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CITY OF AUSTIN

Public safety unions endorse Shade, Galindo, Leffingwell

Firefighters defect from Kim's re-election bid for City Council.

By [Kate Alexander](#)

AMERICAN-STATESMAN STAFF

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Austin's three public safety unions on Tuesday jointly endorsed Randi Shade, Cid Galindo and incumbent Lee Leffingwell in the upcoming City Council race.

The unified endorsement, a first for the groups, comes as the unions for police, firefighters and emergency medical services workers separately head into contract negotiations with the city this year.

City leaders have expressed growing concerns about the increasing cost of public safety as a proportion of the city's general operating budget. Salaries are the driving force behind those cost increases.

Independently, the unions have been influential players in many past races and often, but not always, endorsed the same candidates. This was the first time they evaluated the candidates together and set out to choose by consensus.

Together, their political action committees have almost \$66,000 available that could be used in the May races, according to their most recent campaign finance reports. The PACs are subject to the \$300 contribution limit when giving directly to a candidate. But there are no limits on the PACs spending money independently on items such as signs and mailers, as long as they don't coordinate their efforts with the candidates.

The candidates said they made no promises to the unions about contract demands. And union leaders didn't discuss the contracts with the candidates during interviews, said representatives from the political action committees of the Austin Police Association, the Austin Firefighters Association and the Austin/Travis County Emergency Medical Services Employees Association.

The unions' top priority, they said, is getting the necessary resources to improve response times and ensure quality protection from all three departments.

"We're not looking for candidates to run on a public safety platform," police union PAC Chairman Wuthipong Tantaksinanukij said. "We need candidates to perform on a public safety platform."

Shade and Galindo, an urban planner who serves on the city Planning Commission, committed in written statements to increase public safety staffing. Leffingwell, who won the unions' endorsement for Place 1 without contest, has been leading the effort to put the airport and park police under the Police Department chain of command in order to standardize training.

Shade, an Internet entrepreneur, is challenging one-term incumbent Jennifer Kim for the Place 3 seat.

Firefighters' backing in 2005 helped to propel Kim into a runoff, which she won.

Mike Bewley, a board member of the firefighters' PAC, said they were not satisfied with Kim's responsiveness and accessibility. He did not offer specifics. They also had concerns about her ability to build a working coalition on the council to address their issues, Bewley said.

Kim said she was disappointed but not surprised that the firefighters endorsed her opponent. She dismissed the accessibility claim and said the firefighters' primary beef is over their request for an additional contribution to their pension system, which she was not willing to support at the expense of other city employees, she said.

Galindo is running for the Place 4 seat being vacated by Betty Dunkerley.

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Unions' endorsement history

Police Fire EMS

2006

Mayor Will Wynn Will Wynn Will Wynn

Place 2 Mike Martinez Mike Martinez Mike Martinez

Place 5 Brewster McCracken none Brewster McCracken

Place 6 Sheryl Cole Sheryl Cole Sheryl Cole

2005

Place 1 Lee Leffingwell Lee Leffingwell Lee Leffingwell

Place 3 Gregg Knaupe/Jennifer Kim* Jennifer Kim Gregg Knaupe/Jennifer Kim*

Place 4 Betty Dunkerley Betty Dunkerley Betty Dunkerley

2003

Mayor Will Wynn Will Wynn Will Wynn

Place 2 Raul Alvarez Raul Alvarez Raul Alvarez

Place 5 Brewster McCracken Brewster McCracken Brewster McCracken

Place 6 Danny Thomas Danny Thomas Danny Thomas

* = endorsed in the runoff

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