

# Service Employees International Union

CT STATE COUNCIL



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## **2010 SECRETARY OF STATE QUESTIONNAIRE**

**DUE: FRIDAY, JUNE 11**

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

Name Denise W. Merrill

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Office Seeking Secretary of the State

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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? I am seeking the Office of Secretary of the State, and believe I am the best candidate because I have a deep commitment to civic engagement and a record as a State legislator of fighting for greater access to voting, open and transparent government and clean elections. As a candidate, I am participating in the Citizen Election Program and believe it is making a tremendous contribution to a fairer election system. As Co-chair of the GAE committee I co-sponsored one of the first Clean Election bills and also won passage of legislation to require civic education in school curriculum.

In addition, I worked at the Secretary of State's Office and established the Consortium for Law and Citizenship that is still a robust program focusing on promoting civic engagement. I have always wanted to be Secretary of the State and believe deeply in its purpose of safeguarding our election process.

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

My top three priorities include: ensuring and expanding access to voting through innovation, such as early voting; increased investment in modern technology to make it

easier to register on line and perform other functions; protect and fight for the Citizen Election Program.

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

I am seeking SEIU endorsement because of my long term partnership with the union throughout my career and our shared democratic values of open and transparent government. Together we have worked on many issues including the right to organize, the right to collective bargaining; the right to medical and sick leave and other issues important to working families. The support of the union is very important to me personally and I have always been honored to have your support for my career in public service

**4. What have you done to support the Connecticut's Citizen Election program? What specific changes would you make to the program to improve it?**

As a legislator, I fought for and led on the passage of the Citizen Election Program. I believe it is one of the most important accomplishments of my life in public service. In response to the current Connecticut Supreme Court decision, I am actively working with my colleagues to correct the portion of our law that was deemed unconstitutional. Specifically dealing with infringement on a "rich" person's right to freedom of speech. The current law allows a participant to receive additional funds if the opponent is spending his or her own money creating a disadvantage for the clean election candidate. My amendment would remove that provision and replace it with other types of triggers that are not related to the opponents own personal expenditures. My firm hope is that the Connecticut law will stand firm and not negatively impact the current election cycle- that would be a difficult hurdle to overcome this late in the election cycle.

## **WORKERS RIGHTS**

**4. What is your position on workers' right to form a union? What role, if any, do you think the Secretary of State 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 am proud of my pro union record and believe strongly in the right of workers to unionize and seek better working wages and working conditions. Yes, I have in the past and will continue to openly support the right of workers to organize and proudly sign on to the statement of principles. As Secretary of the State I believe I can partner with unions and other state organizations to engage the public in a dialogue about the rights of working people and how

the labor movement in this country is the main reason for our standard of living and quality of life. It is a living lesson in how democracy works and why voting matters.

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

As stated, I am proud of my long standing relationship with unions in Connecticut and have supported and led on major legislation protecting worker rights to organize, better wages, collective bargaining rights and most recently stood by 1199 in their strike against the nursing home administration in five cities and joined AFSCME in their fight against the Red Cross.

Also, I walked along side janitors in their fight for justice and engaged in civil disobedience. As Majority leader, we fought for health care for workers in big box stores like Wal-Mart and fought to maintain unemployment compensation. I have always supported binding arbitration and maintaining the prevailing wage system in construction.

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?**

I believe the number one issue facing Connecticut is jobs. As Majority leader, I helped preserve state jobs and worked to maintain funding to the towns and cities that directly impacts town budgets and employment choices. The recently passed budget reflects those values and against strong opposition from the Governor and a growing anti-spending rebellion from the public, we held steadfast to our values to fight for working people. As Secretary of the State I will work with the Legislature to preserve state jobs and continue to move toward innovation and new technology- not privatization.

## **VOTER REGISTRATION & PARTICIPATION**

8. The Secretary of State is responsible for keeping and maintaining the voter file. Currently, the voter file does not always contain up-to-date voter information/history from every municipality. **What specifically would you do to insure that the voter file is constantly updated with the latest information from every municipality in Connecticut?**

Connecticut has an antiquated voter file system. Quite frankly, the legislature would have to require towns and cities to participate in the electronic filing system. This is very difficult in the present "anti mandate" climate. But, that said, I think I have the skills and experience to bring people around the table to discuss moving forward and how best to implement the system.

9. There are tens of thousands of unregistered voters in Connecticut. **What is your plan to raise registration levels, especially in the urban areas?**

I believe a lot more can be done on this front, and indeed believe it is one of the reasons I am running for Secretary of the State. My vision for the Office includes expanding the role of local registrars of voters to include more public education and voter outreach. Particularly, I see a role for the Office to work with educators and youth to promote civic engagement and the importance of getting involved, not just voting. I think we were all inspired in the Obama election to see 250,000 new voters in Connecticut. The challenge is to keep citizens involved and inspired. I will make this a priority of the Office. I will actively expand the work I started many years ago with the Consortium for Law and Citizenry that is still housed at the Secretary of State's Office

10. **What is your plan to increase voter turnout and participation?**

As stated, I take seriously the role of the Office in promoting civic involvement and participation. My plan includes the following: public outreach and education; making it easier to vote in a very mobile and changing society through use of technology and other innovations; partnerships with civic minded organizations to actively teach and do public education on the why of voting, not just the how and when. I think one of my strengths is my experience and ability to communicate and bring diverse groups around the table to make voting a major public issue.

11. Many voters vote by absentee ballot, but many others are intimidated by the form that must be filled out. That form requires a voter to state why they need to vote by absentee ballot. **Do you support changing the absentee ballot process to make it easier to vote by absentee ballot? What are your plans to overcome obstacles to its implementation?**

My goal is to make voting as easy as possible! I will explore practical ways to make the process easier and work with local officials and interested parties to develop a comprehensive approach. Many of these reforms will require changes to our Constitution. I believe I have the experience and knowledge and credibility to lead the fight for substantive election reform in Connecticut.

12. **Do you support election-day registration? What are your plans to overcome obstacles to its implementation?**

I am open to the idea of same day registration, but we do not have the technology or statewide up to date voter file to make it practical at this time. I will make it part of the comprehensive approach that is needed to institute many of these types of reforms. I believe change comes when we can demonstrate that the change will benefit Connecticut citizens and I will work with all parties to build a consensus on the direction Connecticut should go in.

**13. Do you support an early voting process including a possible mail ballot? How would you implement it? What are your plans to overcome obstacles to its implementation?**

I believe Connecticut would benefit from an early voting system in today's highly mobile society. It needs to be done in a deliberative fashion as the other reforms outlined. It will be part of a comprehensive approach to modernizing the election system in Connecticut.

**HEALTH CARE & HEALTH INSURANCE**

**14. 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?**

As Majority Leader, I am proud of the leadership of the Democratic Caucus in winning passage of the Sustinet Legislation, establishing the blueprint for universal healthcare in Connecticut. I wholeheartedly support the recommendations of the plan and will work with the Legislature as Secretary of the State to implement and promote it, especially with the business community. I have supported and led on the important public policy issue of access to affordable health care and support expansion of the state pool and other strategies to achieve this goal.

**15. 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?**

Yes, I support this legislation and voted for it in the House. As Secretary of the State, I will engage the public in a dialogue about this issue and other issues related to improving the lives of working families.

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): Denise W. Merrill

Signed: \_\_\_\_\_

Office Held/Sought: Secretary of the State

Date: June 11, 2010

