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Contact: Robert Black
robertblack@rickperry.org
(512) 478-3276 or (512) 913-0046

Strayhorn Finally Decides Education is Important

880 days after she first promised her own school finance plan, 240 days since she announced her candidacy, 105 days after the special session on education ended and 24 hours since a poll showed her in single digits and fourth place, Carole Strayhorn comes up with an education plan...sort of.

AUSTIN – Today, 70 days until Election Day, Carole Strayhorn finally mustered the courage to release an education plan. Carole Strayhorn unveiled an underwhelming list of unfunded promises, unrealistic proposals and contradictory positions that will turn back the clock in education, cost tens of billions of dollars and result in our children learning less.

“It’s been 880 days since she first promised a school finance plan, 240 days since she became a candidate, 105 days since the education special session ended and 24 hours since a poll showed her sinking to fourth place and Carole Strayhorn finally decides education is an important issue,” said Perry spokesman Robert Black. “With the extra two-and-a-half years Strayhorn apparently spent developing this underwhelming proposal, Texans had hoped it would consist of something besides lower academic standards, a return to the failed practice of social promotion, unfunded promises and contradictory positions that look a lot like political desperation.”

Strayhorn Idea #1: *Flip the Texas Assessment of Knowledge and Skills from the end to the beginning of the school year where it will become a true diagnostic test that will allow teachers to teach and students to really learn and really retain. Reinstate the Texas School Performance Reviews.*

Reality: This will completely gut the current accountability system because you will remove the ability to measure a student’s performance. Without a standard measure, schools will return to social promotion as a means to advance students from grade to grade. If the TAKS is moved to the beginning of the school year, it will no longer be a measure for what students have learned throughout that year and teachers will be held accountable for the work of a previous teacher the year before. Remember, the TAKS test has been synchronized with the current Texas curriculum.

Strayhorn Idea #2: *Give each teacher a \$4,000 across the board pay raise now, fully funded by the state, with a competitive automatic pay increase every two years to get Texas to the midway point in the United States. Fully restore the \$1,000 health care supplement to all Texas school employees. Increase retired teacher benefits and increase the state’s contribution to these benefits and have parity between the Teacher Retirement System and the Employee Retirement System.*

Reality: Is this in addition to the \$2,000 teacher pay raise recently passed by the legislature? A \$4,000 pay raise and additional raises every two years to reach the national average will cost more than \$8 billion in 5 years. Where would she get the funds? The \$500 health supplement that was cut in 2003 (not \$1000 as Strayhorn claims) was restored in 2005 and converted into additional salary for teachers. Strayhorn’s plan would actually REDUCE teacher’s salary by turning that \$500 back into a health supplement even if teachers don’t want it. To establish parity between TRS and ERS would cost billion of dollars that Strayhorn has left unfunded.

Strayhorn Idea #3: *Use \$8 billion in long-term “Strayhorn Solutions” to provide a stable, reliable, permanent funding base for schools that includes video lottery terminals and reinstitute the Texas Performance Reviews to find savings across state government. Veto any legislation or plan that includes a single dollar for vouchers.*

Reality: “Strayhorn Solutions” passes the buck to the next Comptroller to find savings in state government, relies on the passage of VLTs which the legislature has already overwhelmingly opposed, closes corporate loopholes which have already been closed in the last special session, and dismantles the highly successful Texas Enterprise Fund that is creating more than 42,000 jobs and the Emerging Technology Fund that is already benefiting Texas universities. This education plan, coupled with previous promises to cut property taxes by 50%, cut taxes for seniors and other spending proposals would cost over \$60 billion (this estimate does not include the astronomical cost of creating parity between TRS and ERS).

Strayhorn Idea #4: *“Implement her Texas NextStep plan that allows every high school graduate to attend a two-year public community college or technical college with the state picking up the tab for tuition, fees and books. Impose tuition locks that will freeze tuition rates for college students at the level when they first enter college until graduation unless tuition rates decrease. Allow college students to purchase textbooks tax free.”*

Reality: This would turn Texas community colleges and technical schools into an entitlement program with no accountability and would cost \$100 million in taxpayer funds to implement. Would students be held accountable for repayment if they don’t pass or if they don’t graduate? She presented this idea to the Legislature in 2003 and it failed to get legislative support to pass.

Strayhorn Idea #5: *“...we will pay \$2,500 bonuses to all teachers in low-performing schools that raise rankings to academically acceptable or better, provide state-funded stipends for quality teachers mentoring new teachers.”*

Reality: This is a complete contradiction. The Strayhorn plan for teacher bonuses relies on an accountability system that she dismantles in Strayhorn Idea # 1! In order to give teachers bonuses based on performance, you have to measure performance. But Strayhorn removes the basic underpinnings of the current Texas accountability system by eliminating the TAKS test at the end of the year. Gov. Perry has already proposed – and funded – the largest performance pay program in the nation for teachers providing as much as \$10,000 for teachers who demonstrate high achievement in schools with high percentages of at-risk children.

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