

DC for Democracy 2008 Candidate Questionnaire
2008 Council Candidate Questionnaire

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1. Tell us something about yourself, including why you are running for office.

Over the past decade, as an Advisory Neighborhood Commissioner and president of both the Logan Circle and Mount Vernon Square community associations, I have observed a shift in priorities away from neighborhoods and people toward developers, ballparks, and special interests. I intend to serve as a true Ward councilmember: responsive, accessible, and focused on the quality of life issues that will make our communities an even better place to live. While serving the community, I have worked as a successful attorney, but I will give up my law firm job to work full-time as your councilmember. There will be no competing commitments on my time and no conflicts of interest.

I cannot imagine a better job than to be able to wake up every morning and say to myself, "how can I spend my entire day to make our city a better place and make it possible for someone to reach all that they strive for in life?" This philosophy has driven me, whether working for my congressman and state assemblyman before arriving in D.C., serving as class and student government president in college, in my community activism across Ward 2, and in coordinating pro bono work at my firm. As a councilmember, I look forward to working for residents of this city each and every day.

I have the experience and background to serve as a strong advocate for Ward 2 and our city. In addition to my law degree, I have a masters degree in public administration and a bachelors in business management from top-ranked schools. I know Ward 2 well, having lived and worked in nearly every neighborhood since arriving in DC in 1997. I understand how the District government works from my experience as a community leader, and what we can do to make it work more effectively for us. And I have a proven track record of obtaining results.

2. If elected, what are the three most important things you intend to accomplish?

1. *Expand educational opportunity.* As a councilmember, I will make it a top priority to ensure that the city gives our children receive the highest quality education so that they have the greatest chance of success in life and that we prepare our residents for the workforce. My education priorities include: (1) ensuring that rebuilding and renovating our schools stays on track and on budget; (2) making it affordable for teachers to live in the District so that they can more easily provide before and after school programs, including tutoring; (3) transforming our schools into centerpieces of the community – where we vote, hold community meetings, and have government offices – so that all residents, whether they have children or not, have a relationship and stake in our schools, and building tutoring and mentoring relationship with residents in the surrounding neighborhoods; (4) establishing a community college system and restoring vocational training opportunities in the District of Columbia; (5) protecting closing school buildings so that they are available for future generations by ensuring that they are not sold to the highest (or lowest) bidder and continue to be used for public purposes; (6) ensuring that children have safe places to go outside of school hours, including libraries and recreation centers for the 21st Century; and (7) expanding adult literacy programs.
2. *Safer neighborhoods.* I will make our neighborhoods safer by: (1) strengthening community policing through pushing for policies that facilitate officers and neighborhoods developing close ties, supporting more foot and bike patrols, making it affordable for officers to live in the communities they serve; and amending Police Service Area (PSA) boundaries where needed to reflect neighborhood boundaries; (2) placing a higher priority on giving police the tools they need, such as ShotSpotter, which detects gunfire immediately and with pinpoint precision; (3) making certain the city uses our financial resources most effectively, by providing close oversight over public funds allocated for public safety purposes; and (4) putting more police officers on the streets, so that we are not continually reassigning officers from neighborhood to neighborhood in response to the latest crime.
3. *Making it possible for small businesses to survive and thrive in the District.* Small businesses are the life blood of our communities, but many are struggling with rising property taxes and government red tape. We already have less small business diversity than many major cities and, if we do not act fast, the District will have few options but chain stores. I will improve the environment for small businesses by: (1) establishing an Office of the Small Business Advocate, which will help owners through licensing and permitting applications, advise the D.C. Council and

government agencies as to the potential impact of legislation and proposed regulations on small businesses, and prepare an annual state of small businesses report for consideration of the city to decide on next steps; (2) establishing a commercial property tax cap for qualifying small businesses; and (3) providing a tax credit targeting small business owners who do not own their property.

3. Briefly summarize your priorities regarding taxation (business, individual, and property) and expenditures, highlighting any changes to current tax law or spending practices that you will promote if elected.

Tax relief. As noted above, I will seek to provide tax relief for small business owners through a cap on commercial property tax increases and a tax credit so that they can locate and continue to operate in the District of Columbia. I would also support an increase in the Homestead Deduction, and consider additional tax relief for long-time residence and those with fixed incomes who are experiencing steep rises in property taxes.

Spending practices. I will spend the District's money more wisely, stop massive giveaways to wealthy sports teams and developers, require open and competitive bidding in government contracting, provide greater oversight over grants, and reform laws governing disposition of public property. A few examples of unsound decisions supported by my opponent and lax oversight in recent years include:

- A \$611 million+ lopsided baseball stadium deal paid for by the public, which even covers their uniforms and scoreboard lights. As the team withholds millions in rent and threatens \$100,000 a day in damages, my opponent defends the Lerner's. I'll defend the city, and I'll put funding neighborhood parks before more ballparks.
- \$850 million to build a new convention center, which barely brings in more visitors than the previous building that was half its size. I'll reclaim this lost opportunity for neighborhood revitalization, by filling the empty retail spaces and addressing the surrounding vacant property that remains even five years later.
- A \$50 million gift to the Verizon Center, supposedly for "upgrades" to luxury boxes, including one for the D.C. Council. Although the then MCI Center was built with \$200 million in private, not government, funding, that did not stop the after-the-fact subsidy. No more giveaways.
- \$50 million stolen from the Office of Tax and Revenue. As far back as 2004, the D.C. Auditor repeatedly alerted the Council to massive discrepancies, but there was no oversight, no action taken. Even after the theft came to light, my opponent continued to push for a substantial pay raise for the CFO. I will restore oversight and accountability by hiring more auditors and inspectors. I'll ask more critical questions and follow-up to demand fixes until they are implemented.

- A \$10 million earmark to Ford's Theatre, a federal property. I'll support the local arts, not contribute to federal taxation without representation.
- As law abiding citizens pay rising property taxes, for years, absentee owners of nuisance properties have avoided the significantly higher property rate imposed on vacant homes and storefronts. Some even receive the homestead deduction. I'll make sure the costs of nuisance properties are placed on irresponsible owners, not the neighborhoods.
- The District continues to allow rampant no-bidding or pseudo-bidding in economic development deals, and makes intentionally hurried emergency decisions, such as the West End folly, to give away precious public fire station and library properties due to lax financial stewardship. I'll support reforms to protect public property and establish an open bidding process.

Due in part to these bad deals, which compete with other priorities such as modernizing our schools, the District's debt has surged. In fact, D.C.'s per capita debt for 2008 is estimated at \$10,902, the highest of any U.S. jurisdiction. One out of ten dollars spent in the District, and rising, is going toward paying off the debt. I will bring back sound spending practices and focus future spending on true neighborhood development, such as small business survival, education, parks, libraries, and infrastructure.

4. Either directly or indirectly, public education affects every Washingtonian. If elected, what will you do to improve the quality of our public schools' system?

See response to question 2.

5. What legislation or policies do you advocate for reducing gun violence in the District of Columbia?

As councilmember, I will:

- Introduce legislation to ensure that individuals with a history of crime, mental illness, or domestic abuse do not qualify for gun ownership
- Advocate for rigorous enforcement of current and future gun laws;
- Require all gun owners in the District to complete mandatory gun safety training; and
- Impose penalties on gun owners whose weapons fall into the wrong hands.

6. What steps will you take to help alleviate the lack of affordable health care in the District?

The District should establish a universal health care program. Legislation along the lines of the Healthy D.C. Act would begin to fill the gap. In addition, the District should aggressively pursue CareFirst to require it to fulfill its obligations as a charitable institution. CareFirst raised its rates, built up a \$770 million

surplus, and paid its executives multi-million dollar salaries even as it opted out of a universal health program.

7. Briefly summarize your positions regarding reproductive health choice, including emergency contraception.

I am, and have always been, pro-choice. I will protect a woman's right to choose and access to reproductive health services.

I support making emergency contraception available over the counter regardless of age. I would require that emergency room staff provide women who go to the hospital after a sexual assault with information on emergency contraception, including immediately providing it upon request in such situations. In addition, I would consider requiring private health insurers to provide contraceptive coverage on the same basis as other prescription drugs.

8. Do you support legal recognition of marriage between same sex partners?

Yes. I am fully in favor of marriage equality and I will support legislation to that effect when I am on the Council. I understand the reasons that a bill has not been introduced until now, but I believe that we may have reached the time, depending on the outcome of the presidential and congressional elections in November, to introduce such legislation. I recognize that Congress controls the final outcome of our legislation and I will work with the GLBT organizations in the District to ensure that we move forward together on this crucial issue in making sure that gay and lesbian residents have their full civil rights.

9. Will you support the legislative and/or regulatory changes necessary to ensure that the District recognizes marriages legally sanctioned in other jurisdictions?

Yes. We must ensure that both legal marriages and civil unions performed and sanctioned in other states are fully recognized when those individuals live in the District of Columbia. I will work to make sure that we have any legislative or regulatory changes needed to make that a reality.

10. What will you do to help create, protect, and maintain affordable housing options and alleviate homelessness?

My commitment to creating, protecting, and maintaining affordable housing includes:

- Supporting aggressive implementation of the inclusionary zoning program, which mandates that all new housing developments of ten units or more offer 8-10% of the units at below-market rates. I'll resist mounting pressure from the building industry to water down the regulations or further delay implementation.

- Supporting the New Communities Initiative, which includes Northwest One. It has the potential to turn older public housing developments with high concentrations of poverty and crime into safe, mixed-income communities, with revitalized schools, libraries and recreation centers.
- Advocating for projects such as the O Street Market, which will bring affordable, senior, and market-rate housing, a major supermarket, retail and hotel space to a high crime area with many vacant properties. Such projects should take high priority, but, unfortunately, this project languished since 2001 and is now only moving forward in an election year.
- Reforming the Home Again program, which moves vacant properties into affordable housing. It has delivered only about 30 properties into affordable home ownership 6 years, despite the thousands of vacant properties in the District.
- Protecting residents of Section 8 housing in our neighborhoods. For example, when Washington Apartments had a fire, I organized a collection of furniture and funds for displaced residents and pressured DCRA to push forward the inspection and permitting process. I am currently working jointly with the Chinatown Revitalization Council, TENAC, and others to protect residents of the Wah Luck House and have posted information regarding the potential sale on my website.

I am committed to helping improve the situation of the District's homeless and hungry residents. I have personally visited several homeless and transitional housing sites in the city, including the Franklin School, Mt. Carmel House, New Endeavors for Women, and the St. Matthias Mulumba House. I also organized a joint forum on homelessness co-sponsored by the Mount Vernon and Downtown Neighborhood Associations. I have met with the leadership of the Capital Area Food Bank. I have personally donated to organizations such as Bread for the City and SOME. I support:

- Developing more transitional and permanent supportive housing.
- Closing the Franklin School only after the new Central Union Mission at the Gales School opens and additional housing is available.
- Expanding the Capital Area Food Bank and supporting organizations such as Bread for the City.

11. What will you do to support the Washington Metropolitan Area Transit Authority and to help ensure its responsiveness to its riders?

Metro ridership is quickly outgrowing its capacity. As Washington Metropolitan Area Transit Authority General Manager John B. Catoe, Jr. recently was quoted, "What do we do? Do we do nothing and let it all collapse? It's not a popular discussion because it's money that we're talking about. But we need to start talking about it now." Unfortunately, doing nothing is precisely the policy of the past decade.

I believe that serious planning and discussion for metro's expansion, including identification of funding sources, and a timeline for completion must begin immediately. It's needed to relieve traffic and parking congestion. It's the right thing to do for the environment. It would increase convenience for residents as well as visitors who would prefer to leave their cars at home and not continuously circle around for parking or pay a steep fee for a private lot.

As councilmember, I will establish one or more dedicated revenue streams to fund metro expansion. I will also seek funding from the federal government as well as our metro partners in Maryland and Virginia. The goal will be expansion of the blue line, as fleetingly suggested on and off for years, which would run from Rosslyn under the Potomac to Georgetown continuing on into Northeast. The new line is needed to accommodate an anticipated surge in ridership over the next twenty years. It is time to stop talking about this and find a way to get it done.

12. In your campaign what are you doing to train, support, and encourage more people to get involved throughout the democratic process of the District of Columbia?

I have involved young people in the campaign by reaching out to schools in the District and providing structured internship opportunities. Our campaign has also signed up many new voters and encouraged those registered in other states to register in the District of Columbia.

13. Which committees would you seek to serve on if elected and why? If you are an incumbent, name two accomplishments achieved while serving on your committee(s), excluding the Committee of the Whole? If you are an incumbent, do you plan to continue serving on your current committee(s), excluding the Committee of the Whole?

I would seek to serve on the following committees:

- Libraries, Parks & Recreation. These areas are central in my campaign because I believe they are critical to improving the quality of life in the District, and providing safe and positive environments for the District's youth.
- Committee on the Public Safety and Judiciary. My strong advocacy on public safety issues and legal experience make this a natural committee for me to use my skills to benefit the District.
- Committee on Economic Development. Serving as an active member of this Committee, I will take a leadership role in developing policies and programs to support small businesses, and supporting neighborhood development projects.
- Committee on Finance and Revenue. As a member of this Committee, I will ensure that taxpayer money is spent responsibly and conduct rigorous oversight of DC government agencies to safeguard against fraud and

mismanagement. I will ensure we have strong accounting controls so that property taxes and school activity funds are not stolen, stop future giveaways to politically-connected developers and sports team owners, and ensure taxes are collected from owners of vacant properties.

I would also advocate for the establishment of an Education Committee on the D.C. Council, charged with closely overseeing school modernization and ensuring accountability as we move forward with school reform. The Education Committee would also be responsible for developing proposals to create a community college system and revitalize vocational training programs in the District of Columbia. Currently, school matters are handled in the Committee of the Whole. I believe that when everyone is responsible, no one is responsible. The D.C. Council needs a dedicated committee to proceed with school reform and I will take a leadership role on that committee.