billion from the federal government to help pay for health-care insurance for working Texans who cannot afford it on their own.

Abbott is so blinded by hatred of the federal Affordable Care Act that he opposes taking the money.

Equal pay
Davis supports equal pay for equal work and effective legal remedies for pay discrimination against women.

Abbott sides with employers against these principles and vows to veto an equal-pay bill, just as Gov. Perry did. Davis was the Senate sponsor of that equal-pay bill, and she plans to sign it as governor!

Employee rights
Davis fought on our side against the

Continued on page 5
2011 law that eroded protections against unfair termination of educators. Abbott has fought to reduce employee rights, issuing an attorney general opinion attacking your right to a voluntary payroll deduction for your union’s separate, non-dues political fund. He also has pushed legislation to hinder union representation of police and firefighters.

**Consumer rights**
Davis has led the fight to limit predatory lending that victimizes unwary consumers and leaves them with huge interest payments, many times the original value of the loan, that they can hardly every pay off.

Abbott defends the predatory lenders and takes their money for his campaign.

**Health and safety**
Davis thinks you should have the right to know when dangerous chemicals like the ammonium nitrate that blew up and killed people in West, Texas, are stored near your home, your business, or your neighborhood school.

Abbott says chemical-storage facilities should be able to keep that information out of the public record and suggests you just “drive around” and ask for the information if you’re concerned. No kidding, that is what he said. And yes, he takes campaign money from the chemical-storage industry, too.

**Testing**
Davis wants to put state achievement tests back in their proper place. She was an author of the legislation, blocked by Gov. Perry, that would have prohibited the misuse of state tests for purposes such as teacher evaluation.

Abbott, as his pre-K policy makes plain, is allied with the testing industry.

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**Lt. Governor’s Race: Leticia Van de Putte and Dan Patrick**

The choice for lieutenant governor is even a stronger contrast than the governor’s race. It’s important, because whoever holds this office controls the flow of legislation in the Texas Senate.

Texas AFT has endorsed State Sen. Leticia Van de Putte, who has been a strong champion for public education.

Her opponent, State Sen. Dan Patrick, has led the charge to privatize public schools, voted to cut school funding in 2011, and voted against restoring funding in 2013. Van de Putte would use the powerful seat as head of the Senate to help advance our agenda.

Patrick has been the leading voice in the Texas Senate pushing various versions of private-school vouchers. With Patrick as lieutenant governor, it would be very difficult if not impossible to keep voucher legislation from passing in the Senate. He also has pushed legislation to greatly expand charter schools and make it easier to convert neighborhood public schools into charter schools.

Leticia Van de Putte has been one of public education’s strongest allies on the Senate Education Committee for more than 14 years. She staunchly opposes vouchers, fought budget cuts to education, and has developed an agenda to scale back testing and end its misuse.

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**Important Dates for November 4 General Election**

- **Last day to register to vote:** October 6
- **Early Voting:** October 20 to October 31
- **Last day to apply for ballot by mail (received, not postmarked):** October 24
  - Note: Federal Post Card Application deadline for service members and citizens outside the United States is October 28.
- **General Election:** Tuesday, November 4

**Web sites for information**

- State of Texas: [www.votetexas.gov](http://www.votetexas.gov)
- Candidates’ Web sites: [www.wendydavistexas.com](http://www.wendydavistexas.com)  
  [www.gregabbott.com](http://www.gregabbott.com)  
  [www.leticiavandeputte.com](http://www.leticiavandeputte.com)  
  [www.danpatrick.org](http://www.danpatrick.org)

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**On the issues…**

- **School funding adequacy/equity**
  - Van de Putte: Right
  - Patrick: Wrong

- **Pre-K expansion**
  - Van de Putte: Right
  - Patrick: Wrong

- **Curbing misuse of testing**
  - Van de Putte: Right
  - Patrick: Wrong

- **Employee rights**
  - Van de Putte: Right
  - Patrick: Wrong

- **Health-Care funding**
  - Van de Putte: Right
  - Patrick: Wrong

- **Vouchers and privatization**
  - Van de Putte: Right
  - Patrick: Wrong
Each year, new hires join our school teams. As support professionals in the union, we have the opportunity to welcome these new employees and make a positive first impression. Let’s give these great ideas a try:

- Identify new school support employees as right away. Check for new hires at the beginning of each school year and periodically throughout the year.

- Introduce new hires to your union as soon as possible. Invite them to a social event or a rally at the school board. Share this magazine with them!

- Be a “First Friend/ Best Friend,” mentoring new employees in the policies and procedures at your school or workplace, and the variety of ways your union can help them get acclimated and become successful on the job (e.g., by providing information on helpful resources, professional development programs, Legislative Hotlines, mentor and buddy systems, support groups and social activities).

- Connect the issues and concerns of new and recent hires with the union’s issues advocacy agenda. Show them how we can make a difference in our profession.

All union members start as new employees, so making them feel welcome is important to ensure they stay involved. How will you introduce new employees to your union this year?