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Q&A

Get to know Tony Thurmond

MEET THE CFT-ENDORSED CANDIDATE FOR STATE SUPERINTENDENT OF PUBLIC INSTRUCTION

In a race important to all educators, the CFT has endorsed Assemblymember Tony Thurmond for state Superintendent of Public Instruction. CFT President Josh Pechthalt said Thurmond, a former social worker, has demonstrated “time and again he is a champion of public education. His policy positions solidly align him with the needs of students, parents and educators.”

California Teacher asked Thurmond about his positions on education issues ranging from early childhood to higher education.

Why are you running for Superintendent of Public Instruction?

I am passionate about improving public schools because it was my public school education that prepared me for a 20-year career as a social worker and inspired me to serve on the West Contra Costa Unified School District Board, the Richmond City Council,

and now in the California Assembly. It’s time to make our public education system among the greatest in the nation, and I won’t stop until we get there.

What would be your top three priorities as SPI?

- 1) Opposing Donald Trump and Betsy DeVos’s anti-public education policies and creating an education rainy day fund to protect against any future Trump cuts;
- 2) Attracting and retaining qualified teachers by providing them with affordable housing, recruitment bonuses, scholarships, and higher wages;
- 3) Preparing California students for the jobs being created by our fast-growing 21st century economy.

Do you support expanding early childhood education?

The research clearly shows that the first five years of life are critical in making sure our children reach their full potential. However, as many as 170,000 California children did not attend preschool last year and will suffer the associated consequences.

This is unacceptable. I've increased funding for early education as an Assemblymember and I will continue prioritizing investment in early education as SPI.

Do you have a proposal to increase funding for early childhood education?

This year, I introduced AB 43, a tax on private prisons that would shift \$450 million from our criminal justice system to early education and after-school programs. I also authored AB 435, which allows counties to use all state funds allocated for early learning and care, guaranteeing that families in need receive these critical services.

As SPI, I will work tirelessly to make sure all children receive high-quality early childhood education. My work in education and social services showed me the impact that early education has on our kids, and that's why I've made it my priority in the Assembly.

What is your position on charter schools?

I believe that charter schools should be required to follow the same guidelines as other public entities for disclosing how public money is being spent. In the Assembly, I co-authored legislation

that bans for-profit charter schools and I voted for legislation that increases accountability of charter schools.

Charter schools should be authorized by local districts, because they have to host the charter and provide the services that the students and the charter will need — they are much better suited for this than the county or state.

Do you believe charter schools should be more transparent and accountable?

Yes. In the Assembly, I've supported several bills that increase accountability and transparency for charter schools, including the enforcement of the Brown Act on public charter school boards and the upholding of

credentialing standards for charter school teachers. I voted to eliminate discriminatory preference in charter school admissions. I believe that charter schools must be measured through the same lens as public schools, follow the same guidelines, and be held publicly accountable.

Do you oppose vouchers for sending children to private schools?

Yes.

What is your position on using student test scores to evaluate teachers?

My career as a social worker has provided me a unique perspective into the lives of California youth. I understand the hardships



Assemblymember Tony Thurmond meets with CFT members who are his constituents during Lobby Day last year.

STEVE YEATER

Who is the billionaires' choice?

FIVE PEOPLE ARE VYING for the position of State Superintendent of Public Instruction, but Thurmond's main opposition comes from Marshall Tuck — the candidate voters rejected four years ago in favor of former teacher Tom Torlakson.

In 2014, Diane Ravitch called Tuck "the candidate of the power elite, the billionaires who cynically employ fake rhetoric about 'it's all for the kids,' when their real goal is to demonize teachers and invest in technology." She

added, "They have zero commitment to public education as a civic responsibility."

Tuck, a former Wall Street banker and president of Green Dot Charter Schools, largely ignores issues of economic inequality and poverty, and their impact on the classroom. He supports the so-called "education reform" agenda that says schools should be run like businesses, and he is backed by anti-union billionaires who will likely flood the state with ads.



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youth face at home and in life, and how those challenges can follow them into the classroom.

Teachers can't control these factors and very often must go beyond teaching to the test to give these kids the education they need. That's why I support more comprehensive approaches to evaluating teacher performance. Student test scores can be a valuable part of state and local continuous improvement systems, but should not be the sole basis for judging teacher performance.

Do you support bringing nurses and mental health professionals back into our schools?

In the Assembly, I'm working to expand school-based health, mental health, and social service programs to remove the barriers that impede the ability of many of our students to learn.

As SPI, what would you do to support classified employees?

As chair of the Assembly Labor Committee, I've fought for living wages, fair work rules, and family leave for all workers. My bill AB 670 has extended classified employee status to part-time playground workers.

As superintendent, I'll keep fighting so that classified employees can feel safe doing their jobs and providing for their families. I will ensure the classified voice is present in all relevant decision-making processes.

Should community college be free to all who wish to attend?

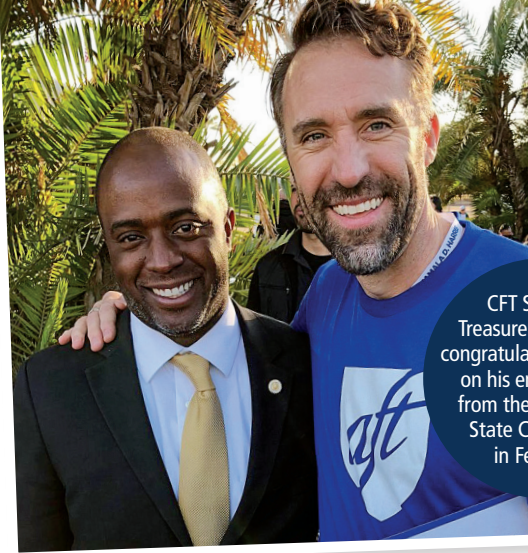
Yes. In 2015, I worked to create a pay-it-forward system, allowing college students to attend at no cost and then begin to repay after graduation according to their job and ability to pay. I'm interested in continuing to work on this and other strategies to make college more affordable.

Do you support giving part-time community college faculty pro rata pay and benefits?

Yes.

How have you supported career and technical education?

In 2015, I co-authored a bill to expand CTE. I currently serve on the Assembly Select Committee on Career and Technical Education and chair the Assembly Select Committee on STEM Education. One of my highest priorities will be to modernize our



CFT Secretary and Treasurer Jeff Freitas congratulates Thurmond on his endorsement from the Democrats State Convention in February.

education system to prepare our students for the jobs of the future by creating internship programs with tech companies, placing tech mentors in schools, and modernizing curricula to include tech.

What do you see as the role of adult education?

We need to ensure every student, regardless of age, has the resources to succeed in our economy. Adult education helps parents to be engaged in their children's learning experience while also supporting their own personal development. Over the years, I have supported increasing funding for adult education.

As the SPI, what kind of working relationship would you seek to have with the CFT?

I will work closely with the CFT, because I know that improving our public education system is incumbent on ensuring that teachers and classified staff have the support they need to give our kids a great education, and I will ensure that we model at the state level highly collaborative working relationships.

How do you compare your qualifications to those of the other candidates?

The most important difference that separates me from the other candidates is my 12 years of education experience. I have run afterschool programs and taught life skills and career training. I have served as an elected local school board member.

In the Assembly, I fought for money to ensure youth in foster care have the opportunity to go to college, and to increase funding for early education. I passed laws to increase accountability for charter schools and ban for-profit charter schools, to provide \$38 million to reduce truancy, expand community schools, and facilitate restorative justice programs. I'm fighting to provide money for preschool and afterschool programs, and to reduce our state-wide teacher shortage by providing incentives to attract and retain more teachers.

No other candidate is better equipped to lead the resistance against Trump and DeVos, whose sole purpose is to undermine and defund our public education system.

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