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AUSTIN CITY COUNCIL RACE

## Kim's controversial votes source of dispute in City Council race

### Kim says she listens to different views and is willing to take a stand; Shade and Weiss say the incumbent is ineffective

By [Sarah Coppola](#)

AMERICAN-STATESMAN STAFF

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Council Member Jennifer Kim arrived at Austin City Hall three years ago as a young upstart looking to make her mark.

She has done that, taking controversial stands that some have seen as gutsy and others as foolish.

She pushed for, then backed away from, tougher rules against panhandling. She abstained from a vote to name Marc Ott the city manager. She voted against the proposed Villa Muse entertainment studio and production facility. She championed programs to install red-light cameras and allow dogs on restaurant patios.

As Kim seeks re-election May 10, she faces a race that is, to a large extent, a referendum on her judgment and skills. Kim's two challengers — Internet entrepreneur Randi Shade and former National Guard officer Ken Weiss — say she's cast ill-conceived votes, alienated her colleagues and been inaccessible to constituents.

"There are so many issues where she failed to demonstrate the kind of leadership we need," Shade said. "You have to work with people and get along with people to get things done, and that is not her strength."

Kim says she is a thoughtful leader who seeks out diverse views before taking a stand.

"My style is to reach out and ask for different perspectives and advice, to make sure I've thought an issue through," she said. "Sometimes all I have is my vote, and I'm not shy about saying no to things I think are not in the best interest of the community."

Shade has raised \$158,000 and Kim \$143,500 since November. Kim has cast Shade as a business candidate who has accepted donations from people who support toll roads — the same criticism that Kim's 2005 opponent, Margot Clarke, leveled against Kim that year. Shade says she has a diverse list of donors and welcomes support from both businesspeople and neighborhood activists.

Kim touts achievements such as helping pass incentives to develop more affordable housing downtown, getting a liaison hired to help small businesses with permitting issues, and strengthening programs to make sure minority-owned firms get a fair shot at city contracts.

She says she stood up for neighborhoods by opposing a Wal-Mart Supercenter planned for Northcross Mall, opposing plans to build a water treatment plant in the Balcones Canyonlands Preserve and voting against a toll road plan.

Shade says Kim tends to take principled stands rather than doing the hard work necessary to produce real results. She notes that Kim waited until the last minute to make up her mind about the toll road plan, which ended up passing; failed to speed up the passage of an ordinance proposed years earlier that might have prevented such a big Wal-Mart; and did not take the lead to find an alternative location for the water plant.

Kim's decision to abstain from hiring Ott when every other council member voted for him is another example of acting too little, too late, Shade said. Kim said she approved of Ott but felt there was not enough public input (only one community forum) during the selection process.

"On the night before the hire was to be made, she decides to abstain and leave her colleagues in the grease," Shade said. "I don't disagree with the idea of wanting more public input, but she should have brought that up months before."

Shade also knocks Kim's vote to offer the owners of Las Manitas restaurant a \$750,000 forgivable loan to move when the Congress Avenue restaurant was in danger of being displaced by a hotel project.

Kim said she got terms added to the offer that would've required the owners to pay back part of the loan. But she said she regrets the vote because the offer was unfair to other small businesses and should have required the owners to pay it back in full. (The owners turned down the loan offer.)

Kim said she regrets one other episode: asking the city manager to clarify whether her City Council ID would allow her into the terminal area at the airport to meet official visitors. Web message boards erupted with criticism that Kim was seeking preferential treatment.

"It got spun that I was asking to skip the line and skip security, and I wasn't," she said.

Shade says it has been tough for constituents to get meetings with Kim, and Shade has promised to be more accessible by posting her office calendar and office expenses online, promptly responding to folks who contact her office, and actively seeking out ideas and opinions.

"I don't want to appease (citizens); I want to involve them," she said.

A Harvard Business School grad, Shade ran the AmeriCorps volunteer program under Govs. Ann Richards and George W. Bush and then started a Web site where customers could buy gift cards for charitable donations.

She says she thinks she has a greater depth of experience than Kim and a better track record of working with others. She has volunteered for or served on the boards of several nonprofits, including PeopleFund, Habitat for Humanity and LifeWorks. She sold her Web business in 2005 and is now a stay-at-home mom to her son, Ethan, who's almost 2.

She says she was influenced by Richards' smart, confident approach to politics and decided to run for the council after watching several City Hall controversies, such as the Las Manitas debacle and public anger about a plan to build an animal shelter in East Austin, unfold this past year.

"The combination of a background in social services and business just seemed like something that was needed — a common-sense approach," she said.

Shade said she wants to balance the demands of growth by recruiting clean-energy firms to Austin; working to implement a zero-waste plan to reduce garbage and increase recycling citywide; finding better ways to build and retain affordable housing; and working to link land-use and transportation planning.

She also wants to improve social services by re-evaluating how the city awards contracts to nonprofit social service groups and devising economic development policies that include more input from those groups.

A native Austinite, Weiss has touted his five years of disaster relief work in the National Guard. He has no prior involvement in city politics but says his experience running two small businesses — a bike shop and a trucking company — made him want to improve the city's bureaucracy.

Weiss said he would push for the city to use more solar and wind power and LED lighting, hold workshops to help small businesses thrive, create more efficient routes for Capital Metro buses, whittle down wasteful spending in the city budget and oppose tolls on existing roads.

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### **Jennifer Kim**

**Age:**35

**Occupation:** Council member; vice president of Vias International LLC

**Education:**Bachelor's degree in political science, Texas A&M University; master's degree in public affairs, Princeton University.

**Experience:**Owner, Computer Moms franchise, 2003-06; legislative aide to Texas Sen. Judith Zaffirini, D-Laredo, 1993-95; economic development specialist for the federal Economic Development Administration, 1998-2002; board member for groups including the Social Equity Commission, Census 2000 Complete County Committee, Commission on Immigrant Affairs, 1998-2001

**Web site:**www.kimforaustin.comRandi Shade

**Age:** 41

**Occupation:** Full-time mom and community volunteer

**Education:**Bachelor's degree, University of Texas; master's in business administration, Harvard Business School.

**Experience:** Founder of Charitygift, an Internet charitable giving site, 1999-2006; executive director of Austin Entrepreneurs Foundation, 2002-05; director of national development for City Year, 1996; founding executive director of AmeriCorps, 1993-96; UT student body president, 1987-88; board member of groups including PeopleFund, 2001-07, University of Texas Hillel Foundation, 1993-95 and 2002-05, and the Greater Austin Chamber of Commerce, 2000-03; co-founder of the Austin Clean Energy Initiative, 2002-05.

**Web site:**www.randishade.comKen

Weiss

**Age:**39

**Occupation:**Maintenance manager for a casino-themed party company

**Education:**Bachelor's degree in business from Concordia University; pursuing a master's degree in business from LeTourneau University


**Experience:**Officer in the National Guard, 2001-06; co-owner of a trucking company, 1992-2006; owner of a retail bike shop, 1987-2000.

**Web site:**www.weissforplace3.com

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