

**DC for Democracy Questionnaire  
April 3, 2012 Democratic Primary  
Ward 4 Council - Renee Bowser**

**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'm running for Ward 4 Council because I believe that the current Councilmember has failed to provide consistent, responsive leadership to all parts of Ward 4. And I believe she is out of touch with her constituents.

For example, the current Councilmember has failed to lead in getting Ward 4 its fair share of money to modernize our schools and playgrounds. Ward 3 schools get more than 3 times the capital spending as Ward 4 schools. Ward 4 schools such as Coolidge and Roosevelt HSs, that have not received the promised modernization, have fire systems which should be replaced and power distribution systems that the 2010 Master Facilities Plan called a "serious safety issue." Water damage and mold are present in MacFarland Middle School, and the 2010 Master Facilities Plan says that the asbestos at the school should be removed.

I will fight for every dollar so that Ward 4 schools get the same level of funding as other wards and are fully modernized; I'll fight for a rational system that bases repair and modernization on the severity of hazards to be remedied. I will also push for innovative learning programs in Ward 4 schools.

Another example is the current Councilmember's failure to deliver true ethics reform at a time our City is having an ethics meltdown. She failed to close the flagrant loophole which allows corporate dollars to skirt contribution limits and therefore have unfair influence over our elections. And the Councilmember has refused to disclose her corporate contributors. By skirting the spirit, if not the letter of the City's campaign finance laws, Muriel is taking "dirty money" to hold onto her Council seat. The Councilmember needs to disclose her corporate contributors or get out as Chair of Government Operations.

I was the first candidate to criticize the ethics bill for not banning bundling, among other weaknesses; therefore I support the petition drive to end corporate contributions.

My priorities are (1) fighting for first-rate education for all Ward 4 students; (2) job creation to substantially reduce the 8.3% unemployment in Ward 4; and (3) upgraded Ward-wide constituent services, including enforcing housing code

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compliance by absentee apartment, group home and Section housing owners, fighting elder abuse and neglect in connection with guardians and conservators, fighting for a real plan to curb property crimes, and fighting for better PEPCO service and blocking the unjustified proposed rate increase.

**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?**

I do favor increasing safety net spending by increasing temporary shelters, truly affordable housing programs, and job training, including real apprenticeship training, for jobs that allow workers to live in the City where they work.

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

The budget is too small for our City if it is inadequate to fund vital safety net programs for its low income residents.

**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?**

Yes, I believe the tax increase is fair. All income up to \$350,000 is taxed at 8.5% whether your total adjusted gross income is lower or greater than \$350,000. Only the additional income is taxed. DC's income tax is less progressive than the federal tax system.

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

I do not believe there is a good model for DC revitalization.

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

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As Councilmember, I will advocate making rent control permanent. I would also increase the percentage of the deed recordation real estate transfer taxes that go to the Housing Production Trust Fund that assists affordable rental housing and home ownership. In addition, I would fight to increase the percentage of affordable units required under the inclusionary zoning law as a condition for developers getting any taxpayer subsidy.

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

No. School repairs and modernization should be given priority based on fixing the schools that are most in need of fixing. The current leadership has not acknowledged the strong correlation between poverty and the obstacles to learning the poor face and therefore has failed to provide proper systems of wrap-around services. Additionally, I do not believe that such heavy reliance on testing is the best way to excite the passions and creativity of youth to equip them to learn. Further, I believe that teacher evaluation system should be based on a collaborative process between teachers and school management and not a process that demonizes public workers.

**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.**

I live near Rudolph Elementary School at 5200 2nd Street, NW which was closed nearly 4 years ago. During that time, the current Councilmember failed to engage my Petworth community about how the school should be repurposed. Last year, members of our community formed an organization to gather community input on what they would like to see done to serve the immediate and greater Ward 4 community. Our organization is working with the DC Department of General Services to work toward a beneficial use of the public property. Recognizing the crisis of unemployment and untrained residents, our first priority is a real apprenticeship training program at Rudolph. Our second priority is a structured arts, music, and recreation program for youth and other community members. We also propose that library and computer services be part of each of the programs.

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

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I believe that the District should prioritize putting transportation funding toward METRO rail and busses rather than funding streetcars at this time. We must make sure that service to people who depend on METRO for getting to and from employment, child care, and school in a timely manner are our City's top priority.

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

I do support funding for the DC statehood campaign. I cannot say what amount would be fair in relation to other DC priorities.

**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 do not believe that certain Councilmembers, like the incumbent Ward 4 Councilmember, represent the interests of all Ward 4 residents, including low and middle income folks and small businesses. She has failed to focus on programs of job creation and economic development that serves the parts of Ward 4 that are not booming. She has failed to focus on youth education. She has failed to focus on seniors who have been abused, neglected, or exploited and have not been helped by Adult Protective Services and the Superior Court Probate system.

**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 do not support the creation of the ethics commission because we should have strengthened the existing agency which handles ethics by hiring more auditors, investigators, and lawyers rather than creating an additional agency directors at greater expense to taxpayers.

**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?**

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I believe that entities who get contracts from the City or soliciting contracts should not contribute to political campaigns. I agree that corporate contributions should be banned.

**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 will not support constituent service funds unless they are used only for basic social services for the needy with strict of accounting of the uses. Otherwise they should be banned.

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

Develop real training programs for jobs that industry sectors need and that will permit individuals to afford to live where they work. For example, DC should provide apprenticeship training for elevator constructors so that METRO can hire for these jobs locally instead of getting elevator constructors from Canada. A company's development of real job training programs should be a condition of getting any type of tax subsidy or abatement from the DC government.