

Service Employees International Union

CT STATE COUNCIL



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2010 STATE COMPTROLLER QUESTIONNAIRE

DUE: FRIDAY, JUNE 11

PLEASE ALSO INCLUDE A SHORT BIO AND A HEADSHOT PHOTO OF CANDIDATE SEEKING OUR ENDORSEMENT.

Name: Kevin Lembo

Address: 800 Village Walk, #168, Guilford, CT 06437

Office Seeking: Comptroller

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ABOUT YOU AND YOUR CAMPAIGN

- 1. Why are you the best candidate and what are your qualifications for the office you are seeking?**

More than any other candidate, I bring the experience necessary to begin work immediately for the people of Connecticut. I have a demonstrated record as the Healthcare Advocate, and previously as an Assistant State Comptroller, of protecting the public interest, holding institutions and government accountable, speaking clearly and honestly -- even when it is unpopular, and building coalitions to get the job done.

- 2. What will be your top 3 priorities/actions if elected?**

Greater transparency and civic engagement in matters of public finances; continue efforts to reform health care financing and delivery systems; and, building greater efficiency and accountability in government operation.

- 3. Why are you seeking our endorsement?**

To continue our collaborative work on behalf of the people of CT.

4. Do you support Connecticut's Citizen Election program? If you do will you fight to ensure it remains strong and vibrant?

I do support the CEP. I am running as a clean elections candidate, and will work to improve the Program and ensure its future success.

WORKERS RIGHTS

5. What is your position on workers' right to form a union? What role, if any, do you think the Comptroller should play in local organizing efforts? Will you publicly support the right of workers to organize a union and sign the attached statement of principles for public officials?

I support the right of workers to form a union free of intimidation and interference. The Comptroller can use the bully pulpit of a statewide elected official to remind people of the benefits of unions and their historical place in growing the middle-class. Additionally, the Comptroller can help to ensure that preference is given in state contracting to companies that would not/do not oppose the right of their employees to organize/maintain a union.

6. You are running for statewide office. How have you advocated for workers? What positions have you taken regarding workers rights, wages, and working conditions? Have you supported workers' struggles? Which ones?

My most significant contribution has been using my position as Healthcare Advocate to comment on, and influence, potential changes in benefits for workers (e.g., movement from traditional health coverage to HSAs), and pointing out the impact of these changes using academic literature to support my argument. As an Assistance Comptroller, I participated in numerous activities with the Comptroller in support of newly organized/organizing units, and in support of striking workers. While not exhaustive, I have participated in strategic meetings, rallies and other activities for: "Justice for Janitors", the Graduate Assistants at Yale, various groups of para-professionals in educational environments. Additionally, working to ensure the availability of quality and affordable health care for the people of CT directly supports the struggle of working families.

PUBLIC SERVICES, NEGOTIATIONS & STATE RETIREE BENEFITS

7. During an economic recession the State is asking workers to do more with less. How would you work with the front line workers and unions to save the state money and to preserve jobs?

As ever, the front-line staff knows what works and what doesn't. As an agency head, it will be my responsibility to open lines of communication with all employees of OSC and engage them in a process of thinking through the duties of the office and ways to perform more efficiently. However, there will likely be existing and emerging responsibilities that require additional people power. I will not be shy in identifying those areas and advocating for the appropriate resourcing. Additionally, employees of the agency must be empowered to do the best job they can; given broader and clearly defined authority and autonomy to make decisions without fear of reprisal; and, develop an understanding of the expectations for both outcomes and performance.

8. It is our understanding that the CORE-CT as part of the PeopleSoft program will be orphaned by Oracle in 2012. **How will you address what may be an obsolete payroll and human resource program?**

It is not clear to me that the program will be orphaned in 2012, but rather that an upgrade may be necessary. While there is disagreement about the PeopleSoft product and the selection process, significant time and resource have already been expended on the effort. An analysis of the cost of an upgrade versus another strategy should be undertaken. Conversation with all stakeholders should begin as soon as possible.

9. **How would you interact with SEBAC, and do you see areas of disagreement with them?**

The Comptroller has a great deal of on-going interaction with SEBAC, and it is vital that a positive and open working relationship is maintained. I do not have any areas of significant disagreement with SEBAC.

10. **If you could change the state and retiree health insurance program, what changes would you make?**

I would work to maximize health, wellness and disease-management strategies, and also look for ways to leverage the purchasing power of the program for the benefit new constituencies.

11. **What is your position on a defined benefit retirement plan versus a defined contribution plan?**

I see defined contribution programs as higher cost and lower performing.

12. **What is your position on retiree health insurance as it is currently provided for active and retired state employees?**

Connecticut has made a commitment to its retired workers, and that commitment must be kept.

13. State governments are facing other retirement-related issues as well as the problem of funding pensions. The Government Accounting Standards Board (GASB) has established new guidelines that require governments to account for their "other post employment pension" (OPEB) obligations. **What ideas do you have for reducing the OPEB liability for retiree health insurance?**

I am following the conversation on the idea of a trust fund v. pay/go. The new federal resources available for covering pre-Medicare retirees may help in the short term. Incentiving wellness may help with this population.

14. **What role do you think the Comptroller's office should play in expanding health care to the citizen's of Connecticut?**

Connecticut should lead in the management of health care for our employees and retirees. The Comptroller must lead that effort. The state should also consolidate health care purchasing under OSC. Finally, the office will play a central role in any new Sustinet plan.

15. More than 10,000 state retirees are waiting for the pension benefits to be finalized by the Retirement Division, **what ideas to you have to reduce this backlog?**

This process must continue on the path to automation and standardization. In addition, cost and inconvenience of such a backlog should be weighed against the resources that will be necessary to clear those files. If elected, this will be a priority of my tenure as Comptroller.

16. It is clear that the Comptroller's office is understaffed for serving nearly 200,000 lives under the health care insurance program and 100,000 active and retired state employees under the pension system, **what technology and staff do you believe is necessary to properly do the job?**

Again, this is an analysis and conversation that must begin immediately in a new administration. While I will have my own opinions after speaking with stakeholders, it is the front line employees who will have the most relevant and current ideas about necessary improvements. If it is determined that additional people are necessary to do the job, I will advocate for those new resources.

17. What position will you take if a new Governor proposes an Early Retirement Program?

I am generally not a fan of early retirement programs, but also understand that this is a long utilized mechanism to, seemingly, reduce staff costs. My concerns with ERIPs are the cost in retiree health, the question of real savings, and the brain drain – as skilled employees exit our workforce with little or no succession planning in place.

HEALTH CARE & HEALTH INSURANCE

18. **Do you believe Connecticut should have a universal health care system?** Sustinet with its bi-partisan taskforce was passed in 2009 and tasked with developing specific recommendations to move Connecticut towards universal and sustainable health care. **How likely are you to support its recommendations? Do you support the concept of pooling, allowing municipalities, non-profits and small businesses the opportunity to join the State employees' health plan?**

I do believe Connecticut should have a universal health care system. As co-chair of Sustinet we are working on one piece of that strategy. I do not see a situation where I would not support the Board's recommendations. I do support pooling and the work that must accompany that proposal to make it an affordable and meaningful option for municipalities, non-profits and small businesses.

19. The Constitutional officers have a state wide platform to take positions on issues of importance. **Would you support paid sick day legislation that allows workers in larger workplaces (50 or more employees) to earn up to a maximum of 5 paid sick days to be used during any 1 year period?**

I do and have supported the paid sick days legislation.

Signature _____

Date June 11, 2010

STATEMENT OF PRINCIPLES FOR PUBLIC OFFICIALS
The Freedom to Form a Union

As an elected official or candidate for office, I am committed to making our community a better place to live and work. I believe that unions contribute to the economic vitality of our country by playing a key role in making and maintaining good quality jobs that are essential to creating and sustaining thriving communities.

I respect the right of every working person to pursue equality, opportunity, a voice on the job and a better life by forming a union. I understand that the decision to join together in a union belongs exclusively to employees, not their employers. I believe that employers who use tactics that interfere with, harass, threaten, or fire workers for trying to form a union – or who deliberately manipulate the legal system to prevent or delay organizing – are harming not only their employees, but our entire community.

- I fully support the principle that all workers are entitled to form a union and bargain collectively in an environment free of interference, intimidation, coercion, harassment reprisals or delay.

- I will publicly support workers who are forming unions by reaffirming the importance of unions to our communities and by taking actions, such as issuing public statements, attending organizing rallies, sponsoring public forums, and the like.

- I will urge employers to respect their employees' right to form a union, to remain neutral during union organizing campaigns, to voluntarily recognize a union when a majority of their employees choose to form one, and to bargain in good faith and reach an agreement.

Name (print): Kevin Lembo

Signed: _____

Office Held/Sought: Comptroller

Date: June 11, 2010