

**DC for Democracy Questionnaire**  
**April 3, 2012 Democratic Primary**  
**Delegate to Congress - Eleanor Holmes Norton**

**1. Why are you running for re-election, and what are your priorities?**

I am running for Congress with a new urgency, driven by a set of opposing challenges: unprecedented threats from Congress to the integrity of the District's self-governing authority on the one hand, and the city's need for basics and benefits that only Congress can provide on the other. I want to use my seniority in Congress and my leadership on committees of importance to the District to take on the newly aggressive far-right radicals in the Republican House that already has tried but failed to once again eliminate the city's gun safety laws, overturn the D.C. marriage equality law, and re-impose the dreaded needle exchange attachment. I enjoy thinking through the tough challenges thrown up against the District and finding ways to meet them, keeping, for example, the District's priorities funded during deficit reduction, as I did with D.C. TAG, initially threatened by the Republican budget but fully funded by the House and Senate and with the Department of Homeland Security construction in Ward 8, defunded by the House but funded by the Senate.

However, in addition to this work on the core D.C. home rule issues and the federal program funding D.C. needs, I also want to continue to make progress on issues that depend on skills beyond legislation. Among examples of this work are successfully keeping Union Square open for demonstrations and for commercial film making and photography, moving our environmental priorities, particularly my Anacostia Watershed legislation that has begun the first comprehensive clean-up, using my seniority on the Transportation and Infrastructure Committee, which has been important for keeping on track the annual \$150 million dollars for repairs, continuing my work to make Union Station a new economic engine begun with the new bus station, now offering five bus services with a new mixed use community to be developed over the rail tracks, and continuing the progress I am making on returning helicopter service to the city.

I especially enjoy my work in the Congress when the wind is in my face, not only at my back. Defending and making progress for the residents of my home town is a uniquely exciting opportunity. I hope to be given the honor of fighting for my home town again.

**PRIORITIES**

The District has well known goals. My priorities are drawn from those goals but

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are necessarily shaped by finding openings to make progress. I intend to put a special emphasis on budget autonomy because of an opening provided by an unexpected bill from the powerful chairman of the committee of jurisdiction over the District, Rep. Darrell Issa developed a bill which mirrors the major parts of my own pending Budget Autonomy Act after a hearing where witnesses testified favorably about the city's finances but criticized the congressional appropriations process for needless redundancy, assuring extra costs on city borrowing and operations, and creating problems for public schools that open before approval of the budget by Congress, as well as shutdown threats because the D.C. budget must come to Congress and is caught in federal disputes.

This catalogue of congressionally imposed problems, along with the additional responsibility of avoiding congressional riders, and chairman's Issa's public commitment to pursue his bill "until it becomes law," increase the priority and bring us closer to budget autonomy than ever before. I am in discussions with Chairman Issa about achieving his budget autonomy bill without the multiple attachments that were guaranteed if his bill had moved last year.

However, even if radical House Republicans lose control of the House, deficit reduction will leave the city's economic needs at great risk. Therefore, I will focus on two sets of priorities: Special DC funds and appropriated program funds. Among the most important funding the District uniquely receives is DC TAG, which has doubled college attendance here. Without DC TAG college attendance will be impossible for many residents. Families who remained in D.C. because of the program would have an incentive to move to neighboring states with in-state tuition. The city economy, whose jobs go largely to college educated regional residents, would lose the new pool of educated residents now being developed because of DC TAG.

The DC tax incentives, including the \$5,000 homebuyer tax credit, the \$3,000 wage break for hiring and retaining D.C. residents, and other D.C. only business incentives, are part of a large tax incentive package that is up for renewal. I will get Southwest Waterfront bill, already out the House, passed by the Senate for groundbreaking by next year. I am monitoring the clean-up of the Walter Reed site for transfer to the city in 2013. We have at least two years in funding at the Department of Homeland Security construction, and I will continue to vigorously press completion of this project, where 25% of the workers are D.C. residents but only 10% of the regional pool for federal construction that cannot be restricted to

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the location of the construction.

Appropriated funds account for a major part of the District's funds for vital core city services, make the entire appropriations process, beyond D.C. appropriations, a priority. The District is facing similar cuts to other cities but unlike U.S. cities, the District has no state to help make up the difference for federal appropriations for public and section 8 housing, LHEAP, Title I education funds, health care and many other federal programs.

**2. What are the three most important issues facing the District in the next decade?**

The three most important issues for the District in the next decade are new pressures on the District economy; work force challenges to enable residents to get a larger share of the city's private and public sectors jobs; and developing national allies and strategies, with greater use of technology to achieve statehood and full democracy.

*A. Meeting New Pressures on the D.C. Economy*

Economically, the District is a federal city as is the regional economy because of the outsized role of the federal government, directly and indirectly and because much of the region's private sector has federal sources. However, the deficit reduction forecasts years of federal funding program and federal job retrenchment. I have built my seniority on the committee that authorizes federal office space and construction and have been able to keep federal agencies and employees here that are major factors in feeding the city's economy. However, a more economically diverse city economy must be developed that is less reliant on the city's direct economic relationship with the federal government.

In the Congress, therefore, the most important contribution of my committee work today is leveraging federal authority to help the District develop its private economy. In progress is my work to transform Union Station, with a rehabilitated mall and a mixed use community above the rail tracks and expansion of Amtrak VRE, MARC. My work for the last several years insisting on bus service at Union Station has brought a new bus station offering service by five companies. In NOMA we have used federal anchors including the New York Avenue subway and federal agencies to create not another federal enclave but a mixed use community out of an undeveloped but valuable part of the center city. The Southeast

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Riverfront community is the result of our SE Public Private Development Act that for the first time is allowing federal development on private land, written so that the District can get revenue from retail, homes, condo's and apartments that are now being built.

Similarly, my Southwest Waterfront bill, already passed in the House and soon expected from the Senate, will have very little federal presence but will be developed as a new mixed use community.

I will continue to use federal authority to strengthen the economy, not to dominate it, as in the past.

*B. Creating a Workforce to match the D.C. Economy*

My emphasis on using federal authority to incentive greater independence from the federal government will enhance city revenue but will not by itself reduce the District's current workforce mismatch. In addition to my work for federal training and education funds, I have focused on special funds for the District for education, the source of the current workforce mismatch. DC TAG, which gives \$10,000 to attend any U.S. state university has doubled attendance here and exceeded graduation rates for similar students nationwide. In addition, its goal to create a proxy for a full state university system has made major contributions to the city's economy and growth by encouraging taxpayers to remain in the District.

However, many D.C. residents are not able to take advantage of DC TAG. When I first got DC TAG, I insisted on pairing it with my long-term goal for Historically Black College funding for the University of the District of Columbia, which UDC had never received. As a result, UDC gets several million dollars annually in HBCU funding as an entitlement.

I am also seeking funding for the most important work the city is doing to remedy the workforce mismatch, in the creation of the community college. The difficulties DC public school students bring to college training are surmountable in a community college setting geared to state- of- the-art techniques for preparing them for college work, particularly focused on the many jobs in the city and national economy that do not require a bachelor's degree.

*C. Developing a Technology-based National Statehood Strategy.*

Both keeping residents active and developing indispensable allies nationwide is necessary to make statehood an achievable goal today. Fortunately the new

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technology and social media now give residents the tools for a coordinated strategy that could involve thousands of Washingtonians and ultimately could reach millions of Americans. The expertise is readily available here to go beyond the commendable 19th and 20th retail efforts that have little effect and can even discourage citizens who see so little effective activities. Such an effort cannot be coordinated from the Congress, which bars members from engaging in lobbying.

However, this change could provide new and exciting opportunities for residents and for the city, which has not been barred from lobbying for statehood since I got that attachment removed from D.C. appropriations several years ago.

**3. Should statehood be the ultimate goal of the movement for DC rights? Why or why not?**

There has long been a consensus among residents that statehood is the District's major democracy goal, and statehood remains my goal in all my work for statehood and other D.C. democracy issues. We were a great deal closer to statehood when I began my service in the House with the statehood bill we got to the House floor that won almost two-thirds of House Democrats and that got a hearing in the Senate. However, no one thinks that in the near future, Democrats will have the overwhelming House and Senate majorities we had at that time and that were necessary to make the progress we made then.

However, the difficulty of achieving statehood should transform our current, episodic retail strategy that is ill suited to meet such a difficult goal to pursue whatever elements of statehood we can achieve now, such as the recent opening for budget autonomy. In my response to question No. 4, I suggest a change to greater use of technology and social media not only to reach beyond our borders for the necessary allies but also to keep interest and activism alive among D.C. residents.

**4. What would you do to increase awareness among those outside the Washington metro area about the District's lack of representation and self-government?**

The District deserves credit for stepping up its involvement in efforts for statehood and home rule beyond the usual advocacy. However, most of the country is unaware not only of our statehood quest, but even of shocking issues such as shutdown threats and Congressional restrictions on spending local funds.

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To increase national awareness, a far greater and more sophisticated use of technology and social media is important today, beyond responding to bad acts by Congress and also including information, advocacy and recruiting activist allies. Technological advances make it possible to reach millions of people today, witness the Arab spring and the successful Bank of America push- back, initiated, by the way, by a D.C. resident.

It is true that such breakthroughs often occur after precipitating events, but D.C. has its share. Civil disobedience last year by city officials and residents got worldwide coverage, but with the aid of social media, could have had even greater effect. Congress regularly offers up shockingly undemocratic action that could be carried far and wide by various uses of technology. As gratifying as D.C.'s activism is, a more sustainable effort could go far toward exposing one of the great issues of intentional inequality and denial of democracy in our country today. A sophisticated strategy could be accomplished at relatively low cost by involving the city's tech savvy residents in moving D.C. statehood and other democracy issues to a 21st century version of outreach.

**5. What will you do to help create and protect affordable housing and alleviate homelessness?**

The longer the mortgage crisis drags on the greater need to concentrate on affordable rental housing. To be sure, in committee, I continue my work on abusive mortgage service providers, and this year, my unique \$5000 D.C. Homebuyer tax credit comes up for renewal. I will vigorously pursue the credits because the recovering economy makes it more helpful for residents buying homes and seeking jobs, and for small businesses today than ever before. However, one-third of Americans are renters, a proportion that is growing rapidly. Although affordability has been an acute housing problem for decades, the rapid growth of people in need of affordable housing and the slow growth of rental units have made housing affordability a crisis.

I am working in the Congress for more balance and equity in housing subsidies, with greater emphasis on rental housing. I am particularly focused on the billion dollars National Affordable Housing Trust fund because these funds will go to constructing or rehabilitating rental units to increase and preserve rental housing for extremely low and very low income families, including homeless families.

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**6. What would you advocate in order to reform the Washington Metro Area Transit Authority?**

The present focus on reforming WMATA governance is well placed but presents unique challenges because our subway system, unlike others, responds to three states – D.C., Maryland, and Virginia, in addition to federal representatives. Moreover, the recent success of Virginia Governor Bob McDonnell in increasing Virginia’s representation on the WMATA board through the action of a powerful House appropriator shows the vulnerability of WMATA governance reform to the political process and, in any case, governance reform will require years to achieve the necessary consensus and statutory changes from all four jurisdictions.

I have been more focused on near-term structural and operational issues that do not depend on long term structural reform: more immediate structural change and more public participation. WMATA governance reform can be started now. The board already has agreed to the designation of the general manager as Chief Executive Officer. Without awaiting the multiple agreements necessary for wholesale structural reform, WMATA board members, through a memorandum of understanding, could agree now that the CEO’s actions on designated issues would no longer have to come to the board. Such a memorandum of understanding could serve as a valuable pilot that could hasten broader governance reform.

My work on WMATA has been chiefly concentrated on monitoring and oversight of the safety of the system, particularly since nine residents, seven of them from the District, were killed in one of the nation’s worst subway accidents three years ago. My seniority on the Transportation and Infrastructure Committee has given me an advantage in our work that succeeded in getting the third straight \$150 million installment of the 1.5 billion authorization in usually difficult budget years. The CEO could take two concrete steps now to assist in securing federal funds and in getting public participation. He could arm me and other regional members of Congress with annual goals and achievements for safety reform to assist in securing funds as budget cutting continues to threaten the \$150 million annual funding. The CEO also could take the lead to structure more systematic input from the public, which could help him focus on goals and could add the public’s voice to funding for safety priorities.