

DC for Democracy Questionnaire
April 3, 2012 Democratic Primary
Ward 7 Council - Kevin B. Chavous

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?

As a native and lifelong resident of this great city, I have a vested interest in our progress. I am running for Councilmember because the people of the District of Columbia, especially those in Ward 7, are starved for dedicated representation. With roughly one out of every four people unemployed in the ward, we must find ways to get our residents back to work. This starts with improving our failing school system, bringing positive economic development to stagnated parts of the District, and lowering crime rates I am the best person for the job because I have the most comprehensive plan to get these goals accomplished.

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?

Protecting and increasing funding for safety net programs is a high priority of mine. Economic times are dire, and the government has become increasingly frugal with its resources. The impact of this climate on our residents puts the onus on our government to increase safety net spending for FY2013, especially for those programs that provide benefits for our most vulnerable residents.

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

The \$11 billion budget provides for the funding of some quality programs, but not all. In Ward 7, we witnessed the closing of our DCPS Family Resource Center as a result of the budget cuts. This center provided family strengthening services to many of our residents who need these services. Our sole domestic violence intake facility suffered a twenty-five percent budget cut. Also, there are severe cuts in the city's proposed budget for FY12 that disproportionately affect homeless services. Under the currently proposed budget, all shelters for single individuals are expected to be closed by April 1, 2012. These cuts will leave many individuals without shelter of any sort and without any place else to go. These cuts are a direct effort for Mayor Gray to close a \$600 million gap in D.C. for 2012. In order to keep services funded, the Council will need to look into ways to bring more

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revenue back into the city. I would like to reintroduce a bill to tax commuters in order to recover from this deficit, which has been added to by the costs of providing city services to the approximately 300,000 people who commute here daily.

In the District, we provide city services, state services, county services and even the services of a school district; we provide public safety and public works services to the federal government itself. The provision of state-type services such as the Department of Motor Vehicles, the Department of Mental Health, the University of the District of Columbia, and the Department of Consumer and Regulatory Affairs costs us as much as \$500 million a year. Public safety and public works services provided to the federal government cost us approximately \$200 million a year. We do all this with an artificially constrained tax base. We cannot tax the income of people working in the District and living elsewhere, a restriction faced by no state. A two percent commuter tax would raise approximately \$540 million annually. Ironically, even if the District cannot tax income at its source, the District residents who earn income in other states are subject to tax in most of those states. We cannot count on high-density real property to make up for our limited taxable property because of the height restrictions on District buildings. We cannot tax about forty-two percent of the real property in the city, because that property is owned by the federal government, diplomatic missions, or international institutions. The District's biggest industry does not pay District taxes, but imposes costs on the city. The District, of course, enjoys the honor and privilege of being the Nation's Capital, and economic benefits of being the seat of the federal government, but on balance the costs outweigh the benefits.

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?

This provision is unfair, particularly in this economic climate. However, I would propose a progressive tax, with rising rates for the richest earners. The 8.5% rate, as applied to all taxpayers between \$40,000 and \$350,000 does not fairly distribute the financial burden of the tax. Those who earn \$40,000 are hit harder by the 8.5% rate than those who earn \$350,000. Therefore, the progressive tax that I would propose will help to address this concern.

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

There are many examples of quality revitalizations in the District. From Columbia Heights to the U Street Corridor, the city has enjoyed a renaissance. However, the best neighborhood revival models respect the residents of the community. We can look to the Good Neighborhoods initiative in Ward 3 as a good example of community involvement in the revitalization process. My concern is that hard-working, longtime residents are often left out of the renewal process. It is important to ensure that affordable housing is preserved in these newly developed neighborhoods and that residents enjoy the benefits that come with redevelopment. Through my efforts on the Council, I can lay the groundwork for a community that preserves both necessities.

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

One initiative that I will push to ensure that housing remains affordable would be to implement a property-tax freezing measure for residences which are 80% and below of the area media income (AMI) and seniors who have owned their homes for more than 20 years. This will lock in property tax rates for these residents who have owned their homes for five years or more. Homeowners like these, who have invested so much in the District, should be afforded the opportunity to stay in their homes. Additionally, I will be supportive of legislation that seeks to invest in new sources for creating affordable housing in the district, specifically Ward 7.

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

Leadership within DC is focused on making education a top priority. Improvements have been seen within our individual test scores to where we have improved by 100 percent in math and on average around 50 percent in reading. All of these improvements should be applauded; however, the number of students testing at a proficient or advanced level is still below 25 percent. This is unacceptable. We have to do more to ensure our children are on par to compete within this city, nation, and the world. The additional funds acquired by Race to the Top and the adoption of the Common Core curriculum are a great start to build

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the foundation. However, we must stay true to our teachers to ensure they receive all of the support and professional development opportunities necessary to make them highly effective teachers.

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.

We have an excellent opportunity to put these school properties to novel uses. I believe that these properties can become “community” schools. These schools could provide a variety of services: primary education, adult literacy courses, recreational programs, etc. One community that would benefit from this type of project is River Terrace in Northeast DC because they are likely going to see their beloved River Terrace Elementary School closed at the end of this year due to under enrollment. Under enrollment is the major reason for these school closures. A task force should be commissioned to study the enrollment patterns and discuss possible solutions to the enrollment problems.

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

There are several steps that can be taken by WMATA . First WMATA needs to address its revenue streams and stability so that it will not have to resort to multiple rate increases within a year. The rate increases that followed previous rate increases have caused much ire amongst the people that use the Metro system due to the high cost.

The high cost of transportation on the WMATA is more galling considering the unreliability of the buses and trains and the broken escalators. Thus, another step that needs to be taken is a thorough review of operations to identify ways that all these these things can be done better at minimal cost to customers. Rail/bus transfers should also return to alleviate some the pressure caused by the actions of WMATA.

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

Funding the DC Statehood campaign is very important. The funding of this entity

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will provide resources for District officials to advocate for legislative and budgetary autonomy. This autonomy needs to be protected more than ever since the rights of District residents are attacked for political purposes on a regular basis. The best way to ensure these rights is to promote our statehood to citizens throughout the country.

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?

The current Council, in my opinion, is not effectively representing the needs and wants of all residents in the District. More than anything, the District's most vulnerable residents are the ones who deserve leadership and a voice. These residents want their officials to remain in touch with their constituency. They need to be our voice.

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.

I commend the Council for attempting to restore public confidence in our elected officials. I do have some gripes with the current representation. Primarily, I would like to see a comprehensive Code of Ethics that provides stiff penalties for Council members who fail to disclose how they handle the public funds to which they have access. I also do not believe that Council members should have the power to vote on the expulsion of a colleague, which they will have courtesy of doing per the new legislation.

That being said, I support the creation of an independent ethics commission. We must decide, however, if the members of the commission should be elected or appointed by the Mayor.

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?

There is an obvious motive for government contractors to contribute to the

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campaigns of incumbents: they do not want to be on the outs with someone who can possibly take away their contract. We need to limit the ability of contractors to “bundle” contributions. However, I do not think that all corporate contributions should be banned at this time. Local businesses deserve to have their concerns addressed by their elected officials. The aim of any reform is to ensure that people have an equal voice in the electoral process and equal influence in the political arena.

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?

I believe that CSFs are a very important component of the public service that Council members provide to the city. This is especially true in my home ward, where the statistics show that our residents are impoverished and underprivileged at a rate higher than in other wards in the city. When used properly, these CSFs provide a great benefit to needy individuals. The regulations governing CSFs should mandate that the funds will only be used to assist residents in need of assistance and district organizations needing programmatic support.

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

We need to make sure that our job-training programs make placement a core component. Many residents get through these programs but are unable to find a job after gaining their certification. This is disheartening to hard-working people who are in desperate need of employment. We also need to focus on getting our returning citizens back to work. In Ward 7, 80% of our males have a criminal record. We must find ways to get them employed so that they can become productive members of society.

We can do this by linking these programs to private and public companies. We should also train folks for real jobs and job opportunities in the metropolitan area. By linking applicants with companies, we can ensure that people will complete the training programs and obtain job when upon completion.