

**DC for Democracy Questionnaire
April 3, 2012 Democratic Primary
Ward 7 Council - Tom Brown**

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?

We need a council member who works hard for Ward 7. I offer myself as that council member. For almost 15 years, my life's work has been educating our young, training job seekers, and matching their talents with employment opportunities in Ward 7 and throughout DC. I have the knowledge and experience we need to build a brighter future for our Ward.

As the Ward 7 Council member, these will be my priorities:

Bringing integrity and ethics to the DC Government by:

- setting term limits,
- limiting the outside income of Council members and
- establishing an independent Ethics Review Board.

Protecting public safety by:

- assuring that Ward 7 gets its fair share of police protection,
- making sure police are more responsive to Ward 7 citizens and
- maintaining cleaner, more livable communities.

Improving public education by:

- protecting Ward 7 schools from unfair closures,
- giving principals authority to hire and fire teachers and
- increasing technology curriculum and tools for Ward 7 schools.

Increasing job opportunities by:

- uniting business, government, labor & community for Ward 7 jobs,
- helping Ward 7 residents start & maintain their own businesses and
- jumpstarting development on Ward 7 Main Streets.

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?

In the end, cutting vital public services will cost DC money. For example, the

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economic development that stems from new residents and new businesses will be lost, if those new residents and businesses decline to come to DC because our services are lacking. Furthermore, cutting investments in education and health care could trigger higher future expenditures because of resulting unemployment, crime, and drug and alcohol abuse. Another important investment must skills training, particularly in information technology, allied health fields, green jobs.

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

An approximately 11 billion-dollar budget should be enough to meet the needs of a community of our size. Furthermore, we can find funds to grow needed programs by cutting wasteful spending. Finally, by collecting money owed to the District we can raise additional funds for the programs we need.

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?

The span between \$40,000 and \$350,000 is way too broad. I favor progressive tax rates: Those at higher income levels more comfortably can pay a higher portion of their income in taxes, and they should do so. When determining the proper taxes for people at each level, DC should consider sales taxes. A flat sales tax rate is highly regressive; it poses the most severe burden on people at lower income levels. One way to compensate for regressive sales tax burdens would be more progressive income taxes.

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

Our one city should include many different kinds of neighborhoods. These include downtown living in communities such as Penn Quarter, NOMA and the Capitol Riverfront; the vibrant mixture of housing, shopping and entertainment found in Columbia Heights and U Street NW; culturally and economically diverse communities such as LeDroit Park, Brookland, Adams Morgan, H Street Northeast

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and Capitol Hill East; and stable, peaceful residential neighborhoods such as my own River Terrace as well as Crestwood, Deanwood, Eastland Gardens and Hillcrest.

In planning for DC's future, we should draw on positive aspects of all these communities, including

- safe and attractive places to live and shop,
- quality housing that is affordable for those at every income level,
- job opportunities near our homes,
- excellent transportation networks, and
- respect for DC's history and cultural legacy.

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

Housing is more readily affordable for those who have the education and skills needed to obtain good jobs with bright futures. Therefore, my first "housing" priority will be strengthening DC's education and jobs programs.

- For those who would still need help to obtain and keep quality housing, I will support a wide range of programs including:
- real estate tax relief to help senior citizens remain in their homes,
- expanded efforts to require that new housing developments include not only market rate units but also housing for those who have low incomes or no incomes, and
- for those unable to maintain a house or apartment on their own, carefully planned use of group homes and single room occupancy (SRO) facilities.

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

The jury is still out on the question of whether school reform is working. The recent IFF report, Quality Schools, Every Child, Every School, Every Neighborhood highlights how many schools are still struggling.

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To achieve higher levels of learning, we must ask more of our students, their teachers and their parents. We must provide programs that satisfy a wide range of student interests; and this must include state-of-the-art vocational education.

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 support community schools – utilizing a building not just for educating children but for educating adults and for providing recreation and other community services as well.

Where some or all of a school building is no longer needed for education, the building should be utilized for other public purposes.

For example, the Common Good City Farm, on V Street, NW provides a model of using surplus property to support not only urban agriculture but also education about healthy eating.

Other uses for closed public schools should include:

- unique affordable housing arrangements,
- services for seniors,
- tutoring centers, and
- adult education covering such subjects as reading and math literacy, computer literacy, urban green living, and parenting.

Finally, in collaboration with labor unions, DC should use closed schools as sites for technical training centers.

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

WMATA focuses too much on moving commuters between jobs in DC and homes in the suburbs. Instead, WMATA's focus should be on safe, convenient and affordable transportation that makes it easier for people to both live and work in DC. The Circulator bus system is one example of how to accomplish this.

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

To achieve statehood, the DC Government must provide significant funding. However, more important than funding is leadership.

The DC Government should educate every resident about the importance of statehood, and it should call on every resident to demonstrate for statehood. Most importantly, the DC Government should call on every resident to reach out across the country – asking, friends, relatives and business associates to support DC statehood.

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?

Too many times the DC Council sacrifices broad public interests to cater to large developers and national corporations such as Wal-Mart and Marriott. The ordinary citizens of DC who cannot match corporate contributions are underrepresented.

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.

The ethics legislation that passed is helpful but woefully insufficient.

This legislation did not address needed campaign finance reform. DC needs to pick up where the ethics legislation left off – limiting the political influence of wealthy individual and corporate donors.

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?

Banning or severely limiting corporate contributions must be considered. However, the ban should extend not just to contractors but also to lobbyists, grant recipients and others who would benefit from such DC Government actions as tax

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abatements, tax increment financing and zoning changes.

Another way to curb political influence would be prohibiting DC Council members from voting on any issue that directly affects a corporation or individual that made a large contribution to that Council member.

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?

In some communities, including many parts of Ward 7, Constituent Services Funds or an alternative are needed for such emergency needs as food, rent and utilities. We must not abandon Constituent Services Funds unless we have other mechanisms in place to meet these needs.

However, Constituent Services Funds are abused. These funds have been used to promote political events, to enhance the popularity and public relations of a political leader, and to provide personal benefits to politicians. All of this must stop.

Perhaps most importantly, “donations” to Constituent Services Funds provide moneyed interests with yet another way to curry favor with elected officials. This too must stop.

I intend to introduce legislation that severely restricts the use of Constituent Services Funds to assisting with such true emergency needs as school supplies, rent and utilities. Furthermore, I favor public funding over politically motivated donations.

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

I have taught at Anacostia High School and at the Kipp Key Public Charter School. I direct the non-profit organization, Training Grounds. I was the co-founder and head of a Workforce Development Council that enhances the job training through collaborative efforts of:

- private employers,
- labor unions,

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- government agencies,
- academic institutions and
- non-profits that provide training, job placement and social services.

I have found this collaborative model to be highly effective; and as a Councilmember, I will continue to build this kind of collaboration across all of DC.

In addition, my priorities would include improving the quality and relevance of job training (making sure that the training focuses on the competencies that the job market seeks).

However, I would also encourage employers to hire DC residents. We need to increase employer awareness of the great assets they could tap among residents in Ward 7 and elsewhere where unemployment is high. In addition, we must strengthen and enhance First Source laws.

Furthermore, I would seek to eliminate job discrimination. Today, DC residents not only face discrimination because of race or other factors currently covered by civil rights legislation. They also face discrimination based on:

- where the applicant lives,
- the applicant's credit history or reliance on public assistance,
- the applicant's criminal history and
- periods of unemployment in the applicant's job history.

On rare occasions, some of these factors might be relevant to a hiring decision. However, where the factors are not relevant, their use constitutes discrimination and must be prohibited.

By encouraging the hiring of DC residents and by countering hiring discrimination against DC residents, we will be able to enhance to effectiveness of job training programs.