

**DC for Democracy Questionnaire**  
**April 3, 2012 Democratic Primary**  
**Ward 7 Council - Monica L. Johnson**

**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?**

My name is Monica Johnson and I am running for Ward 7 City Council. I am running to make a positive change in Ward 7. Ward 7 is often neglected and has lacked the type of economic development that will make the biggest impact in the community and lives of residents. We have the largest unemployment rate in the city, the highest teen pregnancy rates and experience the most disparity in the educational programs. It is time for a candidate who has the heart of the people in mind who can address the unique needs of the Ward who is more interested in the people and not BIG business.

**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?**

We need safety nets to help the most disadvantaged residents to ensure that they have housing and food until they are able to get back on their feet.

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

Over the past several years there have been budget gaps of millions of dollars with misleading reports of exactly how much the short fall is. The previous Mayor and City Council tried to balance the budget by cutting government jobs, raising parking fees and well as other fees to residents and business owners in the District. When it is all said and done the Federal government has to approve the final budget. I believe each member of the Council has a responsibility to look at the budget, find over spending and waste and work to eliminate that and then look to see if funds are being appropriately allocated based on the total funds we have to work with.

**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?**

I am willing to look at additional options such as the FairTax proposals and other things that are fair to all taxpayers. Unfortunately all those who are able to pay taxes end up picking up cost for those who are unable to pay. I will work to help reduce

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unemployment, and increase economic development so that more residents are able to contribute to taxes, and the overall budget so top wage earners do not have to pay more than other income brackets. I do not think it is fair that the middleclass wage earners pay for many of the services but often make too much money to qualify for needed assistance but not enough to pay for the service outright.

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

Ward 6 has gone through great transformation from the Navy Yard project, National's Ball Park, proposed waterfront development, new housing and restructuring of schools and educational programs in the Ward. It is a diverse ward with various economic levels. I would like to see the same type of growth in Ward 7. There is no reason why Washington, DC cannot be the premier city in the world a great model for the entire country to follow. I believe every Ward and every neighborhood should see transformation so that we are not a city divided by Ward lines.

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

One of the first things we can do is actually look at the Housing Production trust fund established in 2002 with the primary goals of helping build and renovate affordable homes and see how much of that is available for use. If that stream is underfunded we can work to see how much money can be dedicated from tax revenue to fund the trust. We can work to ensure that the housing that has been torn down with the goal of rebuilding actually gets rebuilt and approved through inspection for occupancy. We can work to protect living wages and get residents back to work so that people can afford the homes that are available currently. We need to increase funding for programs that give housing funds not only to low income but middle wage earners so that they can afford homes with reasonable mortgages. I would also be willing to look at rent control options for persons who have resided in the same location for extended periods of time to help keep current residents in homes they can afford.

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

I believe DC is moving in the right direction in terms of making efforts to bring change in the public school system. But I believe that mass firings, disparity in spending across wards, the increase in Charter Schools continue to make disparity grow and confidence

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decline. All of the city's schools need reform, new technology, quality teachers, parent accountability and the best we are able to give to ensure they have the tools they need to flourish in this current climate.

**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.**

Some repurposing has already started with schools such as Berdie Backus Middle school turning it into a Community college campus for UDC, Shaw Junior High closed but now houses a charter school and Scott Montgomery was closed and rented to a Kipp DC charter school. Logan school was repurposed and now houses Capital Hill Montessori, which moved from Peabody ES. I am somewhat disappointed with all the school closings because I still have confidence in DCPS and don't believe opening more underperforming Charter schools is always the right answer to what we are seeing in public schools. I do not agree that the city should sale them at under market value as they have in the pass, when there are such budget deficits in various agencies. I am in favor of changing some to different public uses such as recreation centers, senior centers, training centers for vocational programs and office space for some non-profits that are doing great work in the city (e.g. Victims rights, mental health services etc.) I believe that DCPS could redesign some of those schools and use them for Central office space since DC government owns the building but spends millions of dollars a month renting spaces on 4<sup>th</sup> St S.W. and 1<sup>st</sup> St NE.

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

It is important to work with the appointed leaders over WMATA and the tri-state board, which was convened to make recommendations about the changes that need to take place in order for the organization to run efficiently and safely. As a leader I have to place some confidence in the persons with special knowledge in areas such as regional transportation issues, transportation safety, engineering, finance, public safety, homeland security, and human resources to make appropriate recommendations and to support those recommendations and changes. This matter is a joint issue for the District, Virginia and Maryland to work together to resolve. Although there needs to be change and reform we have to acknowledge the good work that is going on in the department as well.

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

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I cannot say with confidence what amount of money I would approve for funding the DC statehood campaign in 2013. I believe \$50,000 has been allocated for travel for council members and other politicians to travel to various states to lobby for statehood. I think residents as a whole should lobby and march for statehood in various states and in DC to show a unified front. I believe we have to spend resources to gain support from residents in each state to ask their respective Representatives to vote to give DC Statehood. I would consider asking all residents to join in a lawsuit to challenge the constitutional legality of not having a vote on the very laws that affect us.

**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?**

I believe the council represents the interest of big business and not small business and individual residents. The poor and uneducated are often under represented. Middle class residents bear much of the cost of running government but make too much to qualify for assistance and not enough to afford them on their wages. I believe that many members are interested in their own personal interest and not what is best for residents as a whole.

**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. Agencies need oversight and accountability to person's who have the authority to reprimand and correct error and misconduct. In the current climate of mishandling funds and blurred lines of right and wrong and ethics commission appears to be warranted.

**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?**

Truly I am somewhat on the fence with this answer because I am new in the arena of politics and have not yet received funding from corporate contributors (at the time of this questionnaire.) I understand the draw back of having developers and companies contribute to political campaigns. It does have the potential to limit persons who are not "connected" to get in the race and possibly win. I also understand that it takes money to run a successful campaign and to win. I do believe that if leaders had to get funding from constituents in their Ward to support their election efforts they would be more

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responsive to the needs of the persons in their community and therefore more committed to make decisions that affect the whole and not just a few.

**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?**

Yes I support the use of CSF's. The money that is in the CSF comes from campaign contributions and you have to designate how you plan to use or distribute those funds after the election. When there is money left in a budget there is often a designated use or it goes into a general fund I do not believe that is unusual. At this time the office of campaign finance offer suggestions on how the money should be used (e.g. donation of an educational non-profit preferably in the city.)

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

First, DC should find ways to encourage residents who would greatly benefit to actually attend. Provide additional funds for transportation cost so that they can afford to get to the job-training programs. Provide closer monitoring to ensure training is occurring as expected and that residents are attending. Satisfaction survey's can be used to find out why people don't complete training so we can reduce the dropout rate in programs. Lastly, provide job training to students who are preparing to leave high school but have no plans for military service, other job training or college attendance so that they can get right to work after graduation.