

Wellstone Democratic Club Education Committee Report/Recommendations on AD15 Candidates. (excerpt)

To all members of the Wellstone Democratic Club

The Education Committee of Wellstone is asking every member of the Club to vote for Jovanka Beckles.

She has helped build a movement for radical progressive change in Richmond within the Richmond Progressive Alliance against the very powerful oil industry who have always determined public policy there before the RPA. She successfully fought off divisive campaigns against her based on her being gay in addition to being black.

Like Oakland, Richmond has also been facing a crisis in public education and she has helped the fight to preserve public education against the efforts of the charter industry to privatize it.

Buffy Wicks on the other hand is supported by the very wealthy charter school industry and for good reason. During the primary she received \$85,000 from Govern for California which is heavily charter supported.

When Buffy first decided to run (having never held elected office previously and fairly new to this district) we in the Education Committee interviewed her as well as all the other primary candidates for AD15. We asked her detailed questions about her positions on charter schools. She appeared to not be familiar with the Charter School Act or the drastic need to change its provisions. Though she appeared to be appreciative of our educating her on these issues and invited us to get back to her with other information and to meet again she never responded to our communication after that. The next we saw her was at the Wellstone membership meeting with the AD 15 panel of all the primary candidates. She was the **only** candidate to not raise her hand when asked who supported the NAACP and Black Lives Matter call for a moratorium on charters. She was the **only** candidate who did not raise her hand when the panel was asked if they would agree not to accept money from the charter industry.

To be clear, since she apparently educated herself somewhat on charters, the positions Buffy has taken on charters **appear** to be fair and progressive while in fact are anything but. Her opposition to charters is limited to “for profit” charters. There are no “for profit” charters of any consequence in California except for a few on line charters which almost everybody, including the most powerful and wealthy charter industry interests, are against. There is for instance not one “for profit” charter in Oakland where now almost 1/3 of our students are in charters. This is a non-issue to those of us throughout California who are fighting the privatization of our public schools. Although most charter schools are non-profits, in fact many profit from their existence. The key to such profit is understanding that most small charter schools (who by the way often pay their administrators very very well) conglomerate into very profitable Charter Management

Organizations. These CMO's funnel business to many other very profitable private enterprises.

This siphoning of public tax dollars from our democratically controlled schools to private hands is the very nature of the mass of charters in California. Make no mistake: neither for profit nor "non-profit" charters are democratically controlled. And in the meanwhile the siphoning is draining much needed funds from those students left behind in our most blighted and segregated urban communities, exacerbating, not helping in overcoming the racial and class barriers these communities already face. In Oakland for instance the recent study by In The Public Interest has established that over 57 million dollars a year is drained from the public schools by charters. **Buffy has not spoken out against either this financial destruction of public education and its impact on people of color and other poor and working people nor charters non-democratic nature.**

Buffy is again **not** seeking wholesale changes in the Charter School Act. There are wholesale changes needed and she only has stated support for "transparency" and "accountability" without specifying what she means making such positions fairly meaningless. In fact the charter industry, from the very powerful and well-endowed Charter School Association on down, supports those vague goals, like application of the Brown Act which has always been argued to be applicable anyway. What they have fought tooth and nail against are a vast array of very needed amendments such as whether a school district can say no to a charter applicant on the basis that it would hurt the educational and other interests of the other students in the district, including, for example, Oakland, where charters are part of pushing them into bankruptcy and state takeover. They have fought tooth and nail against the horrible authorization process which allows charters to go to mommy if daddy says no by turning to the county and then again to the state if the district says no. They have fought against requiring compliance with Government Code 1090, a conflict of interest law which would require Charter school board members to disclose and then recuse themselves when there are conflicts (such as contracting with the school or CMO for services or goods they profit from). There are many other parts of the law that our legislators have to change, such as forcing charters to end their practice of discriminating against those in most need like students with disabilities, immigrants, English Language Learners etc. And much much more.

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David Weintraub