

**1) Why are you running for City Council and if (re)elected, what are the three most important things you intend to accomplish in the near term?**

Ward One is a rich tapestry of cultures, languages, and histories. We are ONE Ward One. We are different from any other Ward in the city. Since my days as an undergrad at Howard University to now as my wife and I are raising our two young children in Adams Morgan, I firmly believe we can be the best Ward in the city.

However, I am frustrated by the status quo of our city, by the acceptance of mediocrity, by the Ward's current passive and visionless leadership. And by the lack of accountability and transparency that is taking a toll on our grassroots democracy that needs to be vital for the people's business to get done. I see so much potential for growth, unity and improvement in our great Ward.

The three most important things I intend to accomplish in the near term are (in no particular order):

- a) *Transparency/Accountability*: The city's laws need to be crafted to promote more open, honest, and accountable government and to bring the constitutional ideal of political equality closer to reality. Left unchecked, money's distorting influence on politics makes our government less democratic. A combination of well-crafted reforms, including public funding of elections, would more accurately and more democratically represent the voices of District residents who today are locked out of true political participation.
- b) *Juvenile Justice/Youth Engagement and Strategic Crime Prevention*: Far too much time, money and effort has been spent on "blue-ribbon" panels, special task forces and committees seeking to come up with a solution to our juvenile justice system. We need to recreate our system and it must be done now. With my experience with successful youth leadership programs, I can lead the way to real reform. On crime prevention, we need to get back to community prosecutions and community policing if we are to stem the tide of violent crimes in Ward One and move away from band-aid, weekend remedies that play well to the cameras but do nothing for long-term crime reductions Ward-wide.
- c) *Small business*: The District of Columbia is repeatedly ranked 51 out of 51 as a place to run a small business, yet it's the small businesses that are the backbone of our community. The quagmire of rules and regulations that govern our small businesses must be revamped, including laws that govern our ABC establishments. As a four-term ANC commissioner, I have seen first-hand what this maze can do to potential small businesses in our Ward and I will propose real fixes that nurture and sustain our small businesses for the long-term.

**2) What are the three most important issues facing the District of Columbia in the next decade?**

The three most critical issues facing the District of Columbia in the coming decade are crime (particularly juvenile justice); the budget and job creation for District residents.

**3) What are your qualifications to serve as Council member?**

For eight years I have served as an Advisory Neighborhood Commissioner in Adams Morgan (including three as Chair of the Commission); I am a long-time community activist, and a communications professional with over 15 years of experience in progressive causes. I have worked on coalition building in local and national politics, promoting livable and affordable urban neighborhoods, crime prevention, education, community and economic empowerment, affordable housing issues and nonprofit work geared toward youth leadership development. In 2007, I was named the city's best ANC Commissioner by *Washington City Paper*. I also served as the president of the Adams Morgan Community Association.

I am the founder and director of a small Ward One-based nonprofit organization that takes at-risk youth from the District to the highlands of Guatemala every summer for a 5-week program of basketball, cultural exchange, leadership development and mentoring, Spanish immersion, English tutoring and community-building activities.

Prior to founding Hoops Sagrado, I served as a Field Representative and Organizer for the Service Employees International Union (SEIU), Local 500. In addition, I served as Press Secretary for The Body Shop, USA, as well as Assistant Press Secretary for the Democratic National Committee. I started my career in politics as an aide to the late Senator Paul Wellstone and as an aide to Reverend Jesse Jackson.

**4) In the context of the projected budget shortfall, do you believe the current budget discussions fairly balance increases in revenue against spending reductions, and fairly allocate the burden of revenue increases? If not, what would you propose?**

Too many budgetary decisions were made during this most recent and one of our most critical budget sessions that were political in nature—largely being driven by election-year politics. Getting our financial house in order is not pretty and our budget should not be sliced and diced in such a manner that even those sitting councilmembers who are “finance guys” voted against it.

Although there were many changes to the budget before it was approved by the Council last week, upon its first introduction, far too much revenue was dependent on fee increases. Our small businesses struggle and constantly increasing fees to balance a budget on their backs is not the right course.

Nor would have the failed “millionaire’s tax” been the right answer either. Instead of creating one new tax bracket, the District’s entire tax code needs to be equitably re-written.

As caretakers of the District's fiscal stability, the Mayor and Council need to determine what is most important to the District of Columbia. Far too often we continue to find money for things that are not necessarily priorities (or give large, long-term tax abatements to ethically questionable developers), but then we allow systemic, long-term infrastructure problems (like lead in the water) continue to be minimized to fund non-priorities.

**5) The District of Columbia is suffering significantly higher unemployment than Maryland and Virginia in this recession. Describe your plan for broad-based job recovery.**

With an unemployment rate higher than the national average and twice that within the African-American community, the District needs to capitalize on creating sustainable green jobs — particularly by creating training programs. Market studies should occur to determine what green products and services are in demand and sustainable in the DC area. Financial support in the form of low interest loans and tax credits should be provided to entrepreneurs starting new green businesses in these areas or to existing businesses which change their business model to incorporate these new ideas and hire and train District residents.

We need to create more opportunities for on-the-job training, internships, apprenticeships and fellowships. Any large corporation/developer receiving tax abatements, TIF or requesting any sort of relief from the District of Columbia should be required to create a paid, career-path-internship program for underserved District youth enrolled in a secondary school.

**6) If (re)elected, what will you do to create and protect affordable housing options for both home-buyers and tenants, and alleviate homelessness?**

We need to create an affordable opportunity to own a home in the District of Columbia. A workforce housing program—overseen by a Workforce Housing Commission — would offer affordably priced condominiums and row houses to homebuyers with household incomes between 50 percent and 120 percent of the Washington D.C. area median income. Workforce housing units would be sold at below market sales prices, which would be determined by the commission with priority given to teachers, nurses, first responders and service industry employees who meet the criteria. The home would only be able to be sold to a buyer who meets the same criteria. The commission would also seek to create specialized housing units (co-ops) designed specifically for teachers or artists where in addition to homes, the space would provide a collaborative environment to share ideas (and work space for artists).

In addition, the District's feet must be put to the fire on enforcement of housing code violations. D.C.'s tenant rights law "on paper" is one of the strongest in the nation—renters have the right to approve apartment-to-condominium conversions and require landlords to pay a fee on the sale of new condominium units to help uprooted families find new homes. But if a building is vacant, the owner does not have to pay the fee. Far too much lip service has been paid to enforcement and not nearly enough work has gone to backing up that enforcement.

Negligent property owners must be prosecuted and fines collected. We need a court-appointed receiver with broad latitude to address housing code infractions. The receiver could also seek to use money from rent payments to make repairs. Landlords who refuse repairs will not only face fines but could also be held in contempt of court.

**7) Do you think reform in the D.C. Public Schools is headed in the right direction? Explain your answer.**

The short answer is yes, I think that D.C. Public Schools are headed in the right direction. Frankly at this point, with only 14 percent of our city's youth proficient in mathematics, we've got nowhere else to go but up.

However, while it's great that District of Columbia officials have taken on school reform as a priority, I think far too much emphasis has been placed on new facilities rather than what I view is the primary issue with D.C. Public Schools—the achievement gap. The racial achievement gap in the District is 25 times larger than in most major American cities. There is a 66 percent difference in achievement between white students and students of color in the District. That is unacceptable.

We need to have a consistent measuring stick for results. While the District of Columbia has touted an increase in NAEP scores from 2007 to 2009, what most reports fail to mention is that the 2009 report did not include charter schools when the 2007 report did and charter school scores have decreased.

This isn't about Michelle Rhee vs. teachers, this isn't about whether or not someone feels "cuddled and nurtured" after having a meeting with the Chancellor; this is about the children of D.C. The A-1 top priority has to be what's best for the children of the District of Columbia.

So, yes the schools are improving, but to quote the Chancellor, "we have a ridiculously long way to go."

**8) What policies do you recommend for reducing crime and increasing public safety in the District of Columbia?**

We need a true, effective community policing program including: community patrols — officers need to be allowed to advance within the same district which allows them to have great buy-in to and from the community. MPD also needs to work with officers who wish to stay in a community, but for whatever reason can no longer work their current shift hours; community prosecutors — the District needs to return to a system of community prosecutors, where at least one prosecutor from the Attorney General's office is assigned to each police command district (more than one for certain districts) and actually stationed in the District Headquarters.

The District's system of adjudicating young offenders needs to be completely overhauled. The punishment for children found guilty of a crime should not be completely meted out by the

Department of Youth Rehabilitative Services — judges, prosecutors and victim and community impact statements must be taken into consideration in the juvenile justice system. Violent juvenile offenders must be incarcerated with an emphasis placed on training and educational opportunities to decrease recidivism.

**9) What are the three most important steps that need to be taken to revitalize the Washington Metropolitan Area Transit Authority?**

WMATA is the only mass transit system in the country that does not have a dedicated funding source. The District's representative to the WMATA Board must make securing dedicated funding for the system the top priority. Our transit system can no longer be dependent upon the fiscal instability of having three governing jurisdictions, nor can it balance its budget on the backs of those who use the system. We need a true advocate for dedicated funding — someone who will put politics aside and work to do what is right, not what is easy.

Secondly, the time has also come to completely revamp the WMATA board. The current board structure was created at a time when we were building a mass transit system. We should do away with local politicians — and their own political agendas — making up the bulk of the Board and should instead create a newly structured board.

And thirdly, inject real accountability standards for every single employee of WMATA starting with the General Manager and the Board on down.

**10) If (re)elected, what steps will you take to invigorate the D.C. statehood movement?**

A fight for statehood/voting rights needs to be a top priority for any official elected in the District of Columbia. In addition to making sure our efforts are fully funded in any budget, District elected officials need to have lobbying days on Capitol Hill.

The District also needs a nationwide marketing campaign for statehood/voting rights. If California dairy farmers can run prime-time ads on national television promoting California cheese, why can't the District of Columbia purchase airtime to promote our cause?

Instead of junkets to foreign countries, District officials should be taking our case for voting rights/statehood to the people of America.

**11) A moratorium on earmarks was declared in Fiscal Year 2010. Do you think past practices for awarding earmark grants should be reformed? If so, how?**

Big money diminishes accountability, transparency and inclusiveness in our government. It determines who runs for office and where those candidates stand on the issues. It even determines how agencies oversee grants and earmarks. When government agencies put aside

their oversight responsibilities for earmarks out of fear of angering a sponsoring councilmember, we know there is something desperately wrong with the process.

Should the moratorium on earmarks be lifted, it should only be done so if the entire process is reformed to include a competitive grant process — applicants must be registered 501(c)3's and must present either a recent audit of their books or at least three years of 990s to be eligible, among other things — and a clear and transparent reporting process for how the distributed monies are spent should be completed by the organization receiving the grants within six months of the financial award. It's imperative that District residents know where their money is going, and how their money is being spent.

**12) The District's election laws do not allow the rights of minorities to be subject to popular vote. Do you nevertheless think the District's new Religious Freedom and Civil Marriage Equality Law should be put up for popular vote? Why or why not?**

I believe that any initiative regarding the District's new Religious Freedom and Civil Marriage Equality Law is a clear violation of the Human Rights Act of the District of Columbia, and as elected officials we are obligated to oppose any such endeavor; I cannot support any ballot initiative depriving a protected minority of their rights.