



A Union of Professionals

AFT Michigan
AFL-CIO

2018 Gubernatorial Candidate Questionnaire

AFT Michigan is a union of PreK-12 teachers and support personnel, university faculty, staff and graduate employees, community college instructors and administrative employees and credit union employees. The mission of AFT Michigan is to strengthen worker voice, advance the education institutions in which our members work, and build a progressive movement committed to achieving these goals.

The AFT Michigan Administrative Board is considering endorsing a candidate for governor prior to the 2018 primary elections. Responses to this questionnaire will be shared with our local leaders and members, in addition to being posted on our website.

The deadline to submit the questionnaire is December 12, 2017. Completed questionnaires should be emailed to jrowe@aftmichigan.org.

AFT Michigan invites candidates who return this questionnaire to join us at our Leadership Summit on January 13, 2018. The forum will be held 12 p.m. - 2 p.m. with local leaders from across the state.

If you require additional space to answer questions, please attach additional documents. If you have questions or would like clarification on any part of the questionnaire, please contact Julie Rowe at jrowe@aftmichigan.org or (734) 735-8780.

CANDIDATE INFORMATION

Candidate Name: William C. Cobbs

Party Affiliation: Democratic

Website: Billcobbs.com

Candidate Signature: 

Date: 12/11/2017

Please briefly describe your background (including whether you have ever held office, worked in public education, or been a union member).

Bill Cobbs Bio

Bill Cobbs was born and raised in Detroit. Both of his parents were working class people. His father was employed by the Budd Co and a lifetime UAW member. Bill attended Detroit public schools - Peck elementary, Durfee junior high, Cass Technical high school. After completing high school, he attended college for a year before running out of money.

Bill Joined the United States Navy where he served with distinction. As a result of his service, he was selected for the Navy BOOST program (Broadened Opportunities for Officer Selection and Training). The program allowed him to return to the University of Michigan to complete his undergraduate degree. After completing his naval service, he returned to Detroit where he was admitted to Wayne State University (WSU) Law School. While attending law school, he paid his way by working as a police officer.

After leaving WSU Law School, Bill went to work for Xerox Corporation, starting in an entry level position. Over the course of his career, he held a number of sales and leadership positions; including Global Vice President for Public Sector Consulting and Systems Integration. Bill was responsible for the birth of that group, and over the first 8 years of its existence grew it from a zero revenue business to a 1-billion-dollar division. In December of 2016, Xerox split into two separate companies. One being the traditional product company, and the other Conduent which was the services company Bill started in 1994. Conduent is now a 9-billion-dollar standalone business.

After leaving Xerox Bill served as the Marketplace President for IKON now (Ricoh Corp) in New York City, and later as CEO and President for SurfRay A/S a Danish software company.

Bill is married to Lisa Weaver Cobbs. He is also the father of two adult children.

PreK-12, COMMUNITY COLLEGE, AND UNIVERSITY EDUCATION

<input checked="" type="radio"/> YES	<input type="radio"/> NO	Would you restore funding and increase investment in our public schools, colleges and universities?
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How would you approach tax policy to provide increased investment in education?

I've gone on record to say that, as Governor, I intend to move for a constitutional amendment to move from a fixed tax rate of 4.25% to a progressive income tax. That will significantly increase our tax revenue. I also plan to close our corporate tax loopholes so that they are paying their fair share. My team is currently preparing a ballot proposal dealing with school finance and defunding private "for profit" charters with public tax dollars.

How would you make education funding at all levels fair and equitable?

Going forward my plan to insure fair and equitable funding for all districts is to resource school districts based on need rather than zip code. We must make sure that all of Michigan's children are afforded an opportunity for a quality public school education.

How would you make public education systems more holistic and cohesive, from early childhood to university?

In attempting to make public education more holistic I want to get away from the prevailing approach that one size fits all. I want the state to return more control to the local community with the state becoming more of a support system than an overseer. I want us to strive for a cooperative education environment for our youth focused on development with an eye towards each student's individual talents and strengths.

How would you protect students, faculty and staff from discrimination and harassment based on social economic status, disability, gender, religion, national origin, race, immigration status, sexual orientation, and gender expression?

In protecting students, faculty and staff from discrimination and harassment the primary focus would be on creating zero tolerance environment. We would put in place appropriate training and support tools for students and staff; and have staff trained in intervention and remediation processes. Each school would be tasked with developing an annual report evaluating success and failure, in the process, so that we had a methodology for identifying opportunities for continuous improvement.

PreK-12 EDUCATION

<input checked="" type="radio"/> YES	<input type="radio"/> NO	Would you provide necessary funding to expand access to quality early childhood education programs?
<input checked="" type="radio"/> YES	<input type="radio"/> NO	Would you support mandatory full-day kindergarten for all students in Michigan?
<input checked="" type="radio"/> YES	<input type="radio"/> NO	Would you actively oppose all private school voucher proposals and other plans intended to divert taxpayer dollars away from public schools to private schools?
<input checked="" type="radio"/> YES	<input type="radio"/> NO	Would you support policies to reduce the amount of standardized testing required for Michigan students?
<input checked="" type="radio"/> YES	<input type="radio"/> NO	Would you support policies to fully involve paraprofessionals in the development of student's individualized Education Plans?
<input checked="" type="radio"/> YES	<input type="radio"/> NO	Would you restore the right of school support staff to bargain over privatization of school services?
<input checked="" type="radio"/> YES	<input type="radio"/> NO	Would you support requiring full financial and academic transparency of the education management organizations that run charter and cyber schools in Michigan?

What measures would you take to address the current educator shortage in Michigan?

Since 2011 enrollment in Michigan schools of education have gone down by over 40%. The cost of education has increased while salary and benefits have continued to erode. I want to create a loan forgiveness program that would allow young teachers to see their loan debt decreased by up to 75% once they have been teaching continuously for at least 6 years. Effectively that would mean that we would be prepared to reimburse them for the eligible loan debt after 6 years. Secondly, we would make the step increases that have been problematic in the

past happen in a timely manner. We would restore respect to a profession that for too long been taken for granted and not appreciated.

How would you address the achievement gaps between groups of students based on race and socioeconomic status?

In attacking achievement gaps, we would focus on developing a progress model that focused on improvement as the goal post, rather than set achievement targets. We would also be prepared to increase support services like social workers and mental health professionals to the school environment to identify unique issues which might impact a student's development.

COMMUNITY COLLEGE AND UNIVERSITY EDUCATION

<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> YES	<input type="checkbox"/> NO	Would you support returning to a university funding model with the state providing the majority of university funding allowing tuition to be very affordable?
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> YES	<input type="checkbox"/> NO	Would you appoint people who support workers, and our freedom to join together in unions, to college and university boards?
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> YES	<input type="checkbox"/> NO	Would you protect academic freedom from partisan attacks?
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> YES	<input type="checkbox"/> NO	Would you support repealing the prohibition on allowing graduate student research assistants to unionize

What would you do to make public college and university education affordable?

As I indicated before I want to start a state college grant fund that could reduce the cost associated with college and University education.

How would you address the discrepancies in compensation and job security between tenure-track and non-tenure track faculty at colleges and universities?

The compensation issue is challenging. I would not promise that we would have parity between tenure-track and non-tenure-track faculty at our Universities and Colleges. I would strongly support that differentials in compensation not be greater than 30% based on skills and qualification.

How would you reverse the erosion of tenure-track faculty positions?

I would support creating an annual review process that helped faculty identify and inform staff of the likelihood of receiving tenure and after 7 years of continuous teaching tenure being granted automatically.

How would you address the expansion of online education in higher education?

I would drive toward establishing standards related to how much online education we are currently delivering in the degree granting programs. Online instruction does serve a useful purpose but it cannot become a replacement for classroom interaction.

LABOR RIGHTS

<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> YES	<input type="checkbox"/> NO	Would you champion efforts to repeal existing "right-to-work" laws?
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> YES	<input type="checkbox"/> NO	Would you champion legislation to restore collective bargaining rights stripped from the Public Employment Relations Act, including returning the ability to negotiate teacher evaluation procedures and PreK-12 payroll dues deduction?
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> YES	<input type="checkbox"/> NO	Would you publicly affirm the importance of unions and urge employers not to interfere when workers are deciding whether to form or join a union?
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> YES	<input type="checkbox"/> NO	Would you be willing to issue statements, write letters, and attend rallies supporting organizing campaigns to support the rights of workers to form a union?
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> YES	<input type="checkbox"/> NO	Would you oppose legislation to further erode the collective bargaining rights of public sector employees?

JOBS AND THE ECONOMY

<input checked="" type="radio"/> YES	NO	Would you support raising the state's minimum wage to \$15 an hour?
<input checked="" type="radio"/> YES	NO	Would you oppose state budget cuts that weaken the state's social safety net?
<input checked="" type="radio"/> YES	NO	Would you support repealing the pension tax, restoring the homestead property tax credit and restoring tax deductions for children, charitable contributions, college tuition and adoption expenses?
<input checked="" type="radio"/> YES	NO	Would you support paid sick day legislation?
<input checked="" type="radio"/> YES	NO	Would you support creating a progressive income tax structure?
<input checked="" type="radio"/> YES	NO	Do you support prevailing wages for construction work?
<input checked="" type="radio"/> YES	NO	How would you work to end pay discrimination against women and people of color?

GOOD GOVERNMENT

<input checked="" type="radio"/> YES	NO	Would you support efforts to promote greater voter participation, including early and no reason absentee voting?
<input checked="" type="radio"/> YES	NO	Would you support efforts to reform the redistricting process to eliminate partisan gerrymandering and bring fairness to the drawing of legislative and congressional district boundaries?

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