

DC for Democracy Questionnaire
April 2014 Primary, Mayor (Democrat)
Jack Evans

Economy & Jobs

1. The District of Columbia is currently implementing an economic development strategy that defines as one of its goals being the most business-friendly economy in the nation. What do you think of this goal, and how would you revise it, if at all?

I think it is critical for an economic development strategy to be business friendly, it is even more critical to make sure it is a strategy that works for our residents and workers in addition to our business owners. We have seen tremendous improvement in our city throughout the duration of my tenure on the City Council. As chair of the Committee on Finance and Revenue, I have been instrumental in the city's move from a junk bond rating status to Triple A. Having a city supportive of small and well-established business owners is essential to sustaining healthy economic growth, as well as keeping our city unique and a destination to visit and shop. Businesses continue to take root all across the city and our neighborhoods are constantly improving.

We must also acknowledge, however, that economic development is not happening evenly across our city. Recently, I introduced the "D.C. Business Improvement District Economy Development Act" for the purpose of supporting economic development in traditionally underserved areas. Any time two Wards combined have only three sit-down restaurants, we are failing to realize the true great potential of our city. This legislation provides a specified amount in the way of financial assistance while a business tax base is further established. Such legislation and support for businesses establishes building blocks for greater economic and social mobility. As these neighborhoods develop, the quality of life improves for every resident.

As Mayor, I will advance responsible economic development. It is a platform designed to advance and strengthen job creation with real guarantees for our residents-- particularly in those parts of D.C. still experiencing a job crisis and with many residents struggling to find well-paying jobs to afford rising rents and to support their families.

Championing a business-friendly economy simultaneously works to improve other areas of concern such as affordable housing, workforce development, and job growth. My record on job creation is evidenced through the thousands of construction jobs and hundreds of permanent jobs for which I advocated at the Nationals Ballpark, the Verizon Center, the Convention Center, and the Convention Center Hotel. More importantly, these jobs have gone to District residents with roughly half of all new hires and more than two-thirds of new apprentices living in the District.

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?

I do not support an increase in the tipped minimum wage. Four out of every five restaurants close within their first year, and we have already given them a lot of new rules recently along the lines of raising the minimum wage over a period of several years and expanding the paid sick leave law. Given DC's much higher cost of living (including housing costs twice the national average) and exorbitant unemployment rates in parts of the city, I know we must continue to work on correcting societal inequalities – particularly by advancing general wage issues throughout our region so the many DC residents working in Maryland and Virginia also receive increased benefits.

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?

As chair of the Committee on Finance and Revenue, I understand the importance of tax relief. I have continuously labored to limit property tax increases for all residents – especially the elderly and financially challenged. I fought to limit annual property tax increase to 10%, and now I am working to lower them again to 5%. People aren't seeing wage increases of that amount, so it is unfair that their taxes are increasing so rapidly. I have also proposed legislation designed to make our tax structure more progressive by lowering many tax rates, and have been a firm supporter of tax incentives for working families in our city, such as Schedule H and championed recent efforts to expand the eligibility.

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?

It is a real problem. Unlike larger states, the District faces competition from both Virginia and Maryland on a range of issues. We have also seen a reluctance of larger corporations to locate within the District. There is not much benefit to a high corporate tax rate if no companies are here to actually pay it.

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, what model(s) do you recommend?

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Ethics in government is one of my top priorities. I have introduced legislation to remove the Council's role in approving contracts between the government and third party vendors as a direct way to get at the problem of disproportionate influence of corporations in the government. In addition, I would like to see greater enforcement of the laws we already have on the books. Remember that all the ethics violations that have made the news relating to our government the past few years are actually already illegal! Transparency is the most important objective with regard to ensuring fulfillment of our campaign finance laws and ethics requirements. That said, we must provide more resources to ensure this can be easily and effectively accomplished and I will do so as Mayor.

Housing

6. How do you define affordable housing? What are your priorities short-term and longer-term, for remedying the affordable housing crisis in the District?

I believe that affordable housing is critical at all levels, and we need to assure that there are good options for those at 30% AMI just as much as 80% AMI. The rapid rise in housing costs and the slow growth in incomes means that residents, especially in underserved areas face severe housing costs. I have always said that those residents who were here during the tough times deserve to stay during the good times. That is why I created the funding mechanism for the Housing Production Trust Fund and I continue my commitment to ensuring it is at the forefront of the housing conversation. Further, any definition of affordable housing must consider in its equation money left over to meet other basic needs such as food, clothing, medicine, transportation, and education. I am committed to ensuring that all District residents can afford to both live and work here in the city and am a proven supporter of affordable housing.

Education

7. 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?

This number is troubling. Many residents are opting for alternative options offered by private and

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public charter schools. Many are altogether leaving the District for Montgomery County or Virginia Public Schools. Our schools should be delivering a better product to students, parents, and staff. As a top priority of mine, I believe that strengthening public schools will result in a higher level of achievement. The ability to better educate our children is not only a moral imperative, it is vital to ending social problems resulting from education deficits and an inability to be socially active participants in a rapidly evolving city.

I am generally supportive our chancellor and Mayoral control of DCPS. The Deputy Mayor for Education needs some leeway (though not unlimited) to rethink programs, policies, and personnel to bring more accountability and better results to the school system. I think our focus needs to be on producing better results for the tremendous financial investment we are making yearly. At \$29,409 spent per student, our city spends more money per capita on its students than any other major city in America, yet we lag behind in academic achievement. This is unacceptable. It is also hard to believe that with such a large budget, we can't afford to put a full-time art teacher, music teacher, P.E. teacher, and librarian in every school.

Our schools need the type of support that provides ample resources that will empower teachers, staff, and students in innovative ways while ensuring that no community goes without high-quality and local education. Providing a quality public school education must not be a long term goal, it is urgently needed right away.

Criminal Justice

8. Racial disparities in arrests and convictions for marijuana possession in DC are well known. Efforts to decriminalize or legalize marijuana are underway in multiple states today. What are your views on these two policy options?

African Americans are eight times more likely to be arrested for possession than whites – the ACLU found 91% of those arrested for possessions were black. The District also spends an exorbitant annual amount to enforce marijuana rules. These statistics underscore a larger institutional problem pervasive in the District and throughout the nation. I absolutely support decriminalization and was pleased to vote in favor of it both at the judiciary committee markup and at the committee of the whole vote.

Environment

9. A provision in Mayor Gray's "Sustainable DC Omnibus Act of 2013" abolishes the Advisory Board of the Sustainable Energy Utility (SEU), an entity designed to administer energy efficiency and renewable energy programs. The board was created in the 2008

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Clean and Affordable Energy Act to provide advice and recommendations regarding the procurement and administration of the Utility. How would you define the role of citizens participating in the design of policies and communication of information regarding environmental resources in the city?

Sustainable economic development is essential to building a world class city. Attracting businesses that champion the use of clean technology will improve our environment and launch a new era of prosperity and healthy living. Maximizing District resources designed to administer energy efficiency and renewable energy programs must be supplemented by citizen participation. That is why I have endorsed legislation such as the "Urban Forest Preservation Act." The law requires community notice prior to the removal or replacement of trees on public space and established a Tree Advisory Board. I will continue to support legislation that crafts an aggressive and sensible administrative structure for the provision of energy efficiency programs.