

2007 Kansas City, Mo Mayoral Election

Candidate Responses to Labor Questionnaire

Heartland Labor Forum

90.1 KKFI

March 22, 2007

The following questions reflect issues of concern to the organized and unorganized labor community of Kansas City, Mo. This survey was distributed to all mayoral candidates during the primary election. The two candidates in the general election, Mark Funkhouser and Alvin Brooks, were asked to further elaborate on several of their original responses. We did not receive a response from the Brooks campaign regarding the follow-up questions. Original responses and the follow-ups are included here.

KNOWN LABOR ENDORSEMENTS

Brooks:

United Auto Workers CAP Council

Carpenter's District Council

AFSCME Local 500

SEIU

Laborers Local 264

Greater Kansas City AFL-CIO

Greater Kansas City Building and Construction Trades Council

Funkhouser:

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Regarding City Employees:

1. Kansas City police officers are currently barred from collective bargaining with the City over pay and work conditions. Subsequently, they are among the lowest paid in the metro area. As mayor and member of the Board of Police Commissioners, would you support, and advocate for, collective bargaining rights for the City's police force?

Brooks: I would propose keeping the Police Department as it is, under the control of the State of Missouri. As a former police detective, I believe in the autonomy of this service, free of local political influence.

Because of my background, both as a member of KCPD and as a citizen advocate against crime, I have a good working relationship with our Police Department. I look forward to serving on the Board of Commissioners as Mayor. I will be an advocate of the Chief's position that we need to focus as much on the systemic causes of crime in our community, as well as crime itself.

In regard to pay levels and work conditions, I would like to see documentation that supports this statement in terms of our officers being among the lowest in the area. If that is a fact, I would be willing to discuss this issue further.

Funkhouser: As Mayor I will support the right of workers to organize a union, both in the private and public sectors, and help build public support for improving our nation's labor laws. However, in the public sector there are certain vital functions such as police that are fundamentally different and should be treated as such.

Funkhouser (follow-up): As Mayor I will support the right of workers to organize a union, both in the private and public sectors, and will help build public support for improving our nation's labor laws. Yes, I will support and advocate for collective bargaining rights for the City's police force, however I will not support the rights for the police force to strike. In the public sector there are vital functions that should not be allowed to strike.

2. What is your plan for retaining and recruiting highly qualified, experienced city employees given that wages for many positions are below those in the private sector?

Brooks: In the past year, the City of Kansas City, corrected some of the most egregious inequities for labor positions in the city, increasing salaries as much as 40% for some labor scales. As Mayor, I will direct the City Manager and the Human Resources Director to continue to analyze the situation and make corrective measures. Also as important, I will direct the City Manager and his staff to continue to the City's commitment to attract highly qualified, experienced city employees that are comparable to those in the private sector.

Funkhouser: I have always supported employees in seeking proper pay and respect for their work. I believe that the City's work force would be much more effective and efficient if they were properly paid, trained and equipped. Currently, many of our employees have none of these benefits. As Mayor I will ask the City Manager to conduct a pay equity study and make recommendations regarding equal pay for equal work. In order to meet my goal to improve citizen satisfaction with City services, employees must be properly paid, trained and equipped. When we accomplish these improvements, retaining and recruiting will greatly improve.

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3. What is your position on outsourcing or privatization of city services that could otherwise be performed by City employees?

Brooks: I do not favor privatization, wherein the City would sell its assets to private industry and lease back those assets for a private company to manage, such as the Water Department and Airport. In fact, there is a candidate running for mayor in this election who has proposed that the city sell the Water Department and I am adamantly opposed to that proposition for the following reasons:

- 1.) By owning the Water Department, the city is able to direct growth and expansion because utilities open areas for that activity. By turning over ownership of this asset to a private company, it would, in effect, be in control of our growth and expansion. That would be unacceptable.
- 2.) The city would no longer have control of the amount that is charged for water and sewer rates. That is unacceptable.
- 3.) With as much as \$3 billion needed to convert the combined sewer system in Kansas City, it is improbable that a private company would be interested in purchasing the Water Department unless that liability were excluded from the sale. Therefore, leaving that liability with the City, with no means to pay for that unfunded federal mandate, makes no sense.

Funkhouser: If City employees can more effectively deliver the services than the private sector, then by all means the City employees should continue to do so. Privatization is a tool that can be used, carefully, to improve the efficiency and effectiveness of service delivery in certain specific circumstances. In 1995 I advocated selling the Water Department. At that time we estimated that such a sale would net \$100 million dollars to be used on infrastructure and deferred maintenance. In 1996 I advocated a process for managed competition in which City staff would compete with private vendors to secure contracts to provide services. I would not disavow those earlier statements, but neither would I enter lightly into undertaking those actions. Often there is little competition to provide services and contracting out services only works well when there are multiple parties who compete to secure the contract.

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Regarding City contractors and City funded/incentivized projects:

4. Do you support a requirement that a) City contractors and/or b) recipients of TIFs or other tax incentives provide a living wage and/or health insurance benefits to their employees?

Brooks: Yes. The State of Missouri overwhelmingly passed a statewide Minimum Wage Amendment this past November and the federal government is finally taking it into consideration. The City of Kansas City is a good employer, providing a living wage and health insurance benefits to our full-time employees. As Mayor, I will support requirements of City contractors and/or recipients of TIFs or other tax incentives provide a living wage and health insurance benefits to full-time employees. As Mayor, I will encourage our vendor and TIF partners to share the same commitments as the City.

Funkhouser: YES City contractors and recipients of TIFs should be required to pay the prevailing wage and benefits to their employees.

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5. a) Are current regulations requiring that a portion of City contracts be awarded to minority- and women-owned businesses adequate? Should the owner have to be involved in day-to-day operations?

Brooks: Current regulations requiring that contracts be awarded to minority- and women-owned businesses are adequate. The key is strictly monitoring and enforcing those policies so to ensure that goals are being met and exceeded. Owners of MBE/WBE organizations should be involved in the day-to-day operations of the business in order to fulfill both the letter and spirit of the law as intended.

Funkhouser: The Mayor and Council should pass an ordinance that implements the findings of the City's disparity study. Business owners seeking minority / women owned business status should be involved in day-to-day operations.

b) Do you support proposals that would also require a certain portion of a City contractor's workforce be women, minorities, or residents of Kansas City, MO?

Brooks: I would certainly be interested in exploring opportunities to reward City contractors on a point or credit system for their commitment to hiring a diverse and local workforce. Points or credits could be measured toward future vendor opportunities with the city or as in the case of JE Dunn or H&R Block, points could be a consideration when applying for tax incentives.

Funkhouser: No.

Funkhouser (follow-up): I would support the enforcement of all MBE/WBE ordinance requirements and conformance with the disparity study. I would be concerned about requiring contractors to hire Kansas City, Mo. residents as this is difficult to enforce and can have some legal implications.

c) Should similar requirements be placed on projects receiving TIFs or other tax incentives?

Brooks: Again, I would certainly be interested in exploring proposals that would reward credits to businesses for hiring a diverse and local workforce. The credits could be a consideration when applying for tax incentives with the City of Kansas City.

Funkhouser: YES All requirements for City contracts should apply to projects receiving TIFs or other tax incentives.

d) What monitoring and enforcements mechanisms should be implemented to ensure compliance?

Brooks: The city's current monitoring and enforcement policies are good. As Mayor, I will ensure that city staff and the City Manager understand that this is a high priority and one that I take very seriously. I will lead a city that rewards commitments to hiring a diverse and local workforce and meets MBE/WBE expectations put forth by the city. It is important to recall that the city's MBE/WBE goals are a remedy handed down by the courts for decades of lack of access to opportunities within City government. It will be a city that is the best of times, all the time, for all residents of the city.

Funkhouser: All contract requirements should be monitored sufficiently to assure compliance. If this requires more contract compliance officers, then they should be hired. Equal compliance of contractors allows a level playing field and equal competition. There should be progressive penalties for noncompliance up to and including debarment of the contractor.

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e) What plans do you have to help train women and minorities in the skills necessary to get these job and contract opportunities?

Brooks: As Mayor, I will work with the existing organizations and programs that are doing positive work to train underrepresented populations including women and minorities to ensure they are adequately prepared to enter the workforce. I support the efforts of several vital organizations including the Full Employment Council, Women’s Employment Network, Project Prepare, Urban League of Greater Kansas City and other apprenticeship and workplace readiness programs that are working to leverage existing successes and identify new opportunities.

Funkhouser: My administration wants the minority and women construction workers in the community to thrive and be successful. No one knows their needs for skill training, better than themselves. We will meet with representatives of the workers and leaders in the various industries, determine their needs and then pursue the best ways for the City to assist you. One of my three major goals is “to improve citizen satisfaction with the City’s services.” Your question goes to the heart of the many current unaddressed needs that we can meet.

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Regarding city-wide labor issues:

6. Missouri Senate bill SB 348 is a comprehensive immigration bill strengthening employer sanctions, requiring that landlords check to be sure that all renters are in the US legally or lose their licenses to do business, and requiring police to ask anyone they stop their immigration status. There are several other bills--HB 262, SB 90 and constitutional amendment 119--making English the official language of the State and possibly thereby banning provision for translation services to non-English speakers among other things. What is your position on these proposals?

Brooks: Immigration is primarily a federal issue. I have not read these particular bills and would have to see specific ordinances to determine whether or not I would support the landlord verification intent contained in the question.

Funkhouser: I do not yet have a position on these specific bills. In general I think immigration issues are best left to the national government. I think that stronger sanctions against employers who hire illegal immigrants seem the right direction to go. In general I think the “English only” provisions are bad public policy. The other provisions seem to be bad ideas as well.

Funkhouser (follow-up): As you state this is a comprehensive bill and is currently being discussed and possibly amended. If elected Mayor, I will have my staff research the specifics of this and any other legislation and after study determine a position. In general I think immigration issues are best left to the Federal government. I think that stronger sanctions against employers who hire illegal immigrants is probably the proper legislative action.

7. Kansas City has been active in supporting NASCO and the concept of an I-35 “Super Corridor”. Some say there are plans to build a massive, 1200’-wide, *private* transportation corridor that would make it easier to bring in goods from Mexico and ultimately China. This corridor is already under construction in Texas. Is it environmentally, or economically, sound policy to support the importation of cheap, foreign goods that could be produced locally? Won’t this exacerbate the loss of manufacturing jobs from the region? Will you support or fight further development of the NASCO Super Corridor?

Brooks: As mayor, I will work with all citizens to get a complete understanding of all implications of Kansas City’s status as a Foreign Trade Zone, the proposed Super Corridor, and ultimately properly position the city and the region to take advantage of its geographic location as the center of North America.

Funkhouser: I need to know the specifics of the various proposals and give this issue a great deal more thought before deciding on a position.

Funkhouser (follow-up): This is a broad issue with many nuances. Without more specific information it is not prudent to simply say yes or no. However, Kansas City is well located, is already a railroad hub, has a great interstate highway system and therefore should be well suited to capture manufacturing and warehousing operations. Support of some of the plans suggested above might allow other cities to gain a competitive advantage over KC and would thus be unwise.