

Statesman

Candidates share platforms at forum

Accountability session for city candidates held a day before early voting

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A day before the beginning of early voting, candidates vying for mayoral and City Council seats in Austin met with a crowd of about 200 people gathered in pews at the University United Methodist Church to explain how they plan to address some of the city's most-pressing issues.



The candidates gathered at a stage Sunday at the invitation of **Austin**

Interfaith for what the congregation group called an accountability session.

“You see the headlines about robust growth in the region, but working families are being pushed out of Austin in search of affordable housing. School districts are making drastic budget cuts because of inadequate state funding,” said the Rev. John Elford of Austin Interfaith.

Congregation leaders called candidates to state their positions on nine issues, with the format of the session mainly asking them to respond to “yes” or “no” questions such as: Will you commit to voting to increase the city living wage to \$16.83 by 2020? Will you vote to increase funding for long-term job training? Will you vote to continue the city’s investment in the Prime Time After School Program?

“Yes to all three,” many candidates said, adding details in a response period limited to 30 seconds.

The forum, which also included congressional and state legislative candidates, featured Austin

Mayor Steve Adler and challenger Laura Morrison; one candidate running for District 1, Vincent Harding; District 3 Council Member Sabino “Pio” Renteria and his sister Susana Almanza, who is challenging him for his seat at the dais; District 8 candidates Rich DePalma and Bobby Levinski; and District 9 Council Member Kathie Tovo and challenger Danielle Skidmore. Linda O’Neal, another District 9 candidate, was not allowed to participate in the session, though it was unclear why.

Austin Interfaith leaders brought up several affordability issues, including whether to dedicate affordable housing dollars to residents making 60 percent or less of the area’s median income. All candidates agreed with the proposed policy, with Levinski adding that the city could go even further.

“I think actually that 60 percent is a little too high, so I would support a lower goal,” Levinski said. “I think we can do better than that.”



Austin Mayor Steve Adler answer question with challenger Laura Morrison listening at a forum hosted by Austin Interfaith on Sunday at University Methodist Church.

The only divergence in candidates’ responses was regarding ordinances that prohibit public camping, which the faith group believes would target the homeless. Tovo said the city would need to consider how the repeal of such ordinances would run up against criminal trespassing laws before she would take a firm position on the issue. Adler said the question should first consider how the city could house its homeless.

“Someone shouldn’t be placed in jail because they don’t have a place to sleep,” Adler said. “In our city, the question really needs to go further than the one asked: Are we going to commit to provide housing for people that are homeless? The answer to that has to be ‘yes.’ ”
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