

DEA 2010 Utah State House of Representatives
Candidate Questionnaire

Name: Christopher S. Williams
District: 14
Street Address: 1085 W. 150 South
City: Clearfield
Zip: 84015
Phone: 801-660-8919 (cell); 801-825-6982 (home)
Email: williamswins@gmail.com
Website: williamswins.com

1) I currently serve as the Community Relations Director of the Davis School District and can no longer remain in lockstep with those in power — specifically the Utah Republican Party — as they continue to not adequately fund public education and divert more and more money to other “needs” such as roads and corporate tax breaks. More moderation needs to exist within the halls of the Capitol, and the only party that seems to allow any moderation is the state Democratic Party. I also believe legislators need to look more to the future and not just at the end of the legislative session. For those and a host of other reasons, I have chosen to run as a Democrat seeking to serve people in District 14.

2) Public schools in Utah are not adequately funded, and considering the culture in the state prides itself in being family-oriented, one may wonder why schools receive less money per pupil than any other state in the nation.

The easy excuse is that Utahns have the largest families in the nation, and for that reason, it can't certainly fund public education that way it would like to.

However, that excuse falls flat. During the last legislative session, for instance, Utah lawmakers didn't even find money in which to educate new students coming into the system. Granted, economic times are difficult, but the economic future of the state is tied to its education system.

There are four main points:

- Rather than not pay for the education of roughly 1,000 new students coming into the Davis School District this coming fall — which will require the district to hire as many as 32 additional teachers at a cost of \$2.3 million — I will insist my fellow legislators stand with me and at least find funds to educate newcomers at the same rate existing students are funded.

- Rather than continuing to siphon \$250 million to \$761 million per year from the state's Education Fund to help meet higher education and transportation costs, the state needs to cap the amount of money that is diverted from K-12 funding. Public education must have a dedicated revenue stream in which to rely on or the future of the state is in jeopardy.

- Sales tax exemptions and corporate property tax breaks have also cost Utah public schools \$60 million to \$90 million a year. Since 1981, the number of exemptions in the Utah tax code have gone from 11 to 68 — a more than 600 percent increase. 13 years ago, natural resource companies paid 17 percent of Utah's total property tax. In 2006-07, they paid only 8.7 percent. Points like these have to be raised and

communicated. It will be a hard nut to crack, but without continued education on the matter, the nut won't be cracked and the legislature will not enact change.

- The state legislature must enact equalized funding so that students across the state receive the same funding for their education. Why did the legislature take (\$15.3 million) from non-charter public schools and give \$14.5 million to charter public schools? This must stop.

3) If another voucher or tuition tax credit bill were introduced in the legislature, I would oppose the effort.

That being said, my heart goes out to parents who believe — after being in the public education system and not being convinced that their special needs child is being adequately served — that they should pull their child out of the system and then pay the costs of private school. If the current system is not serving their needs, they should go elsewhere.

However, until the public education system is adequately funded, my thought is that money should not be diverted to sources outside the system. To expect continued success from an institution that continues to not be adequately funded is not logical. It is like the farmer who kills the golden goose because he's convinced doing so is the quick way to become rich.

4) If I was considering becoming a pilot and was continually told the airline industry was broken and beyond repair, I'd choose another profession.

One of the on-going challenges we face in public education is the continued diatribe in the national media that public schools are failing and that bad teachers run the roost. That diatribe has continued since the 1983 release of "A Nation At Risk," and the continued attempts by business leaders to want to use a business model to solve the woes of public education does nothing but breed discontent for the profession in general.

Those within public education circles not only don't have money to sway public opinion in huge public relations campaigns, but also don't do an adequate job encouraging students to consider education as a profession.

That being said, is it the role of government to retain quality educators in Utah? Surely, adequate funding is part of the answer, and as a legislator, I will do my best to make certain public education is adequately funded. However, public education employers must also strive to have staff development programs through which they can attract and retain quality educators. Money is only part of the solution.

5) Any employer who wants to attract bright, young talent must have the resources it needs to attract new teachers. Unfortunately, because of budget cuts in Utah, many districts have been forced to cut their mentoring programs.

Research shows that the vast majority of teachers who leave the profession leave within the first five years of employment. Certainly, legislators should do what they can to earmark monies for teacher mentoring programs to exist. School districts, however, must also be responsible to make certain new teachers are not left with worn-out equipment, as well as not overloaded with extra preps and extra assignments that veteran teachers could be able to shoulder.

6) The legislature made progress. However, I was one of many who signed the ethics initiative, went door-to-door to collect signatures and recruited others to collect signatures as well. As a legislator, I would not use campaign contributions for my personal use and would join other legislators to call for a limit to corporate contributions. Sitting legislators should also not be able to be registered lobbyists.

7) If the overall performance of the legislature were adequate, I would not be running for office. That, in itself, should speak volumes. Those in leadership on Utah's Capitol Hill should live up to public expectations, be willing to police themselves and not allow derogatory terms — such as “educrats” to describe educators and “evil” to describe Democrats — to continue to fill local airwaves on a weekly basis. Polarization of all issues does nothing to foster a desire for either political party to work together.