

Dallas Morning News – Candidate Questionnaire Responses

(available online at <http://www.vgt2004.org/a-dallas06>)

Q: Name:

A: Wilson Aurbach

Q: Length of residency in Dallas County:

A: I have spent nearly all my life in Dallas County, and specifically, what is now District 30. I was born in Dallas, grew up in the Buckner Terrace neighborhood in East Dallas, attended D.I.S.D's Talented and Gifted Magnet Elementary and Middle Schools and graduated from Bishop Lynch High School (all of these schools are in District 30). I left Dallas County to earn my undergraduate and law degrees. Shortly after graduating from law school in 2002, I returned to Dallas County and District 30, where I currently live and work in Downtown Dallas.

Q: Occupation/main source of income:

A: Attorney

Q: Current civic involvement/accomplishment highlights:

A: Member of the Texas Bar Association
Member of the Dallas Bar Association
Member of the Dallas Association of Young Lawyers
Member First Baptist Church Dallas
Regular legal representation of charitable organizations and individuals unable to afford an attorney on a pro bono basis

Q: Previous civic involvement/accomplishment highlights:

A: Texas Review of Law and Politics, Associate Editor
University of Texas Interscholastic Mock Trial Team
Baylor University Student Foundation, Co-President
Chapel Orchestra, First Baptist Church Dallas (saxophone)
Active in missions locally, in other parts of the United States and internationally in Spain, Kenya and Myanmar.
Vacation Bible School volunteer

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Q: Education:

A: The University of Texas School of Law - J.D. 2002
Baylor University - B.A. 1999
Bishop Lynch High School (in District 30)
Alex W. Spence Middle School (in District 30)
K.B. Polk Elementary School (in District 30)

Q: Campaign Web site:

A: www.voteaurbach.com

Q: What conditions should be met in Iraq before the U.S. withdraws its forces?

A: The U.S. should not conduct a large scale withdrawal of its forces until Iraq has a stable elected government and a military force that is capable of controlling the insurgent activity within its own borders. Like many Americans, I want our service men and women to return home to their families and communities as soon as possible, but we have made a commitment to a free Iraq, and if the U.S. leaves now, we threaten to undo all the progress we have made in Iraq, and, indeed, in the entire region. Our capable military commanders are in the best position to determine the proper methods and precise timing for our withdrawal, but we can take certain specific measures now to prepare for that day. First, the U.S. should put together a rapid-response force, including ground troops, which will remain in the area (but not in Iraq itself) to support the new Iraqi military when necessary. Second, we should continue to provide air support to the military forces of the fledgling Iraqi democracy on an as-needed basis following the withdrawal of U.S. ground forces. Third, the U.S. should continue training and equipping the new Iraqi military even after our own ground forces withdraw. Fourth, the U.S. should encourage our allies to contribute money, training and equipment to help build up the military of the democratic Iraq. Fifth, the U.S. should treat the newly free Iraq as a valuable ally in the Middle East, and respond to any requests for military assistance from its government. Sixth, the U.S. should continue to pursue non-Iraqi al-Qaeda terrorists in Iraq aggressively using special forces teams, air power, and Predator drones even after our primary ground forces withdraw. Seventh, the U.S. should continue to provide intelligence (e.g., satellite reconnaissance and communications intercepts) to the government and military of democratic Iraq.

Stated simply, the insurgents are less likely to escalate their activities as the U.S. decreases its presence in the region if they

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know that we are still close by and remain deeply committed to Iraq's long-term stability and freedom. Our withdrawal from Iraq must not mirror our chaotic and total retreat from Vietnam—a withdrawal that doomed the people of Southeast Asia to decades of communist servitude. Having these systems in place will allow the transition back to an Iraqi government to be as smooth as possible, while also minimizing American casualties and the number of American soldiers on the ground in and around Iraq. I am optimistic that these goals can be accomplished, and hopeful that they can be accomplished quickly.

Q: How do you assess the progress in the war on terror? What should be the next step?

A: The war on terror divides cleanly into two phases; the defensive effort, and the offensive effort. Given that since September 11, 2001 there has not been a successful terrorist attack on U.S. soil of any kind, the defensive half of the war on terror has gone extremely well. After the 9-11 attacks, I, like many Americans, feared additional terrorist incidents within days or weeks, and I must commend the current administration for thwarting numerous domestic terrorist plots while allowing Americans to maintain their freedom. Had the 9-11 attacks been followed in close succession by more terrorist incidents, a nationwide panic would have developed and radical measures, such as martial law, might have been implemented. Indeed, few American would have believed that four and a half years after 9-11-2001 not a single additional act of terrorism would have taken place on U.S. soil. As such, our success in the defensive aspects of the war on terror should not be understated. However, even on the defensive front, more needs to be done. First and foremost, our borders, both north and south, need to be secured. Our porous borders have become a serious national security issue, and immediate steps must be taken to improve security along both borders. The U.S. government needs to know who is coming into this country, and what they are bringing with them. Otherwise, a terrorist will eventually slip over the border with a weapon of mass destruction. I do not view border security as an immigration issue so much as a national security threat, and I would treat the issue as such. Second and similarly, another major goal in the defensive war on terror must be the inspection of all cargo containers coming into U.S. ports. Third, we urgently need to improve security at critical and vulnerable infrastructure, including nuclear power plants, water treatment plants, and oil refineries.

Offensively there is still much to be done. While Operation Anaconda appears to have succeeded in eradicating the formalized structure of al-Qaeda, Osama bin Laden and his primary deputy, al-Zawahiri, are still unaccounted for. In addition, al-Qaeda retains the ability to strike in the West, as evidenced by the subway bomb attacks in London and Madrid. Al-Qaeda and its affiliates continue to strike in Iraq as well, destabilizing that fledgling democracy and inflicting substantial casualties. I firmly believe that continued—and intensified—efforts are necessary to track down these terrorist leaders and bring them to justice. In terms of next offensive steps, I believe we should encourage the Pakistani government and provide assistance to police the lawless and volatile Pakistani/Afghanistan border where many believe terrorists, including bin Laden, are apparently enjoying

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sanctuary. To the extent that Pakistan is unwilling or unable to assert control over these semi-autonomous tribal areas, we must put aside concerns about Pakistani sovereignty and authorize covert American operations—including pursuit from Afghanistan—into Pakistan’s tribal areas. Another key offensive step is improving our human (“people on the ground”) intelligence network throughout the Middle East. In order to hunt down and bring the terrorists to justice, we need to know where they are. And the best way to find them is through reliable, old-fashioned human intelligence.

Q: How should homeland security funds be distributed? Should they be based upon threats or upon geography?

A: Our focus should be on threats, not simple geography. There is no place for regionalism or pork barrel spending when we are working to protect the safety of Americans. Sadly, many of our current policy makers do not seem to understand this principle. For example, two of the biggest recipients of homeland security funds have been Alaska and South Dakota. While these are undoubtedly great states, they simply do not face security threats of the type or magnitude confronting many other areas, including parts of Texas. Taxpayer money should always be spent in a responsible manner, especially when protecting the nation as a whole. In allotting homeland security funds, we must be guided by the types of threats that the U.S. is most likely to encounter. For example, the U.S. is much less likely to see ICBM’s launched from a hostile foreign power than it is to have a nuclear warhead carried over one of its porous borders on the back of an 18-wheeler or brought into one of its ports aboard an unsearched cargo ship. As such, we should spend more on border and port security, and less on a domestic, space-based missile defense system. We can not protect this country unless we know who—and what—is entering it. As such, homeland security funds should focus on securing our borders—both North and South—and on controlling what comes in to our seaports and airports. We also need to allocate more homeland security funds to the visa applicant screening process, thereby insuring that an adequate background check is performed on every person applying for a visa to this country. Adequate visa applicant screening would have kept several of the 9-11 hijackers out of this country, and possibly prevented their horrific attacks.

Finally, domestic human intelligence must be an important homeland security priority. One of the greatest dangers to this country are al-Qaeda “sleeper cells” that may already be here. We saw how dangerous these cells can be during the al-Qaeda attacks on London and Madrid. No amount of border security will keep out terrorists who have already infiltrated this country. The best way to uncover these dangerous sleeper cells is via old-fashioned undercover police work in the relevant communities. Simply put, the best way to discover and “roll up” sleeper cells is by placing undercover law enforcement in the places that such cells are likely to bloom.

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Q: The deficit continues to hover between \$300 billion - \$350 billion annually. What would you do to reduce that figure? Please be precise about what you would cut or tax. Would you favor returning Congress to a pay-as-you-go system, where legislators must identify how they would pay for spending hikes or tax cuts?

A: Spending is out of control in Washington, and I think that the American tax-payers' money should be spent more wisely. Republicans are supposed to be in favor of a smaller, more efficient government and yet spending has increased while the GOP is the majority. A copy of the federal budget is larger than the Manhattan phone directory. As such, it makes little sense to point to particular small items that need to be cut—the budget is simply overflowing with non-essential expenditures. The key is not finding a few outlandish government extravagances—such as the infamous “bridge to nowhere” in Alaska—but rather reforming our philosophy of government. I firmly agree with Thomas Jefferson that “the government that governs least governs best” and that small-government philosophy will guide my spending decisions. The function of government is to protect the lives, liberty and property of its citizens, and the further a particular item falls from that limited function, the more likely I am to press to cut it. Aside from specific budget cuts, Congress needs a change in mindset regarding how and why it spends tax payer money. Institutional and structural changes are needed. For example, much of the unnecessary spending could be reduced if the heads of the House’s appropriation committee and its sub-committees (the so-called “College of Cardinals”) were limited to one term, thereby making these positions less coveted and less prone to abuse. Such a limit would also reduce the temptation to attach pork barrel projects to every major bill. Similarly, institutional controls on “earmarks”—special private spending bills used by individual members to bring home pork—need to be immediately imposed. The use of earmarks is up 872% since 1994, and this is grossly unacceptable in a Republican-controlled Congress. Eliminate or seriously reform earmark usage and you will eliminate a significant amount of pork spending. Another efficient and proven institutional method for reducing the federal budget deficit would be to allow the President a line-item veto. This process was first used, rather effectively, by President Clinton’s administration, but was later determined by the Supreme Court to be an unconstitutional delegation of the legislature’s power. I think Congress should look into a constitutional amendment to again grant this important budget balancing power to the President.

Q: Do you favor any changes in the federal laws governing open meetings and public records? If so, please explain.

A: I do not believe that many changes in these laws are necessary at this time. As a general rule, transparency in government

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is desirable, and every American has the right to know how their government works and how they are being represented. I think that the Freedom of Information Act strikes an acceptable balance between allowing the public access to the inner workings of their government and not wasting resources in delivering information that the public neither wants nor needs. Stated simply, under FOIA if you want a piece of information badly enough to ask for it, you will generally get it. Even apart from FOIA, today's America has a staggering amount of information about their government right at their fingertips via the internet and continuous live coverage of the Legislature via the two C-SPAN television channels. I would welcome, however, a C-SPAN3 covering the Supreme Court and other important federal cases—considering the wide-ranging impact of the Supreme Court's decisions, there is surprisingly little coverage of its proceedings. Outside of the additional access to the federal court system I would be interested to know what additional information from open-meetings and public records that citizens are concerned is not presently available.

Q: Do you favor using federal dollars to fund stem cell research? Please explain.

A: I would favor funding adult and umbilical stem cell research. Geneticists all over the globe have already achieved results from these types of stem cell research that have been nothing short of astounding. The potential for breakthroughs is especially great for stem cells found in newborn's umbilical cords, which are rich in cells that are very similar to embryonic stem cells. Many new parents are now having these umbilical cord stem cells stored professionally (at their own expense) to give the parents and the child more options in the event that genetic impairments show up later in life. These cells obviously contain a perfect match to the child's and parent's DNA and, as such, are an ideal source of genetic material at its early stages of development for that particular family. Moreover, failing to conduct such research on U.S. soil when we know that embryonic stem cell research is being funded and performed by other governments and corporations elsewhere throughout the world could cause the U.S. to fall dangerously behind in the international community and could lead to many top scientists leaving the country. By focusing on the adult and umbilical stem cell research now, we could see the end of such destructive diseases as leukemia and osteoporosis in our lifetime.

Q: China and India are investing heavily in preparing more engineers. What are your ideas for graduating more engineers in the United States?

A: I will be the first to admit that America has too many lawyers and not enough engineers (among other professions). Many of the new generation of engineers in India and China were educated in the U.S. We have the best universities and higher-educational facilities in the world—and foreign students are, not wrongly, taking advantage of the relative ease of obtaining a student visa and the opportunities provided by our universities. As a general principle, I believe that our free-market system

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will take care of the scarcity of engineers (or any other profession) in America. The free-market economic principle of “functionalism” should regulate any shortage in the number of engineers in this country: if there are not enough engineers to fill the market’s needs, the compensation for engineers will increase dramatically, leading to a greater number of people becoming engineers, until the shortage is solved and compensation levels out with other professions. Aside from relying on the “invisible hand” of the free market, one way to increase the number of American engineers is to start emphasizing the importance of science and math in elementary-school classrooms. The earlier students become interested in scientific and mathematical disciplines, the more likely they are to carry that interest with them through college. Early in the Cold War, after the Soviet Union put Sputnik in orbit, the Eisenhower administration urgently mandated that American schools refocus on math and science. It may be time for such a program once again.

Another effective way to encourage scientific and engineering interest is through corporate or government sponsored challenges that inspire experienced engineers and elementary students alike to excel in engineering. One great example of these types of challenges is the Defense Advance Research Projects Agency’s (DARPA) Grand Challenge that awarded \$2 million to a team from Stanford University for building a robotic vehicle capable of traversing over 100 miles of the Mojave desert without direct human control. This particular contest attracted entrants from major corporations, universities and individuals across the country. Another example of encouraging engineering innovation was the privately-funded “X-Prize” given for the first civilian space craft—a prize that has now been claimed by “Spaceship One.” I am in favor of encouraging both an increased number of engineers and a greater degree of technical innovation by establishing more such high-profile prizes and challenges. There is no substitute for American ingenuity, and I am confident that America will continue to produce some of the best engineers in the world.

Q: What should Congress do, if anything, to help high schools prepare more graduates for the global economy?

A: Education is primarily a local and state issue, and rightly so. Of course, federal funding has a major impact on how effectively the state and local governments can run their public school systems and can provide incentives for methods that would serve the nation as a whole. Educational standards are lacking nation-wide and simply throwing money at the problems will not solve anything. Students are more likely to be successful if they feel invested in their education. Current high-school curriculums were designed for an economic landscape that has changed drastically in the last 20 years. Today’s employment opportunities require a totally different set of skills than those of just a decade ago, and I suspect the set of requisite skills

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will continue to change in coming years. As a result, we need to allow our high schools to be flexible so they can adapt to the changing needs of their students. As a baseline, there should be a renewed focus on foreign language studies and computer skills as well as math and science. To go a step further, Congress could encourage focused high school curriculums similar to D.I.S.D.'s Magnet School system which allows for programs tailored to what students want to learn (e.g. the Booker T. Washington Arts Magnet and Health Professionals Magnet). For students at these magnet schools, the basic academics are the same as any other high school, but students are also allowed to study subjects tailored to their particular aptitudes. Skyline High School's cluster-based system where students can focus much of their school day on developing a particular skill or trade from computer programming to aeronautics provides another positive local example that is potentially worthy of federal study, and perhaps, funding.

Q: What would you do to improve America's immigration problem? How important is including a guest worker program, building a wall between the United States and Mexico, or ending birthright citizenship to stepping up border security?

A: It is a wonderful testament to the opportunities provided by the American way of life that so many people will risk everything just to live in this country. However, America's porous borders are becoming a threat to national security, and it is time for us to make some tough choices about our borders and the people who are in our country illegally. It is imperative that we gain control over our borders and know who is coming into our country and why. Much of the debate concerning the Texas-Mexico border concerns what specific security measures need to be put into place. This debate misses the point; the key fact is that additional security measures urgently need to be taken, regardless of what specific measures are ultimately adopted. As an attorney, I understand the value in consulting with experts, and I believe that one of our best resources in making these tough decisions about what measures need to be taken at the border is the expertise of the U.S. Immigration and Naturalization Service (now a part of the Department of Homeland Security). For example, we would need to know how a wall would realistically affect the U.S.-Mexico border before such a structure is put into place. I am suspicious of a wall because I feel it is a symbolically poor choice. America is a country known for tearing down walls, not putting them up. In addition, there is some evidence that a wall encourages more dangerous methods of crossing the border—indeed some illegal immigrants have died trying to tunnel under walls that are currently in place. Nonetheless, if the experts at INS told me that a wall was the best mechanism for gaining control of our southern border, I would ultimately support it. If a wall is eventually constructed, it is important for the U.S. to let the rest of the world know that putting up a wall does not mean

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that we have closed our doors. My instinct is that measures other than a wall would ultimately be more effective and less symbolically troubling. For example, a sophisticated network of sensors at the border backed up by a substantially upgraded and better-funded Border Patrol would seem likely to have essentially the same effect as a wall. Given the national security implications of border security, I also envision some role for our National Guard along the border. For example, a small militarized rapid-reaction force (e.g., air cavalry) should be stationed near key border crossings in order to intercept large-scale armed incursions into the United States by narcotics traffickers (as we have already seen this year in Hudspeth County, Texas) or by terrorists. The military should certainly not be used to enforce immigration law, but should be on-hand near the border to handle national security threats. It is also important to note that as we strengthen the Texas/Mexico border, the other U.S. borders will become more attractive to those who might want to harm America (especially the world's longest non-militarized border between the U.S. and Canada). As such, our efforts to control the borders cannot be limited to our southern border. I would favor increased aerial and electronic surveillance of our Canadian border as well.

I would support a guest worker program as long as there is a demonstrated need for such workers in addition to citizens already working in this country. Stated simply, I favor a guest worker program provided that it does not displace any American worker. I do not think that it will, as there are entire industries staffed primarily by illegal labor, and certain circumstances regularly create sudden and large needs for laborers that the U.S. economy cannot supply (for example, the shortage of laborers working to rebuilt New Orleans after Hurricane Katrina). As such, we should allow these hard working immigrant laborers to work legally in this country—while stopping short of rewarding their heretofore illegal presence in this country with citizenship. Properly designed and administered, a guest worker program would be of enormous benefits to the foreign workers, the companies that hire them, and the Government's tax rolls. Birthright citizenship is a difficult issue because of its roots in the founding of our nation, but I believe that citizenship is more about a commitment to being an American than the geographical location of your birth. It is worth noting that many other countries have abandoned birthright citizenship. Our current system encourages parents-to-be to immigrate illegally so that their child will be “born an American.” If we are serious about quelling illegal immigration, we need to be serious about changing incentives. I believe this issue warrants further study, and I would be open to discussing a move away from birthright citizenship.

Q: Overall, do you consider immigrants to be a benefit to or a drag on the United States?

A: Properly controlled, immigration is a great benefit to the United States. America is a country founded by immigrants, and nearly all Americans can trace his or her roots to an immigrant. Immigration is part of our national fabric and should

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continue—but so should the process of assimilation. Immigration historically produces new waves and generations of Americans, but immigration without assimilation is a formula for chaos. It is important to distinguish between political immigrants—those who come to America seeking to become Americans—and those who come to America for purely short-term economic reasons. Purely economic immigrants do not change their national loyalty nor are they intent on becoming Americans. Much of the money made by economic immigrants is sent back to their home countries. For these purely economic immigrants, I would support a guest worker program that would be better for the U.S. and for them. Under this program, guest workers would be able to support their families in their home countries legally (when America has need for their employment), and America would benefit from more than just their services, because once their presence was legalized, they could be taxed. Of course, these guest workers would not vote, receive welfare benefits or enjoy certain other privileges of being an American citizen. However, immigrants with a desire to become Americans and assimilate into our society must be given the opportunity to do so.

Q: Should North Texas have more time to comply with clean air requirements? Or should counties like Dallas, Tarrant, Ellis, Collin and Denton comply with Clean Air Act standards by the existing deadline of 2010?

A: Yes. North Texas is making progress towards meeting the 2010 standards, but we do need more time because it is very important that the North Texas area not lose its federal funding for highways. North Texas' air quality is certainly not perfect, but it is also not at the dismal levels of Los Angeles or Houston, and Congress should not squelch the growth and progress in our area. North Texas is not dominated by heavy industry and our largest contributor to pollution is automobile exhaust. A time extension would allow people more time to make sure their personal vehicles are in compliance. Of course, those fortunate enough to own newer cars will not be as directly affected, but those who are not as financially privileged would benefit from the additional time.

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Q: Do you think a seamless regional transit system is vital to this region's effort to reduce traffic congestion and pollution? Will you help secure federal funding for such a system?

A: Yes, I believe that our regional transit system is vital to North Texas to reduce traffic congestion and pollution and will also make our part of the country a better place to live. DART has already come a long way, and its recently constructed light rail system has been an enormous success (indeed, the only real criticism is that it is not expanding fast enough). Providing this type of transportation infrastructure is a classic federal function and I would help secure some funding to help make the system as useful, expansive and as efficient as possible.

Q: What prompted you to run for office?

A: The process leading up to my decision to run for Congress in District 30 began on election day 2004, when there was not a candidate whom I felt would represent me in Washington. In fact, there was no Republican candidate at all. As a citizen, I think the lack of a viable opponent for an incumbent politician is unacceptable. Unchallenged politicians tend to be less accountable to their constituents, and I believe District 30 is no exception. The incumbent's positions have become increasingly unpopular in her District (such as her threat to shut down Love Field) and among leaders in the legislature. I believe that there is an opportunity for a conservative message to resonate with many nontraditional voters in the District and with the significant influx of conservative voters in all of District 30. Many of these new voters have not had the opportunity to vote for a serious Republican candidate, and long-time residents may have felt abandoned by the party and are no longer as involved in politics as they once were. It is time for a conservative voice for District 30.

Q: Describe an example of how you've led a team or group towards achieving a particular goal.

A: As an associate in a large law firm, I am very familiar with the process of working as a team. On almost every case that I have handled, there are lawyers at different levels of seniority and experience working together as a team. However, attorneys at my level very rarely serve as the leader of these teams. At my level, I am often in control of cases on a day-to-day basis, but if I want to influence the larger-picture strategy or positions in a case, I have to work behind the scenes to manage the team leaders and convince them that my ideas are important before they will adopt my perspective. I think this scenario is very similar to what I will experience as a freshman congressional representative. Obviously, I will not be elected

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as majority leader; I will have to work in much the same way that I do at my law firm every day. I will work hard with the party and senior congressional leadership to convince them that what is good for my district is the best decision for Congress to make.

Q: What political leaders do you most admire, and why?

A: I do not know any political leader well enough on a personal level to say that I categorically admire him or her. However, there are characteristics of these political leaders that I do admire. Below are just a few examples:

--George W. Bush: I admire our President for having the courage to say publicly and boldly that his faith plays an important role in his politics.

--John McCain: I admire the Arizona senator for his unquestioned patriotism and because, despite being a Republican party leader, he is not afraid to cross party lines when he thinks his position is right. I think that, too often, politicians let their party dictate their vote before an issue is even debated.

--J. Erik Johnsson / Annette Straus: I admire these former Dallas mayors for their ability to partner government and the private sector to create real progress and opportunities for their constituents. Largely because of leaders like Mayors Johnsson and Straus Dallas used to be known as “the City that works.” It long ago relinquished that title, and I would like to see a return to that era of public-private cooperation and sound, responsible government in North Texas.