



Austin City Council Candidate Questionnaire Responses  
District 3

October 9, 2018

Question 1	Why are you seeking this public office? (Please be brief)
<b>Jessica Cohen</b>	There are several reasons but the most important are Austin's affordability, transportation crisis, increased homelessness, and having a progressive transgender candidate representative on city council.
<b>Justin Jacobson</b>	I'm running because over the last year I became very disappointed with the direction of our city. There is an increasing amount of division setting in on council and we don't seem all too capable of accomplishing serious action on our most pressing issues.
<b>Pio Renteria</b>	I am running to make sure that the working families and individuals who have made Austin such a great place to live are able not just to remain, but to thrive and have access to quality services. That's why my top priorities are affordable housing, public transportation and economic empowerment.

Question 2	Please tell us why you are seeking the endorsement of SDA. Do you consider yourself to be a Democrat? Do you have a history of involvement in Democratic politics and/or LGBTQ issues? If so please briefly describe this history.
<b>Jessica Cohen</b>	I am running as an out and proud transgender woman. I would say I'm a very progressive independent only because currently I'm frustrated by the Democrats national leadership. However, I always have and will continue to vote Democrat.
<b>Justin Jacobson</b>	As an identified Queer person and past board member of SDA, I can think of no other club's endorsement I'd rather have. Outside of my campaign work for Democratic candidates, it's been this organization that kept me involved with politics. My activism started in the queer community and I'm happy to a partisan layer t that as I've gotten older.
<b>Pio Renteria</b>	I would be honored to have the endorsement of Stonewall Democrats of Austin because I share your commitment to fighting for social justice and equity. I consider myself a life-long Progressive Democrat, have served as a Precinct Chair and State Delegate, and was a National Delegate for President Barack Obama because I believe that every person regardless of race, ethnicity, sexual orientation, gender identity, or physical ability deserves a fair shot at life and the opportunity to pursue their own happiness and success through safe work and fair compensation, access to quality healthcare and education, and to be able to do it free from the threat of violence.

Question 3	Do you believe LGBTQ individuals should be protected against discrimination in employment on the basis of sexual orientation or gender identity/expression?
<b>Jessica Cohen</b>	Yes. After I first transitioned, I had difficulty getting a job. After I was passable, I lost a couple jobs due to being outed. I want to ensure there are enforceable protections in place to prevent this from happening again.
<b>Justin Jacobson</b>	Yes, I do so unequivocally.



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<b>Pio Renteria</b>	Yes, LGBTQ individuals should absolutely and unequivocally be protected against discrimination not just in employment but in any aspect of society including education, housing, and healthcare. This is one of the most important civil rights issues of our time.
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<b>Question 4</b>	<b>If elected would you commit to appointing LGBTQ individuals to City Boards and Commissions.</b>
<b>Jessica Cohen</b>	Without a doubt.
<b>Justin Jacobson</b>	Yes.
<b>Pio Renteria</b>	Yes, I have appointed members of the LGBTQ community to City Boards and Commissions and if re-elected, would continue to do so. I also supported the creation of the LGBTQ Quality of Life Advisory Commission so that we can hear directly from the community about the services that are needed.

<b>Question 5</b>	<b>Do you think that the Austin Police Department is doing everything it can to make its officers aware of and sensitive to the rights and dignity of Austin's LGBTQ citizens?</b>
<b>Jessica Cohen</b>	I've had so many bad experiences with the Austin Police Department that it's hard to say. I believe they believe they are doing everything they can.
<b>Justin Jacobson</b>	I believe the police department has done some good work to date. However, we should not accept that these efforts are over, especially for our Trans and QPOC brothers and sisters. More training and education can always make our police department stronger.
<b>Pio Renteria</b>	No, I believe major reform is needed to move us toward a community policing model that makes our communities safer by prioritizing trust-building and mutual respect. Ensuring that officers are aware and sensitive to the rights and dignity of Austin's LGBTQ residents is extremely important and that's why I voted to create a stakeholder group that would advise APD and Council on policy and training changes that can improve law enforcement's interactions with LGBTQ and gendernonconforming individuals as well as facilitate the reporting of bias-motivated crimes.



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Question 6	If elected, would you act to increase recruitment of LGBTQ employees for the police, fire, and emergency medical services? What proposals would you suggest to make coming out on the job safer for LGBTQ employees?
<b>Jessica Cohen</b>	Absolutely. As a former EMT, I'm intimately familiar with the mentality of the firehouse and it can be rather abrasive. Having said that, I believe that there shouldn't be much allowance given when an employee's sexual orientation or gender is being discussed. I believe AFD, ATCEMS, and APD should have a strict leave your prejudice at the door or you can't work for us policy. This kind of policy, along with employee education and constant reminders from the department in both training and active duty that intolerance will not be accepted will help promote a healthier environment that's safer for LGBTQ employees both newly transitioned and established.
<b>Justin Jacobson</b>	I would commit to increasing recruitment of LGBTQ employees across all departments. One of the most fundamental ways to help folks feel comfortable with coming out on the job is by having out and proud council members. I want to be the loud queer voice that says we're here and people need to get used to it.
<b>Pio Renteria</b>	Yes, our community is better served if our emergency responders and public safety personnel reflect the diversity in our community, not just for diversity's sake but because they will be better prepared and equipped to serve the different needs of Austin families. LGBTQ employees should feel safe coming out on the job and Human Resources should proactively work with employees, supervisors, and managers to ensure that nobody is being discriminated against based on their gender identity or expression by providing safe avenues to raise issues like complaint processes or periodic surveys and reviews to take immediate action when necessary.

Question 7	Do you think the City of Austin is doing enough to ensure equality for its LGBTQ employees? For example, how would you address organizational issues such as transgender employees transitioning on the job?
<b>Jessica Cohen</b>	It's really hard to say. I've seen where a company may have some very good policies on the books but more often than not those policies aren't enforced. Speaking from experience, transitioning on the job is never an easy thing. Based on not just my experience but others as well, I feel transitioning on the job is easier when there is a period of time between the announcement and the beginning of the transition and I do not mean just a weekend. I believe that a period of no less than a week should be allowed to be taken off from the job using PTO or earned sick time to allow time for adjustment. After that, mandatory educational training along with dedicated resources where both the transitioning employee and their coworkers can get more information should be made available.
<b>Justin Jacobson</b>	Once again, we can always do and strive for more. For our trans brothers and sisters, we need to do all that we can to honor their true selves. Whatever measures the city can take to facilitate that, we should implement them ASAP.



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<p><b>Pio Renteria</b></p>	<p>No, above I mentioned the importance of recruiting diverse public safety employees but just as important is ensuring that evaluations and promotion decisions are made without prejudice or discrimination to ensure we have a workforce that truly reflects Austin's diversity. Transgender employees who are transitioning should have a supportive work environment and be able to work with supervisors and managers so that accommodations can be made if they are needed.</p>
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<p><b>Question 8</b></p>	<p><b>If elected, would you continue to uphold the current requirement that a company that receives economic incentives from the City not discriminate against its LBGQT employees?</b></p>
<p><b>Jessica Cohen</b></p>	<p>Absolutely. And I vow to actually enforce it.</p>
<p><b>Justin Jacobson</b></p>	<p>Yes.</p>
<p><b>Pio Renteria</b></p>	<p>Yes, Austin should only do business in ways that promote and reflect our shared values, including respect for all members of our community and the City should refrain from providing financial support to companies that discriminate against LGBTQ employees.</p>

<p><b>Question 9</b></p>	<p><b>How familiar are you with organizations, such as Out Youth, the Austin Gay &amp; Lesbian Chamber of Commerce, and AIDS Services of Austin that serve the LGBTQ community? If elected, would you support increased funding for the services organizations like these provide? What services do you think are crucial for LGBTQ residents?</b></p>
<p><b>Jessica Cohen</b></p>	<p>Extremely. I support increasing funds for these service organizations now. I pledge to find a way to increase funding to these groups if elected. To be honest, I can't think of a service that isn't crucial to the LGBTQ community. The most crucial is probably mental health counseling. Coming out, and the unfortunate stigma that is often associated with it, can be extremely stressful to the point of leading to suicide. We as a community must strive to prevent this.</p>
<p><b>Justin Jacobson</b></p>	<p>I am familiar with many of these organizations. Out Youth started my journey in activism, ASA provides me with STI &amp; HIV testing, I receive PrEP from the KIND clinic. I know what the resources have meant for my life and will be a tireless advocate for them at council.</p>
<p><b>Pio Renteria</b></p>	<p>I am very familiar with their work and will continue to support increased funding for services that help provide support systems for LGBTQ youth, economic opportunities for LGBTQ workers and small businesses, and quality health services to the LGBTQ community.</p>



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<b>Question 10</b>	<b>Describe a step you would take, or have taken, or a proposal you would make, or have made as a member of Austin’s City Council that would <u>specifically</u> benefit Austin’s LGBTQ community.</b>
<b>Jessica Cohen</b>	I ran for office. If that’s not a message to the Texas Legislature that the LGBTQ community will not tolerate being pushed around by archaic bigots stuck in the 19th century then I don’t know what is. I think it’s important that we have appropriate representation on the city council.
<b>Justin Jacobson</b>	I want to make sure we've taken a hard look at the training resources we're giving our Police officers. Not only do we need to make sure they are sensitive to those experiencing mental health difficulties, but are also mindful of our trans community, especially when it comes to identifying persons.
<b>Pio Renteria</b>	At Council, I have supported funding and sponsored fee waivers for events including Queerbomb and PRIDE, supported funding for the Gay and Lesbian Chamber of Commerce, voted to create the LGBTQ Quality of Life Advisory Committee, and voted to include \$200,000 in the FY 18-19 Budget to conduct an LGBTQ quality-of-life community study.

<b>Question 11</b>	<b>In the 85<sup>th</sup> Texas Legislative Session, legislation was filed that would prohibit people from using bathrooms based on their preferred gender identity. Similar legislation is certain to be filed in the 86<sup>th</sup> Texas Legislative Session. Would you be</b>
<b>Jessica Cohen</b>	IN THE LOUDEST VOICE POSSIBLE. STANDING IN THE MIDDLE OF CONGRESS IF NECESSARY.
<b>Justin Jacobson</b>	Yes.
<b>Pio Renteria</b>	Yes, as an Austin Council Member, I would be willing to testify against this hateful attack on our community and to encourage others, including major employers in Austin, to do the same.

<b>Question 12</b>	<b>In 2015, the U.S. Supreme Court, in the case of <i>Obergefell vs. Hodges</i>, ruled that all marriages be treated equally. In 2017, the Texas Supreme Court threw out a lower court ruling that said spouses of gay and lesbian public employees are entitled to government-subsidized same-sex marriage benefits. Do you agree or disagree with this ruling and would you maintain the City of Austin’s policy to provide employee benefits to all married employees?</b>
<b>Jessica Cohen</b>	100%. Love is love. It doesn’t care what you look like. Married is married and should be treated that way regardless of the genders (or non-genders) involved in the relationship.
<b>Justin Jacobson</b>	I do agree with throwing out that ruling and would always maintain that the City provide benefits to all married employees.



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<b>Pio Renteria</b>	Gay and Lesbian public employees should be entitled to equal protection under the law and that includes being treated the same way and receiving the same benefits as any other married couple. The Texas Supreme Court ruling is unjust, and I would continue to support City of Austin policies that provide employee benefits to all married employees.
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Question 13	Do you believe that public schools should institute rules and policies to prohibit harassment and discrimination against LGBTQ students?
<b>Jessica Cohen</b>	Considering how many horrible events I had to deal with in school, I absolutely believe there should be rules and policies in place to prohibit harassment. Just as schools should be teaching tolerance between ethnicities and cultures, they should be teaching tolerance for all genders and sexual orientations.
<b>Justin Jacobson</b>	Yes.
<b>Pio Renteria</b>	Yes, harassment and discrimination against LGBTQ students should not be tolerated and policies should be instituted at our schools to protect our students from bullying and violence.

Question 14	If elected, how would you stay informed of the concerns and interests of your LGBTQ constituents?
<b>Jessica Cohen</b>	The same way I do now. By spending time with them.
<b>Justin Jacobson</b>	Yes.
<b>Pio Renteria</b>	As always, I will continue to depend on the counsel of LGBTQ community leaders when making decisions that impact the wellbeing of my constituents in District 3 and the City of Austin. I plan to continue working with LGBTQ organizations and will pay close attention to the results of the LGBTQ Quality of Life Study.

Question 15	Have you attended functions in Austin's LGBTQ community and, if so, which?
<b>Jessica Cohen</b>	Yes. So many I can't even begin to name them all. However, I did miss the Gender Unbound Art Fest this year. But, over the course of 30 years, since my first viewing of RHPS (which was still considered very risqué in 1989) I've been to or participated in just about every pride festival (Austin, Houston, DFW,) queerbomb, local drag show, LGBTQ burlesque show, etc. etc. I've been an employee of Elysium for 15 years which is now (thanks to me) home to no less than two drag shows a week including the monthly Boiz of Austin Drag King show.
<b>Justin Jacobson</b>	I have attended many. From PRIDE, Austin Gay and Lesbian Film Fest, Greetings From Queer Mountain, Austin International Drag Fest, many ALLGO functions, and more nights out on fourth street than I can remember, I definitely spent my time in and among the community.



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<b>Pio Renteria</b>	Yes, I never miss a PRIDE parade, have attended PRIDE festivals and Queerbomb, and just a few years ago I celebrated the Supreme Court ruling in support of marriage equality at a rally on 4th Street.
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