



The Advocate

AFT-Lone Star Endorses the Bond

On Saturday, October 11, 2014, the AFT- Lone Star College Executive Board voted to endorse the 2014 Lone Star College Bond referendum. Before this bond election occurs, Chancellor Steve Head and others have taken the time to meet with AFT officers to share with us the plans and rationale for this 2014 referendum. This was in marked contrast to the former administration's lack of communication on the previous, failed, 2012 referendum. After a healthy discussion of legitimate concerns about the bond, AFT-Lone Star's Executive Board decided to endorse the bond. This article provides a summary of the process behind our decision.

We are aware of several questions and concerns that members have raised about this bond. A primary concern arises from what appears to have happened after the 2008 bond passed. Inadequate funding was set aside in the planning to assure we would have enough maintenance workers, IT staff, faculty, and other personnel to support the new facilities. We built it and they did come, but our staff, which was already spread very thin, had to cover even more ground. As the representative of many LSCS employees, AFT is keenly aware of the negative impact on the morale and well-being, as well as productivity and efficiency of all of our employees when they are overworked.

Of deep concern to us is that the faculty and staff, those who are most intimately aware of what we need to serve our students, should be included in specific planning of construction projects,

right down to the selection of chairs and tables. Because of our varied perspectives and experiences, we can provide valuable feedback on concerns such as whether an entrance is truly user-friendly for the disabled and whether a student on crutches can navigate a space as it is designed. Some issues are location-specific, such as the prairie wetlands preserve at LSC-CyFair. When the campus was opened, employees there understood that the prairie wetlands at the site would be permanently preserved. Some are now worried that the proposed new building will destroy the last of the prairie wetlands. In addition to losing an important part of the area's ecosystem and natural history, LSC-CyFair would be in danger of losing its award-winning designation for participation in the Katy Prairie Restoration project. Employees at many of the centers are especially worried about adding more space to facilities where security and safety personnel are already stretched too thin. Finally, some members question the need for more building so soon after completion of the last round of bond projects.

Keenly interested in AFT's concerns and questions, Dr. Head invited three AFT officers to a meeting about the current LSCS bond on September 23. Alan Hall, John Burghduff, and Jim Good attended the meeting. We welcomed the invitation as a positive step in the improvement of relations between AFT-Lone Star College and LSCS leadership. Link Alander (Chief Information Officer) and Ray Laughter (Vice Chancellor of External Affairs)

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presented data as we all engaged in detailed discussion of the referendum.

All of us were impressed by the extensive research presented on space utilization. If this sort of research had been undertaken before the failed 2012 bond referendum, we never saw it. Dr. Head began by noting that LSCS's enrollment increased another 7 percent this fall, the largest increase among Texas community colleges, most of which saw enrollments drop.

Next, Alander explained that the classroom utilization study was based on class caps. For example, for pedagogical reasons, a writing class might be capped at 25 students and nursing classes, to be accredited, are capped at 10 students. Although the room might have 35 seats, it makes more sense to base usage data on the class cap rather than the number of seats in the room. Measuring room utilization can be tricky. With classes of different lengths beginning at many times during the semester and with certain courses requiring particular spaces, it is essentially impossible to assure that every space is used 100% of the time. Also, many students are not able to attend classes at certain times. With these constraints, as one walks around campus, one can think that more space is available than actually is. Dr. Head then pointed out that, at the current rate of growth, LSCS has enough space for—at most—two years' worth of growth. From the utilization study, the administration concluded that from 8:00 a.m. to noon, LSCS classrooms are at 92-97% capacity; from noon to 5:00 p.m., capacity is 85%; and from 5:00 p.m. to 10:00 p.m., capacity is at 79%.

LSCS now offers over 12,000 sections per long semester. Of the classes we offered this fall, 95 percent had enough enrollment to make. The college system has experienced 50% enrollment growth since 2007. Credit enrollment is currently 82,818, with an additional non-credit enrollment of 12-13,000. Although we may not see that same rate of growth, demographic projections for our service area indicate that we can expect steady growth for the foreseeable future. The population of the LSCS service area has grown by 176,000 residents since 2010 and is expected to grow by an additional 242,000 residents by 2019.

Currently, 25% of high school seniors who graduate in our area go on to attend Lone Star College. With 78% of Texas college students attending community colleges and university tuitions continuing to rise, this percentage could grow. In addition, as we continue to expand our Honors College, Phi Theta Kappa, and international edu-

cation programs, Lone Star will increasingly become the college of choice for area students. Also, area industries are coming to us to develop programs to train the workers they need now.

Because available space is filling up fast and it is very reasonable to expect that growth will continue, the executive board of the AFT voted to endorse this bond.

An additional consideration for this endorsement is that construction costs have increased 20% in the last two years and are projected to rise by 6%-10% per year over the next several years because of major construction projects underway throughout the northern Houston metropolitan area. This bond is asking for \$12 million less than the previous bond but, because of how construction costs have increased in the meantime, will realize less value for the money. The proposed bond includes a contingency fund to cover unexpected cost increases and construction surprises. Making decisions to move ahead with construction now can save greater expense later.

Projections about population and enrollment growth and increases in costs are not guaranteed. Dr. Head and Vice Chancellor Laughter emphasized that a bond grants the college spending authority, not a commitment to spend. The construction projects in the bond are planned to be phased-in over a period of time and can be rescheduled, scaled down, or canceled if situations change.

The phasing-in of projects has another benefit, according to Dr. Head. Bringing in the projects over time allows us to build the necessary personnel so that the facilities are adequately staffed when they open. To his credit, Dr. Head has already announced a plan to achieve a 50% full-time/50% part-time faculty balance within the next six years. He also has committed to increase support staff, showing that he shares the concerns employees have expressed about being over-extended. By state law, bond money can only be used for capital improvements. Staffing has to be covered out of the regular budget. At present, 23% of our budget comes from the state in the form of contact-hour reimbursements (more student contact hours = more state funding). Another 34% of our funding comes from student tuition and fees (more students = more student-based funding). The demand is already there. If we build it, they will come, and we will be able to staff it. With more students comes more funding that can be used to address the full-time/part-time balance, as well as other spending priorities.



The AFT members who met with Dr. Head asked him specifically how complete the construction planning is at this point. He and Vice Chancellor Laughter emphasized that the bond sets broad parameters and that the details of what those buildings look like and will have in them remains open to input from employees. We hope that this will give employees an opportunity to express the concerns we have heard. Serious consideration of employee input could result in greatly improved plans that could get the college the space we need without causing some of the problems that worry us, such as the loss of prairie wetlands at LSC-CyFair. The AFT will be watching carefully to make certain that open communication takes place and that concerns are seriously addressed in the final plans.

The specific projects proposed by the bond can be found online at www.lonestar.edu/Election/bond-2014.htm. We encourage all employees to read this proposal carefully. The majority of the projects are for increased instructional space. Particularly emphasized is space for workforce programs because the demand for graduates with AAS degrees and certificates is growing at an especially high rate. Increased instructional space necessitates other construction for such things as parking, IT infrastructure, and safety and security.

For all the reasons described above, the executive board of AFT-Lone Star College has voted to endorse the bond. If the bond passes in November, we urge Dr. Head to take the concerns we have listed very seriously and to engage employees actively in the detailed planning of the new construction.

Lone Star College Trustee Election

As you probably already know, the Lone Star College System has created nine single-member trustee districts to give local communities within the larger college system a greater voice in the affairs of the institution. This replaces the previous at-large system whereby voters throughout the entire college district elected each trustee. On November 4, candidates will be elected in Districts 3, 4, and 9. You can only vote for one of those candidates if you live in their district (see the map at: <http://lonestar.edu/departments/webservices/LSC-Single-member-district-map.pdf>).

The AFT Lone Star Committee on Political Education (COPE) went to work immediately after the last election,

seeking out and vetting candidates to run in the new single-member districts. We are very pleased with the results. The COPE recommended three candidates to the AFT Lone Star Executive Board, which voted to endorse all three candidates and donate funds to their campaigns.

ART MURILO Committee members began meeting with Art Murillo in June and were immediately impressed by his roots in the local community in District 4, his support for education, and his commitment to transparency, due process, and fair treatment of all employees. Mr. Murillo worked as a staffer for State Representative Kevin Bailey (the first president of AFT Lone Star) from 1991 through 1995. Bailey's District 140 corresponds closely with LSC District 4. Murillo has served on the Aldine ISD School Board (2004-2006), and currently works as Senior Community Outreach Representative for the Metropolitan Transit Authority of Harris County. The AFT Executive Board voted to endorse Mr. Murillo and donate funds to his campaign on August 4.

ALTON SMITH Committee members began meeting in July with Alton Smith, who was already interested in running for the District 3 trustee position. We are impressed with Mr. Smith's life story and public service. He was raised in poverty in rural Louisiana by parents whose opportunity to go to school was limited. He was the first in his family to attend college, graduating from Southern University in Louisiana in 1968. After a successful career in employee relations at Shell Oil Company (1968-1998), Mr. Smith began a second career in education, earning an Ed.D. from Sam Houston State University in 2003 and working in Klein ISD as a teacher and administrator (1998-2011). After retiring from that career, he was elected to the Aldine ISD School Board (2005-present) and currently teaches EDUC 1300 classes at Lone Star College-North Harris as an adjunct professor. We believe Mr. Smith understands our students and employees well. The AFT Executive Board voted to endorse Mr. Smith and donate funds to his campaign on August 25.

DOM BONGIORNI In District 9, the COPE selected Dom Bongiorno, retired LSC-Kingwood Speech Professor (1996-2012) and Faculty Senate President. Prior to his career at LSC, Bongiorno served in the U.S. Army for 20 years, rising to the rank of lieutenant colonel. Bongiorno holds an MA in Speech and a Doctorate in Education. He is a hard-working candidate, speaking at community events, block walking, and distributing mail-outs and campaign signs. We believe he will bring that same level



of energy to the LSC Board if he is elected. In his campaign, Dom has spoken out for greater transparency with the community, increased support for workforce education, and fair treatment of employees. The AFT Executive Board voted to endorse Mr. Bongiorno and donate funds to his campaign on September 2.

Much to our surprise, when the filing period ended on August 18, 2014, at 5:00 p.m., both Murillo and Smith were unopposed. We are delighted to know that they will take their seats on the LSC Board in the December Board Meeting. Bongiorno faces two opponents in District 9: Ken Lloyd, retired from General Electric; and Lamar Casparis, a CPA with Fitts Roberts and Company.

Early voting for the November 4th election begins October 20 and continues through October 31. The AFT recommends that you vote early because it's more convenient and takes less time than voting on Election Day. Additionally, if there are any problems with your registration or ID (an address change, a lapsed or missing registration, a wrong form of ID, etc.), voting early can make you aware of the problem in time to resolve it. During the early voting period, you may vote at any early voting location in the county where you are registered. If you wait until Election Day to vote, you may only vote at the precinct where you are registered. Please encourage your family, friends, neighbors, and colleagues to vote early as well.

For information about early voting locations and hours of operation, go online:

Harris County: <http://www.harrisvotes.com/EarlyVoting/EarlyVotingLocationsSchedule.pdf>

Montgomery County: <http://www.mctx.org/election/>



The High-Fives Corner

A new breeze seems to be blowing from the System Office. It whispers of “servant leadership,” transparency, and collaboration. As we transition from one leadership style to another, we will experience many changes. Just as we can’t please all of the people all of the time, we won’t all like all of the changes. There is one student, however, who may be completely unaware of the changes occurring but became the beneficiary of them. That student’s story is the impetus for this “High-Fives Corner.”

Navigating the intricacies of college life, this Deaf student was confronted with delayed financial aid. The delay led to the student’s receiving an eviction notice. An employee in the campus’ Office of Disability Services, who is also an AFT member, notified AFT President Alan Hall of the situation. Alan in turn contacted Dr. Head. Although Dr. Head was on a well-deserved, though brief, vacation with his family, he contacted Helen Clougherty, Special Assistant to the Chancellor. On Dr. Head’s authority and with Ms. Clougherty’s dedication to duty, a check was ready for the student by the end of the day.

That’s what I call a student success action. It also exemplifies the best of what we can do when AFT and administration work together to resolve problem. We know that too many of our students are one financial crisis away from dropping out. This time, instead of a hurricane or tornado wreaking havoc on a student’s life, a fresh breeze from the System Office rescued one. What’s more, I didn’t hear about this because someone trumpeted it from on high. No, they quietly did what they knew to be the right thing. I heard about it through the grapevine and confirmed the story myself. High Fives to the campus employee, Alan Hall, Dr. Head, and Helen Clougherty!

Linda Good

Trustee, District 7