ILLINOIS FEDERATION OF TEACHERS 2018 PRIMARY ELECTION GUIDE

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Thank you to all the local and council leaders who came to Peoria in January for the 2018 IFT Presidents’ Conference! It was terrific to see so many of you, along with our AFT colleagues from around the Midwest, as we worked together to build upon our ongoing efforts to engage members, prepare for a negative decision in the Janus case, and gear up for Election 2018.

Through a series of workshops and presentations on union-building, effective contract campaigns, professional development, reaching new members, and developing strong worksite structures, one thing was crystal clear: IFT leaders are fired up and ready to go! Those who want to stifle the voice of working people don’t know what they’re up against.

As AFT Secretary-Treasurer Lorretta Johnson said, we can look at the challenges ahead as threats, or as an opportunity to grow our unions stronger through meaningful conversations and connections with one another. After learning how other state unions have succeeded and hearing our own local leaders detail their work on the ground, I’m confident that’s exactly what is happening.

We have big goals, but I know they’re achievable. I know we’re in a strong position to elect a pro-labor governor and state legislature. I know we will do more than survive the challenges ahead - we’ll thrive right through them. And I know that we’re fulfilling the IFT’s vision - to fight powerfully for a strong union and the future we all deserve. I look forward to continuing our work together.

The Illinois State Board of Education (ISBE) makes policy decisions for our state’s PreK-12 schools that directly affect our students and classrooms. The nine members of that powerful board — and the State Superintendent of Education, who heads ISBE — are appointed by Governor Rauner.

WHY IT MATTERS
It’s simple. By wielding the power to appoint ISBE members — as well as the members of the Illinois Board of Higher Education, the Illinois Labor Relations Board, many policy-making groups, and more — Rauner’s pro-charter school, anti-union agenda is setting the direction for Illinois’ public schools. And it shows.

EDUCATORS ARE BEING SILENCED
Since Rauner took office, there has been a serious disconnect between the decision-makers and those who do the actual work in our schools. Rauner’s ISBE and the State Superintendent claim they want educator input and support public education, but their actions tell a different story. In fact, ISBE has made numerous policy changes that have weakened standards and hurt public schools. Consider this:

1. Rauner has dramatically changed the makeup of ISBE. Teachers and administrators on the board have been replaced with business executives who lack knowledge of schools and the staff who work in them.
2. Since Rauner took office in 2015, ISBE has initiated multiple changes to licensure. The constant change in requirements creates chaos and instability, weakens content standards, and discredits the teaching profession.
3. Teachers called for the state’s Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA) plan to minimize testing and increase support for struggling schools. Instead, Rauner’s ISBE ignored ESSA’s opportunity for change and advocated for a state plan that looks nearly identical to No Child Left Behind. The plan focuses on shaming and punishing teachers and schools that don’t make the grade and gives little weight to systemic inequities.
4. Rauner’s ISBE limits teacher and PSRP input and experience. By scheduling meetings during the school day and failing to provide resources for substitute teachers and travel stipends, it is nearly impossible for educators to attend. When educators can participate, the voices of school reformers and other non-educator “experts” take precedence and drive ISBE’s decision-making.
5. Rauner’s ISBE has pushed to eliminate mandates, including successfully getting rid of daily physical education and allowing schools to more easily contract out driver education.
6. When the State Educator Preparation and Licensure Board (SEPLB) (which consists of practicing teachers and university faculty) recommended denying teacher preparation program approvals to for-profit, non-CAEP accredited programs such as American Intercontinental University and Relay Graduate Schools, Rauner’s ISBE unanimously overturned SEPLB’s decision.

WHAT CAN WE DO ABOUT IT?
We must elect a new governor in 2018. Only then can we change the trajectory of our state and ensure that our voices are heard once again at the State Board of Education and beyond.
Q: What (or who) inspired you to run for office?

JB: For more than 20 years, I’ve been a national advocate for early childhood education, including organizing the White House Summit on Early Childhood Education for President Obama in 2014. I strongly believe that every child deserves a quality education so they have the tools they need to build a better life. For too long our public education system has suffered from systemic disinvestment, and that has only been exacerbated by Bruce Rauner and his attack on public education. I’m running for governor so we can pass a progressive income tax, reverse that systemic disinvestment, and invest in public education.

Juliana: As a woman of color and the daughter and sister of Chicago Teachers Union members, I know how important it is to ensure policy is made by and for me, not done to me. That has led me to be a lifelong advocate for the progressive values I care about, especially reforming our criminal justice system. Running for office is another way for me to stand up and fight for what I believe in.

Q: What qualifies you to be a great leader?

JB: I’ve spent my life fighting for fundamental progressive values and getting big things done for Illinois families and communities. I’ve been a national advocate for early childhood education, I helped fight discrimination and bigotry as the chair of the Illinois Human Rights Commission, and I founded 1871, an anti-profit tech incubator that has helped create 7,000 jobs.

Juliana: As a professional mediator, I know how to unite people and get things done. I’ve run my own small business for more than 20 years, bringing people together to create fair workplaces for everyone. And as Director of the Center for Public Safety and Justice at UIC, I trained law enforcement on building trust in the communities they serve. I know my history of unifying people to fight for what’s right will allow me to help JB move our state forward.

Q: The Constitution and the Supreme Court have made it very clear that a pension is a promise, yet politicians from both sides of the aisle keep trying to rob us of our benefits to solve a problem we didn’t cause. How will you approach the pension funding issue and protect our retirement security?

JB and Juliana: We believe it’s a moral obligation to live up to the commitments made to our public servants who have been promised pensions. Poor management of our pension liabilities by both parties has put our pension systems at risk. We will partner with the labor movement to create a fair budget that meets our pension obligations. One major priority will be passing a progressive income tax, so those who can afford to pay more do.

Q: What is your position on collective bargaining and other rights important to working women and men?

JB and Juliana: We support full collective bargaining rights. Throughout this campaign, we have stood shoulder to shoulder with workers exercising those rights and striking because of unfair wages, benefits, and working conditions. If elected, we will protect the rights of workers from attacks, stand up for working families, and strongly support the labor movement.

Q: Do you believe we adequately fund Illinois’ schools? If not, what is your plan to ensure our students have what they need to succeed in both K-12 and higher education?

JB and Juliana: We need to provide a quality public education to every child in Illinois. Our best economic resources are our people, but Illinois is nearly last in the nation in state funding for public education. If elected, one priority will be ensuring that all kids in Illinois get the quality public education they deserve. That means reversing Rauner’s massive disinvestment from higher education to ensure our colleges and universities are fully funded, repealing Rauner’s back-door voucher program and placing a moratorium on charter schools, and increasing state investments in public education.

Q: How will you address concerns about high-stakes teacher evaluations and overtesting students?

JB and Juliana: No Child Left Behind and the “school reform” movement promised to improve learning, but instead resulted in overtesting, drastically reduced instructional time, and assessments used to rank, sort, and punish schools that most need our support. We believe nothing is more important than the quality of our children’s learning experience. If elected, we will bring the IFT and other stakeholders to the table to design education policy that aligns with the goal of improving citizenship readiness.

Q: Finally, what kind of Illinois do you want for your children? Describe your vision for the future we all deserve.

JB and Juliana: It will take years to clean up Bruce Rauner’s mess. Rauner’s fiscal mismanagement and manufactured two-year budget crisis blocked critical investment in education, human services, and economic development, especially in some of our most economically challenged communities. But our financial challenges won’t prevent us from making progress creating good-paying jobs, expanding healthcare for Illinois’ families, and guaranteeing every child gets a good public education. With support from IFT members, I know we can move our state forward, put Springfield back on the side of working families, and build an economy that works for every community in Illinois.
IFT members know that there’s a lot at stake in the 2018 election. That is why it’s critical that our union supports candidates who will stand up for workers’ rights, protect employee pensions, and invest in the public education and services that benefit all Illinoisans.

In the March 20th Primary Election, the decisions about which candidates our union is endorsing were not made lightly, and they were not made from the “top down.”

In fact, the work started from the ground up. The IFT and our local unions worked harder than ever over the last few months to ensure every member had the opportunity to have a voice in these important decisions. From a statewide membership poll to local membership surveys to candidate forums hosted by locals, our union reached out on many fronts to learn how members believe things are going under Governor Rauner and better understand where they stand on the issues.

A record number of members also participated in the IFT’s democratic Political Action Committee (PAC) process for the Primary Election. As compared to 2016, attendance at the 17 Regional PAC meetings increased by an amazing 600 percent. During these December and January meetings throughout the state, PACs conducted interviews and reviewed voting records, position papers, questionnaires, and other information about candidates for the Illinois legislature and Congress. Regional PACs then forwarded their endorsement recommendations to the Statewide PAC, which met in late January to finalize a list of endorsements before sending it to the IFT’s elected Executive Board for approval in early February.

The complete list of IFT endorsements for the 2018 Primary Election is on the next page. Tear it out and take it with you to the polls, or print it from the IFT website.

Members make the difference in candidate endorsements
VOTE

VOTER REGISTRATION
Standard registration closes 27 days prior to an election. In-person registration is available through Election Day at select sites.

EARLY VOTING
Ends Monday, March 19

ELECTION DAY
Tuesday, March 20

VOLUNTEER OPPORTUNITIES
Contact your local union office to find campaign volunteer opportunities in your area.

VISIT IFT-AFT.ORG/VOTE FOR MORE INFORMATION.

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pledge to vote!
Use the #iftvotes Facebook frame to let everyone know that you have pledged to vote on March 20th!