

San Antonio Express-News

Candidates questioned on commitment and accountability

By Nicole M. Bautista, Staff Writer

April 23, 2017



(Photo: Jerry Lara/San Antonio Express-News)

San Antonio City Council member from District 1 Roberto Trevino, right, stands with two of his opponents, Michael Montano, center, and Robert Feria, during the Communities Organized for Public Service/Metro ... more

It may be Fiesta, but at least 750 people had something other than partying on their minds Sunday — the candidates running for San Antonio mayor and City Council.

As it has for the past 40 years, COPS/Metro — Communities Organized for Public Service and the Metro Alliance — played host to San Antonio’s mayoral and council candidates for an annual accountability assembly.

The event, held at St. Henry Catholic Church Parish Hall in Southtown, is for residents to question candidates on issues important to the community, such as immigration, housing and economic security, and to allow the politicians to state where they stand.

“This event is important because it is not just the candidates coming and presenting to us what they say they are going to do,” said Melissa Cessac, assembly chair. “We meet regularly with folks, we meet individually, we meet in house meetings to learn what the issues are that people are really facing.”

After months of meetings with San Antonio residents, COPS/Metro organizers came up with an agenda for mayoral and City Council candidates to address at the assembly, Cessac said.

“That’s where the questioning came from,” she said.

Before the questions began, three speakers shared personal stories about immigration, housing and workforce development.

Then, the candidates were then each given a turn to respond “yes” or “no” to three questions regarding those issues.

The first question asked whether the candidate would commit to increase the city’s investment in Community Development Block Grants/HOME funds.

The second question revolved around whether the candidate would commit to create a citywide ID for all San Antonio residents, and a legal defense fund for citizen children who have lost their immigrant parents to deportation.

A third question asked whether the candidate would commit to raising the city’s minimum wage for city workers to \$14.75 per hour; \$9.50 per hour for contract workers; and raise the city’s investment in Project Quest, a work-training program, to \$2.5 million.

Of the mayoral candidates present, Ron Nirenberg and Manuel Medina responded “yes” to each question when given their turn. They each were then given two minutes to elaborate on their answer.

Mayor Ivy Taylor was invited to the event and committed to attend, but did not, organizers said.

All council candidates from Districts 1-8 responded “yes” to each question and were given 30 seconds to elaborate. The large audience was passionate, but professional.

COPS/Metro, a coalition of churches, schools and unions, has held the accountability sessions for more than 40 years and organizers say it’s been helpful.

“Ask any politician who has been elected in San Antonio, and it is something that they probably remember,” said Jorge Montiel, a lead organizer for COPS/Metro Alliance.

Montiel said there may be one more accountability assembly for this election if there is a mayoral runoff.

“This is a part of our political culture in San Antonio and I think that our political process is stronger because of it,” said Father Brian Christopher of Our Lady of Guadalupe Church.

nbautista@express-news.net