

La Mesa Citizens Oversight Group Questionnaire

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1. How would you describe your philosophy, not political party identification, on the purpose of local government generally, how do you see your responsibility as an elected official of the HWD Board?

I see my philosophy/responsibility as the same thing. As a member of the board, I would always vote in the best interest of the ratepayers. I want to do what is best for all or most, not just the few, whether it is about conservation, water safety or rates.

2. What is on your “to do” list?

- 1. I would like to go get to know how everything works, or educate myself as to the inner-workings of the Water District. There’s only so much you can know from the Website.**
- 2. I would like to change the tiered-rate structure to a single rate per unit for all – no matter how much water is used. No one should pay less than the cost of water – ever. And no one should be charged a higher rate or be forced to supplement those with less water usage because they have a larger lot, perhaps with a vegetable garden, fruit trees, and animals to water. I understand that everyone gets the low rate for the first 10 units of water, but for those of us who go over, we pay more and supplement others – it’s just wrong. We should pay for what we use and be our own guides as to what we can do to conserve.**

I would take a look at the base charge/meter charge. It seems high to me and I want to know why. It’s charged even if no water is used.

Helix refers to water as a “commodity.” Water is not a commodity. It is not bought and sold on the stock market. Water is a necessity and the board has a responsibility to the ratepayers to keep all rates as low as possible.

- 3. As a matter of full disclosure, I am a Teamster (Local 2010). I have Labor’s endorsement for my race as well, but I would like to take a close look at the benefits structure for the employees/board. While I believe all employees should be paid a fair wage and have decent benefits, it seems to me by being so generous, the board members are lining their own pockets.**

4. **Look for new and untapped sources of water.**
5. **Look for other sources of income such as cell towers.**
6. **Reinstitute educational and conservation programs.**

3. How will your life, work, education, past and present association experiences, civic activities, elected & appointed positions, etc., help you execute the duties of your office?

My bachelor's degree and experience in print journalism taught me to ask questions. I am not afraid to ask anyone anything, personal or otherwise. And when you ask, you normally get an answer.

As an active member of the San Diego County Democratic Party, (I have their endorsement) over the past six years (volunteer of the year 2012), I learned to organize, consensus build and lead. I always speak up, ask questions and work hard to get what I'm after.

4. From what civic or political groups, business leaders or elected officials have you now received, or expect to receive, endorsements or campaign contributions? Do you plan to keep an up-to-date list of financial contributors, of \$100 or more, readily available for the public to view?

Frankly, I haven't been out endorsement seeking much, but I have received endorsements from:

1. **The San Diego County Democratic Party (my race has been deemed strategically critical)**
2. **San Diego and Imperial Counties Labor Council**
3. **Run Women Run – A non-partisan group who recruits and mentors women to run for office.**
4. **The La Mesa – Foothills Democratic Club and other individual members of the club.**
5. **Marty Block**
6. **Todd Gloria**

I absolutely do keep an up-to-date list of financial contributions. As soon as my Website goes up, I will be happy to post it there. Including contributions of less than \$100. I am also required by law to keep records and report them to the Registrar of Voters, the FPPC and the IRS.

So far, I have received \$300 from the La Mesa – Foothills Democratic Club and \$500 from my dad. Other than that, checks that have been coming in are \$25, \$50 or \$75. I have raised approx \$1,500 so far and have about \$1,200 on hand.

5. According to the latest CALPERS Actuarial Valuation the HWD has a \$15 million unfunded pension liability that is costing ratepayers about \$1 million each year in interest. What do you plan to do about this and other HWD financial challenges?

I would like to find a way to pay it off more quickly and save ratepayers as much as possible in interest. I haven't had a chance to look at it too closely yet, but as one staffer described it, it's like a mortgage. If that's the case, I pay extra on my mortgage every month and will pay off my house early and spend much less in interest. Unfortunately, I do not have a degree in finance, but I am intelligent and willing to learn – quickly!

6. With so much discussion about pensions and employee contributions, why has the HWD been so slow and continuing to delay employee contributions to the defined benefit plans?

The employees don't want to pay into it and have not been forced to. They received a cost of living increase to offset their cost, but they don't understand that when the cost of water is going up, and cost of benefits is going up, there needs to be give and take. If I worked there, I probably wouldn't want to pay into it either.

The board needs to be stronger and stand up to staff. The current board members seem to give into everything staff wants. In good times we can give, and in bad times we need to negotiate a balance. Employee salaries and benefits comprise about 30 percent of the budget.

When negotiating with employees, a lot of options that have been overlooked. The former General Manager negotiated their contract with his own financial interest in mind. There was no labor negotiator – no one neutral. Proper labor negotiations were not conducted, but approved by this board.

7. How will you decide if HWD employee and board member salaries and benefits are too low, too high, or about right? Which private sector related/similar type business' total employee compensation is less than HWD total compensation benefits?

There are published comparisons, which are easy to look up. Plus as public employees, salaries are public information. I want to pay fair wages and have incentive to keep employees happy. It's about fairness, and turnover can be expensive.

8. What is HWD's employee retirement rate, average employee length of employment, rate of employee rating as unsatisfactory?

N/A – Question for Helix Water District Information staff.

9. With rising/ high unemployment rate and high skills inventory, what is the length of time you negotiate for?

Please clarify. I'm not sure if you mean labor negotiations or management.

10. Does the HWD perform withholding of employee union dues? If so, what is the amount of union dues withheld for the last 5 years?

N/A – Question for Helix Water District Information staff.

11. What is total compensation and benefits for a member of the HWD Board? How does it work?

Board members receive health and insurance benefits, and \$200 a meeting, Plus expenses. For more information, contact the district.

12. Are you satisfied with the current rate structure? If not, how would you like to see it changed?

No, I'm not at all satisfied with the current, tired-rate structure. Water should cost the same for everyone. In fact, as I mentioned above in question #2, no one should pay less than cost. No customer should have to supplement other customers. We need one, as low as possible, rate for all. But, we have to keep in mind that our budget needs to stay healthy while restructuring.

13. What issues need to be brought to the County Water Authority?

I would hold them to the same standards. I would like to know what they are doing to ensure water rates are low and fair and quality is good.

14. Is there anything not listed above that you believe should be discussed this election season?

From what I've reviewed and witnessed at board meetings, the representation for the ratepayer is not there. Water rates can be reduced.

I was upset when the board moved the meetings to afternoons. This meant the working public couldn't attend meetings, and as a working person, neither could I. All it shows is that the board didn't want public input.

My opponent claims he introduced a motion, which passed unanimously, to reduce expenditures by \$1 million over five years. When a motion was

made that they lower rates for customers, the board voted against it. However, my opponent still claims on his Website that this will result in lower water rates.

Mr. Muse has said he's reduced staff by 10 percent. However, from what I understand, the staff reduction is attributable to attrition. If Helix Water District Board really wanted to save money, there are things that can be done. Many options have been overlooked including alternative work schedules, furloughs, or close the office every other Friday.

Some lawsuits have been filed, including The El Monte Valley Project. After spending more than \$2 million, they were forced to shut it down. Most of this is discussed in closed session, but it can be looked up in public records.

Also, there is a lawsuit brought by an employee but is being addressed in closed session. These suits are going to cost ratepayers.

15. Summarize why someone should vote for you!

First and foremost, I will look out for Helix Water customers. Above I've mentioned several reasons why someone should vote for me. My interest is specifically in Water. We live in a desert and water is a resource we can't afford to squander, yet we all know prices are going up. I want to make sure we have clean, safe and affordable drinking water for all.