

DC for Democracy Questionnaire  
April 2014 Primary, At Large (Statehood Green)  
Eugene Puryear

## ECONOMY & JOBS

*1. Given the strong economic and population growth in recent years, we can all agree that this city is now a hot place to live and work. Going forward, what criteria should justify the use of DC taxpayer funds for economic development?*

The key criterion that should underpin any expenditure of taxpayer funds should be clear and compelling evidence of advancement in employment for District residents at a living wage to avoid exacerbating the sky-high income inequality that exists in the District. Further economic development should contribute to creating a more environmentally sustainable city if there is to be any consideration of the use of taxpayer funds. Also, taxpayer funds should never be used to facilitate developments by entities with a record of anti-labor activity or wage theft, and those that are unwilling to acknowledge that they will respect the rights of workers to organize on the job.

I do not support the current fashion on the Council to use tax breaks as an economic development tool. This so-called “development” tool has evolved into a form of extortion by businesses against localities, forcing them to compete to give away the money of taxpayers-- often to large and profitable businesses, or unproven start-ups. Research, both nationally and locally, is at best mixed on the positive benefits of these strategies. In the District, this has been borne out, at least partially, by clear evidence that many firms failed to comply with the First Source and/or wage requirements that were stipulations of their agreements.

My view is that the D.C. Council should not be focused on using taxpayer money, with no guarantee of either success or corporate compliance, which is essentially extorted, for private ends not public good.

*2. The tipped minimum wage has been frozen at \$2.77/hr in DC for over 20 years. Meanwhile, the Minimum Wage Act left out the issue of tipped minimum wages. Would you support an increase in the tipped minimum wage, and to what level?*

Yes. I believe the minimum wage for all workers should be uniform. Currently that would be \$11.50, although my campaign is calling for a \$15/hr minimum wage. I find the entire system of “tipped” employment to be problematic in many ways. Being forced to rely on the whims of customers to survive, with no real guarantee of a stable living standard, is deeply unjust. While technically employers are supposed to pay the difference between the “tipped” minimum wage and the actual minimum wage if it falls short, this is rarely if ever enforced. Also, it is small consolation when the minimum wage is not a living wage. As a matter of basic

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human rights, working people should be paid a living wage, period.

## TAXATION

*3. The Tax Revision Commission was presented with clear, official data showing that the District's current tax system is regressive. The Commission has recommended some proposals to reduce this regressivity. Are you comfortable with their proposals in this regard? What further changes would you propose, if any?*

Without the working people who work in their businesses, buy their products and services, and run all the societal essentials from transportation infrastructure to trash removal and food service, the very rich wouldn't be so wealthy.

As such, I am entirely uncomfortable with the proposals of the Tax Revision Commission. First and foremost, their "reduction" of regressivity is minor, with the top 1 percent still paying a rate close to the bottom 20 percent. This is vastly out of sync with the current realities given that the taxable income of those with adjusted gross incomes of \$1 million and above was \$3.3 billion.

I would propose several additions: A progressive sales tax credit; an increase in income tax to 9.5 percent for taxable income of \$150,000-\$350,000 and to 10 percent for taxable income above \$350,000; and no lowering of business taxes for any but small business.

*4. DC has a reputation as a high-tax jurisdiction that drives investment and wealthy families out of the District. In reality, how big a problem is this?*

Not a problem at all. Research has consistently shown that "tax flight" is essentially a myth. Recent studies by both the Center for Budget and Policy Priorities and the Institute on Taxation and Economic Policy conducted over the past three years have buttressed this. The same research has shown that a variety of non-tax factors weigh into economic growth. While for business this a helpful talking point, and one used to extort lower tax rates from cities and states, it isn't backed up by the facts.

## ELECTION REFORM

*5. In order to reduce the influence of large contributors on legislation, a number of states and localities have turned to public financing. Do you in general favor public financing, and if so,*

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*what model(s) do you recommend?*

I do favor public financing of elections. I would support a model similar to that proposed by Council members Grosso and McDuffie in their “Fair Elections D.C” bill; that is, basing public financing on reaching a fairly low threshold of privately raised funds, then matching private donations—capped at a lower rate than currently—with public dollars on a per donation basis.

*6. The electoral system in DC allows candidates to be elected to office with a plurality, not a majority, of votes. Do you support any type of runoff system of voting? If yes, what mechanism do you favor? If not, why not?*

Yes, I support D.C. adopting an Instant Runoff Voting system. I am opposed to general non-partisan primaries, which while masquerading as more fair, favor more well-known or well-funded candidates.

## HOUSING

*7. Councilmember Kenyan McDuffie has introduced a bill (Disposition of District Land for Affordable Housing Amendment Act of 2013), which includes a requirement that private developments on surplus public lands with transit access (½ mile of metro station or ¼ mile of major bus route/streetcar line) to provide at least 30% of rental units to be set aside for very-low to low-income households. Would you support this bill? Why or why not?*

Yes, I would support the bill as I believe it does advance the goal that my campaign sets, which is to achieve affordable housing for all District residents. I view housing as a human right not a privilege, and Washington, D.C., should provide truly affordable housing to all residents.

That being said, if I was on the Council I would seek to amend Councilmember McDuffie’s bill to use District Median Income (DMI) as its standard for affordability as opposed to Area Median Income (AMI). AMI, which is currently used for Inclusionary Zoning in the District, takes into account very wealthy surrounding localities, which skews the criteria for “affordability.” Using DMI will reflect much more significantly the actual living standards in the District itself and I believe make all IZ regulations and Councilmember McDuffie’s bill more impactful.

Further, our housing policies must be firmly rooted in an all-around approach to decreasing poverty that provides the District’s poorest residents clear routes out of poverty, not just adjusting their ability to live in poverty.

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## EDUCATION

*8. The percentage of children in traditional public schools has declined dramatically in DC and is now, at 56%, the third lowest in the nation. Should we be concerned about this trend? If so, what should be done to halt or reverse it? If not, what changes would you propose to accommodate to the trend?*

We should be concerned. If we want to reverse this trend, the first thing we must do is not close any more of our neighborhood schools. Secondly, we need to discard the thinking that “creativity” and “innovation” are only possible in charter schools. Third, we need to move away from total “mayoral” control and bring democratic decision-making back into education policy.

## CRIMINAL JUSTICE

*9. What would you do to improve job and living prospects for the high number of returning citizens in DC?*

While there are a range of issues that need to be addressed to improve quality of life for Returning Citizens, there are three main things I would pursue immediately.

First, I would seek to implement true “Ban-the-Box” legislation that eliminates questions about one’s criminal record from consideration in employment – you either get a second chance or you don’t. To assume that a person will “re-offend” is inherently discriminatory. If a person has served their mandated time in prison, barring them from employment on the basis of past offenses is an extrajudicial punishment with no real basis.

Second, I would also pursue legislation to eliminate criminal records for consideration in housing, which goes hand-in-hand with “Ban-the-Box” legislation for employment.

Third, I would fight for more funds to be allocated to the Office on Returning Citizens Affairs, and gear them towards rooting out discrimination against Returning Citizens on the job, in housing and in all areas of life.

In addition to these legislative items, it is crucial that the Council use its oversight power to aggressively examine the conditions at some of the District’s halfway houses, where there has been little accountability, and many reports of abuses and lack of service provision.

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