

**DC for Democracy Questionnaire**  
**April 3, 2012 Democratic Primary**  
**Ward 4 Council - Baruti Jahi**

**1. Why are you running for City Council, and if (re)elected, what are the priority areas you intend to concentrate on in the near term?**

I am running for City Council because I aspire to help people. The malfeasance and corruption on the Council has contributed to residents losing faith in local government's ability to help with basic constituent services. I hope to restore public trust and accountability by improving public service for **all** D.C. residents. Public safety, education and economic development are my priority areas.

**First**, I will advocate for more police on foot patrol to create a more visible police presence in neighborhoods. I will also establish a Ward 4 centralized Orange Hat Patrol to assist neighborhood Orange Hat Patrols in need of individuals to walk their communities. The visible presence of Orange Hat Patrols can only serve as a crime deterrent. In conjunction with advocating for more police and the Orange Hat Patrol, I will initiate legislation to more severely punish individuals convicted of gun related crimes.

**Secondly**, I will organize a Ward 4 PTA consortium consisting of representation from all of the PTAs in the Ward. The purpose is to share ideas, while working together to improve the overall participation in PTAs of Ward 4. The PTAs are very important to the overall development of a school, and a ward-PTA can only strengthen the overall goal of the PTA, which is to improve the quality of education for children.

**Thirdly**, I will develop a Ward 4 business and services directory in both hard copy and electronic formats. This will allow for the continuous promotion of businesses and services in the Ward. It will also provide residents and our public officials a detailed list of health and retail options close to home, because Ward 4 businesses should be publicized and strongly considered in the DC government contracting process.

**2. With unemployment, homelessness, and general economic distress at historically high levels, do you favor increasing safety net spending in future budgets? If yes, which programs should be given highest priority?**

Yes, I support an increase in social safety net programs. However, spending from District budgets will not solve this problem by itself. Support for these District government safety net programs must be supplemented by coordinating with outside service providers to help with revenue shortfalls.

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**3. Do you consider the District's total current budget to be too large, too small, or about right? Please explain.**

The District's total budget is about right considering the many budget areas under the city's jurisdiction. It is the allocation of resources that must be continually reviewed and adjusted to meet ever changing requirements and demands.

**4. Last year, income taxes for those earning above \$350,000 were increased from 8.5% to 8.95%, subject to a "sunset" provision after 4 years. With this temporary increase, all taxpayers earning between \$40,000 and \$350,000 remain subject to the 8.5% rate. Do you believe this is fair? If not, what would you propose?**

No, I do not believe this is fair. A tax structure that has a person who makes \$40,000 paying the same or similar rate as someone making \$300,000 is regressive. But, I do not believe in this current economic climate that raising taxes on the wealthy is the answer. Nor, can we afford to reduce the tax rate for the middle and working class. Unfortunately, I believe we need to keep the tax rates where they are and find our savings by becoming a more creative, effective, and efficient government.

**5. What recently revitalized DC neighborhood would you suggest as the best model for the city as a whole, and why?**

The H street corridor between Union Station and 17<sup>th</sup> Street, North East has been transformed into a vibrant and revitalized area, and a good model for the city to follow as a whole. H Street has repaved roads and sidewalks as well as new businesses and restaurants that attract diverse ethnic backgrounds.

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

I will support the growth of the housing production trust fund by advocating and voting for more funding for the trust fund. I also believe that one-time fees paid by large commercial developers and affordable set-asides are viable options to help create, protect and maintain affordable housing in the District. Another idea is to increase and preserve the affordable housing stock by having The District government invest in a home ownership program targeted for District government employees who reside in the city. This affordable housing program will help to create long term stability in District neighborhoods, and give hard working District employees, i.e. teachers, principals,

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police and fire officials, a major stake in their community.

**7. Do you think reform in the DC public schools is headed in the right direction? Explain your answer.**

NO. The recent IFF Study suggests that 62% of seats in schools serving cluster 18, which represents Ward 4, are in underperforming schools. Basic reading and math levels are below acceptable standards and many of the school facilities need to be upgraded.

**8. How do you suggest that we repurpose the large number of school properties that have been closed over the past few years? Cite specific schools/communities as examples, if possible.**

Reuse of existing school properties require planning and focus on a property-by-property basis. It would be irresponsible for me to provide a blanket answer in a format of this nature. Each property must be evaluated based upon the needs of the school system, the community in which it exists, and an overall city-wide plan. Money generated from the resale of school properties should be reinvested in the school system.

**9. What are the most important steps that need to be taken to reform the Washington Metropolitan Area Transit Authority?**

The creation of an oversight board that would evaluate the effectiveness of the Washington Metropolitan Area Transit Authority (WMATA) would help with its reform. The oversight board could make recommendations based on an exhaustive review of WMATA's policies and guidelines, and the City Council could advocate for their recommendations.

**10. Do you support funding the DC statehood campaign in the 2013 budget? If so, what amount would you support and for what purposes?**

Yes. The funding for a state hood campaign should be determined by the status of budget expenditures and availability of resources for constituent services. I support the state-by-state lobbying efforts currently engaged in by the mayor and council.

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**11. Do you believe that the current DC Council represents the interests of the broad public? If not, what segments of the public are underrepresented?**

Yes, but there are segments of the population that could be better served. There is a widening gap between the middle class and poor. Affordable housing is very difficult to find, and there is not enough social service programs designed to help underprivileged communities.

**12. Do you support the creation of an independent ethics commission with members nominated by the Mayor and confirmed by the Council, as provided for in the newly enacted ethics reform legislation? Please explain your position.**

Yes. However, the recently passed ethics legislation is shameful and does not change the current pay to play culture that exists on the City Council. The Washington Post calls the legislation a “Toothless Wonder” because the legislation leaves intact the current “pay to play” system, preserves the use of “constituent service” slush funds and allows council members to continue collecting tons of freebies and hold outside jobs.

**13. Unlike most states, the District allows entities under contract with or soliciting contracts from the city to contribute to political campaigns. Is this a problem which future legislation should address, and, if so, how? Should DC ban all corporate contributions?**

Yes, ban all corporate contributions from those entities under contract with or soliciting contracts from the city to political campaigns.

**14. Do you support the use of Constituent Service Funds (CSFs)? If so, why? If not, would you be willing to work for their elimination?**

No, and I would work to eliminate Constituent Service Funds. Under the newly passed ethics bill, the fundraising limit on constituent service funds — political accounts from which council members can spend on those they represent — will shift from \$80,000 to \$40,000, which merely returns the annual limit on these funds to the level it was before the council voted in 2009 to double the intake. DC for Democracy’s research on the use of constituent service funds found that council members spent on average only 12 percent of their constituent services funds in 2010 to meet emergency and immediate

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needs of constituents. Most expenditures from the funds went for the members' own use — office supplies, catering, refreshments and event tickets.

**15. What should DC do to improve its job-training programs?**

The District government should invest in a job-training program designed to develop various trade skills. A program inclusive of Heating, Ventilation, and Air Conditioning (HVAC), Plumbing and Electrician training. The program should be tied to high schools and recreational centers to provide access and opportunities to interested people willing to pursue a career in the aforementioned trades.