

**DC for Democracy Questionnaire**  
**April 3, 2012 Democratic Primary**  
**Ward 7 Council - William Bennett**

**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 District of Columbia resident who has called the District home since birth, my concern with the past, present, and future of this area transcends the transitory. Matters of the District are highly personal with me...Therefore, as an individual who has been an informal student of the District and who has ties that are compelling linked to its historicity, my decision to seek to serve the District as Ward 7 City Councilman is more than a "career move". Rather, my Team and I have examined some of our problems and have identified some complementary strategies to current regulations, programs, and policies to support the quality of life of District residents.

In this regard, my priority areas are several. Specifically, my Team and I have selected as my immediate priorities those areas that multiplicatively impact other areas of life.

First, we will seek to create what statisticians call "statistically significant" decreases in poverty in Ward 7. I use this term because I want my constituents to be able to hold me accountable for my promises by saying, "When Bill Bennett and his Team took office poverty in my census tract was 36%. And, at the end of his term, this rate had dropped to 20% ( $P < .05$ )."

My Team and I will achieve this goal by not only applying tested strategies to bring large employers to Ward 7, we will also launch a campaign that says, "If you can't find a job, create one!" And to support micro-enterprise development, we will organize teams of volunteers who will train District residents on how to capitalize and start micro-enterprises right where they live.

We will also seek to re-norm residents from a "job" mentality as the primary source of income to recognizing that income can also be generated through investments. I have often used the example that for the price of a Big Mac purchased daily, an investment of that some amount into a high yield mutual fund will allow a publicly dependent, single mother who is age 25 to retire as a millionaire at age 65.

In addition to financial and economic growth as a priority, education is another of my priority areas. My Team and I will seek to "create statistically significant decreases" in dropout, overall academic achievement, science and math achievement, graduation rates, and the entry into college of those youth who do

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graduate. Again, my promises are measurable so that whether my promises are kept can be tracked. My proposed strategies for achieving this goal are research-based. Did you know that if we can implement measures to ensure that every child in the District of Columbia can read by the age of 3, our drop-out rates would decrease? Did you know that independently of parental income, training young parents in the District to speak gently to their children and praise them will initiate a chain that increases test scores?

Another of my priority areas is “ team parenting.” In the District of Columbia, approximately 7-8 in every ten children born are born to a single mother. In addition, the District has maintained divorce rates that equal 9.7%.

Now as a divorcee, I understand the complexities of seeking to enter and maintain marriages. But, parents can be trained to engage in team parenting so that children’s lives will not be adversely affected by father’s absence.

Now, think about what I’ve outlined briefly, poverty reduction, increased education, and stronger familial support systems can create a chain of causation that can reduce crime, improve health outcomes, increases reported happiness, and create other positive outcomes. But, observe something else, - There are low-cost strategies that can be implemented without battling our city officials to allocate funding!

And so, as you can see, I’m seeking the institutionalized role of City Council person for Ward 7 because I have a strong vision of how to catalyze change.

**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?**

With unemployment, unemployment, 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 the priority?

Table 1 below lists poverty and unemployment rates for each of our Wards.

Table 1		
	Poverty Rate	Unemployment Rate

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Ward 1	16%	7.2%
Ward 2	15%	4.0%
Ward 3	6.9%	3.4%
Ward 4	9.9%	7.6%
Ward 5	19%	13%
Ward 6	18%	8.4%
Ward 7	36%	19%
Ward 8	35%	17%

As one reviews the above data and begins calculations that transform these numbers from mere percentages and into human lives, it is clear that an enlarged pool of safety net spending is needed as the District transitions to current and/or more innovative recovery strategies. However, what I would like to see is greater accountability in terms of how safety net spending is used. What is the cost per outcome for that which is achieved through safety net spending? How can spending be reconfigured to generate more targeted outcomes per dollar spent? Indeed, I would like to see such an analysis conducted using data from past safety net spending so that we all can have a more informed basis for our decision making.

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

As you are aware, the proposed general fund budget – the segment that is funded through local taxes and fees is \$6.16 billion. However, the contributions of the federal sector elevate this amount to approximately \$9.5 billion. Now when we benchmark this amount against an area of comparable size such as Wyoming, we see a budget of \$4.8 billion. We also see a state that actually selected not to apply for \$17.5 million in additional funding that it could have received from the federal sector. I think we, in the District can learn from this example. Larger and larger budgets are not always better. Saying this, I would say that while the District's total current budget may need reconfiguration, it's about right.

**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**

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**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 don't base my appraisal of the District's tax structure on premises associated with equity. Rather, I prefer to focus upon the efficiency of a tax. In order to answer this question, we need to review studies commissioned that answers questions such as:

- 1) Once deductions, tax credits, and other factors are considered, what is the effective tax rate for different income classes?
- 2) What is the impact of the current tax structure upon total revenues collected? Has an unanticipated outcome of the current tax structure been any significant loss of higher paying residents? I would need additional data unavailable to me as a citizen to make an informed decision. However, I must say that if the net effect of this tax is to reduce the long-term growth of the District and/or to disproportionately shift the burden of this tax upon those less able to pay, I would oppose it.

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

I am, and have always been a fan of HOPE VI revitalization projects. In Atlanta, the HOPE VI projects created extreme increases in employment. In Arizona, the HOPE VI projects used Individual Development funds to assist residents in establishing micro-enterprises. In Chicago, the HOPE VI project successfully housed low-income and higher income families within the same development. In Washington, I am a fan of the Arthur Capper and Carrollsburg Dwellings sited from the Navy Yard to the Anacostia River. I also favor the Bryant Street Townhome Condominiums because they have created homebuyers opportunities for District residents.

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

Home ownership rates are only 45.1% in the District relative to 66.9% nationwide. One strategy I would use to increase home ownership rates is intensive consumer

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economy, credit management, and credit repair training to increase eligibility for a first-tier mortgage. Another strategy that I would use is the formation of housing corporations. However, with median home prices at \$440,500 in the District versus the national median of \$185,400, I would urge the public not to buy homes at these artificially inflated prices thereby lending systematic and extended pressure to the bursting of the housing bubble that currently exists in the District of Columbia.

Additionally, consistent with the efforts of the federal and quasi-federal sector, I recommend that foreclosed federally insured properties be rented or leased by the City, thereby providing more affordable housing – a practice that is already underway in some areas. To alleviate homelessness, I would begin by contracting with an integrated substance abuse, mental health, and physical health providers to co-locate in emergency rooms at hospitals that serve large number of individuals, assess these chronically homeless persons who come to the ER, transfer them to a newly established 80 or so bed residential detoxification, treatment, and recovery center and then use community-based systems of care to support the recovery process.

In addition, using a Housing First approach with housing stabilization services, and benefits establishment, I would partner with non-profit developers that place these individuals and families into permanent housing.

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

This question is difficult to answer because some researchers have challenged the DC School System's findings regarding improvement as being based upon "dirty data". If the outcomes are, indeed, improving, I will support the current reform effort. I am familiar with the DC School Reform Now Advocacy and would seek to work with them.

**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.**

With approximately 23 schools sitting empty, several strategies can be use. First, one or more schools could be refurbished as workforce housing and/or affordable housing. Secondly, some could be used as transition housing for those who are

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either returning citizens or have completed treatment programs and are ready to transition as productive citizens. I also recommend the use of some as Charter Schools. The sale of some of the buildings could also generate revenue for the renovation of buildings targeted for alternative use. Additionally, I would recommend that some buildings be left maintained for future “reserved projects” or leased and not sold immediately.

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

**10.**

First, the WMATA Board requires members who truly know and understand public transportation issues and options. Second, to ensure safety and fund much-needed updates and repairs, the District can consider a bond issue as a slight increase in the proportion of sales tax revenues allocated to transportation or re-assign year-end surpluses for this purpose.

**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 Statehood is an issue that is close to my heart. In addition to current efforts of the Mayor and City Council to garner the support of other states, I suggest that the District government prepare annual performance reports that track our performance and benchmark other urban cities of comparable size. This will strengthen support for 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?**

Yes, I do believe that the current DC Council as a collective represents the interests of the broad public. I truly believe that shortcomings revealed by some members are failings of VISION and not of purpose. Additionally, I think that it is urgent for constituents who feel slighted to voice their concerns through visits and in writing so that City Council members can “hear” them. I also think City Council members must become even more active in soliciting “voices” of those who are served. My strongly held position that it is “Teamwork that makes the Dream of Good Governance Work!”

**12. Do you support the creation of an independent ethics commission with**

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**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 very much support the creation of an independent ethics commission. However, can members nominated by the Mayor and confirmed by the Council be truly independent?

**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?**

I support Ms. Sylvia Brown, Advisory Neighborhood Commissioner in my neighborhood of Deanwood in the effort to ban direct corporate contributions. Recent newspaper articles have highlighted the abuses of the intent of the law by LLC's. However, the legislation must be carefully written to prevent being overturned by the Supreme Court. Current and prospective contractors should not be allowed to contribute to political campaigns.

**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?**

No, I do not support the \$80,000 or \$40,000 Constituent Service Funds program. Whether used appropriately or not, they set City Council members up for ethics charges. I recommend that we allow the contributions to be made to a nonprofit for fiscal administration on behalf of constituents.

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

Again, measurable performance goals are needed to signal how well this and other programs are working. Additionally, job training must be directly driven by the demands of the marketplace five and ten years from the completion of the program.

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Thank you for the opportunity to share some of my thoughts.

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