

**DC for Democracy Questionnaire**  
**April 3, 2012 Democratic Primary**  
**At-large Council - Sekou Biddle**

**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 Council because I know we can do better than the representatives we have now. I believe we need to create a more responsive and transparent DC Council that the residents can have faith in. Ethics reform is a major issue and should be a priority. The ongoing ethics scandals coming from the DC Council are also an unfortunate distraction from other pressing issues such as education, affordable housing, workforce development and public safety. These issues in addition to ethics are what I will focus on if elected.

**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. Education, Public Safety, Workforce Development, Housing and TANF (in no particular order) are my priorities. I'm interested in maintaining a 'safety net' for the city's most vulnerable citizens so that they do not bear the brunt of decreased funding or the cyclical nature of economic downturns.

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

I think it is hard to say exactly the right size of the budget. While the previous mayoral administrations and councils have made great progress cutting waste, we have also cut safety net programs drastically. We need to continue to try to find efficiencies in our budget and re-allocate those funds towards evidence based programs that meet the needs of our residents. That being said, I am not taking any options off the table for revenue increases or further cuts. We could find that our money, when better allocated is plenty, or we could find that additional spending is needed. I'm open to all solutions.

**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?**

**DC for Democracy Questionnaire**  
**April 3, 2012 Democratic Primary**  
**At-large Council - Sekou Biddle**

Facing a \$400 million deficit, the Council was forced into making some very difficult decisions regarding revenues and cuts to very important services. I don't prefer tax increases of any kind, however when facing huge budget deficits I am not willing to take any options off the table.

What I'd propose is that we make the government's spending decisions and government operations more clear and transparent. This will give District residents the confidence that any tax increases are absolutely the last resort to help protect critical programs and services. We could find that our money, when better allocated is plenty, or we could find that additional revenue is needed. I'm open to all solutions.

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

I think that no single neighborhood is the perfect model for redevelopment. Columbia Heights is booming, and an excellent model for transit oriented development, but we have also learned that parking minimums that were put in place for DC USA may not have been necessary. The revitalization of the H Street corridor is long overdue but it is also an example of the District government needing to make a concerted effort to ensure that new development does not push out long standing locally owned businesses either. The Reeves Center served as an excellent catalyst for development around 14th and U, NW but high rents in the area for businesses and residences show that we need to make sure that mixed incomes are able to take advantage of these newly popular neighborhoods and their services.

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

As I stated above, we need to make sure that citizens of all incomes are able to both work and Live in the District. I will work with Council, community groups and the development community to increase the stock of stable long-term affordable housing. Additionally, I will work with the Council and relevant city agencies to ensure any public lands being disposed of for residential development include adequate affordable housing for mixed income levels. As is often the case, this is a matter of priority and it will take leadership on council and effective oversight in the committees to ensure that the government is doing everything it can/should to provide access to housing that is safe and affordable.

**DC for Democracy Questionnaire**  
**April 3, 2012 Democratic Primary**  
**At-large Council - Sekou Biddle**

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

I believe school reform is generally headed in the right direction, but we have to re-double our efforts to so that we are improving access to a quality education in every part of the District. I look forward to working with the Chancellor and the Council to create incentives for our best teachers to teach in our lowest performing schools. Further, we need to work with all education and community stakeholder groups to make sure teachers and school executives are held accountable in order for any reform to be successful and sustained. And lastly, I'll work with the with the Chancellor and the Washington Teachers Union to ensure that teachers get what they need to be great teachers including excellent professional development opportunities.

**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.**

Our recently closed schools are an opportunity for rebirth for a number of our neighborhoods. There are multiple uses for each of our closed schools, whether they be homes for one of our Public Charter Schools, DC Government offices, or some sort of mixed use redevelopment. For example the repurposing Fletcher-Johnson JHS on Benning Road, with its proximity to the metro, could catalyze redevelopment for the surrounding area. I think that first and foremost the community must be engaged in the process so that whatever comes into those spaces next can be embraced by the community and have a long term chance at success.

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

As a frequent user of the WMATA system, I can tell WMATA needs to improve its communications and transparency with its customers if they are going to have increased faith in their services. In order to create a more reliable system we need to ensure that the District of Columbia provides a dedicated funding source for WMATA and I will encourage similar support from our partners in Maryland, Virginia, and the federal government.

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

**DC for Democracy Questionnaire**  
**April 3, 2012 Democratic Primary**  
**At-large Council - Sekou Biddle**

I do support funding for the DC Statehood campaign, however I think that we need a clear plan for the campaign. After years of struggle to raise our profile and move the issue forward it has not gained significant traction. If elected I will work with my fellow councilmembers as well as organizations that advocate for DC Statehood to come up with an effective campaign.

**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 think that the DC Council is adequately representing the entire District population. The group that is not being represented well at all are the low income residents that reside in communities that are trapped in a cycle of poverty due to decades of failure of the District government to provide adequate education and pathways to employment opportunities. Unfortunately, I think the recent ethics debate is illustrative of Council members placing their own interests over those of their constituents.

**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 support this ethics commission, however I think that the ethics legislation fell far short of where it needed to go in order to be truly effective. In addition to the ethics commission, the Council needs to pass laws banning corporate contributions from political campaigns, as well as create disclosure requirements for city contractors that donate to campaigns. We should not have to wait until one of our elected officials is arrested or a major scandal breaks to create a more transparent government. In order to earn back the trust of the DC residents that the Council has lost, it needs to be a proactive body that addresses any appearance of a conflict of interest for its members.

**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?**

See answer to question number 12

**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?**

**DC for Democracy Questionnaire  
April 3, 2012 Democratic Primary  
At-large Council - Sekou Biddle**

I testified this past year at the ethics bill hearing that we need to eliminate CSFs. They are used as Council political funds instead of serving the neediest residents and they are yet another way for corporations to give unlimited amounts of cash to individual councilmembers in order to curry favor. Instead of CSFs Councilmembers should work to make sure that the residents in serious need of assistance can be helped quickly and systematically so that no one will fall through the cracks and crises can be prevented. My complete testimony on this issue is available on my website at [www.sekoubiddle.org](http://www.sekoubiddle.org)

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

I think that we need to do a serious analysis of how effective our current job training programs are. Our investments in our residents and use of our tax dollars need to be evidence based. Are we getting a return on our investment? What is the rate of placement in jobs after our residents leave these programs? I think we also need to make sure that the jobs we are training people for match the demand for jobs in the District.