

DC for Democracy Questionnaire  
April 2014 Primary, Mayor (Democrat)  
Tommy Wells

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?

**What DC needs is to focus on what works and gives us the best return on our investment for business development. Competing with other states in a “race to the bottom” to attract business by giving away tax breaks and incentives while hurting workers isn’t what we need and it is no way to build our city. We do need to work to attract and recruit the entrepreneurs of the new economy. We may not be able to compete with the tech sector of California or the available capital of New York but we do have the ability to tap into the emerging economies led by millennial innovators. I will pursue better opportunities for early stage capital for start-ups in order to drive economic growth and I will author and support innovative legislation that accelerates entrepreneurs into the market. It will take more than just throwing money at the issue, but working side by side with these business to create a entrepreneurial environment that fosters growth rather than stifling it.**

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 have spent many months studying and learning about the “tip economy” as many of your leaders and members know. I think we should consider equalizing tip wages in DC with our neighbors in Maryland, just as we did on the living wage. One of the my concerns is that while an increase is needed, it is dramatically unfair. What I will support is increasing the tipped minimum when it is shared with all the workers in the establishments. To do any less is to codify inequality. I have seen in dozens of restaurants that those who work in the “back of the house” are often locked into these jobs due to immigration, language or cultural barriers. By only increasing the wages for wait staff would say that the work they do isn’t as important and they aren’t worthy of equal treatment. As a life-long progressive I simply can’t support a law that values one class over another.**

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?

**A progressive city needs a progressive tax code. I believe the recommendations were a good start, but didn’t go far enough to create a truly progressive tax code. The top**

tax rate is set to expire, and as Mayor I would keep it at the current rate because I have always said that everyone should pay his or her fair share. I strongly support the Commission's proposed increase in the standard deduction to the Federal level, which I introduced previously but was struck down by members of the Council. Also, I recognize that many families now do have to deal with significant increases in property value and while I don't agree with the Commission's suggested overall increase, I would look at the impact that has on the tax structure.

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?

There are a number of issues that drive families out of DC – such as failing schools, a failing transportation system or even the high cost of real estate but I do not believe our taxes are a reason people leave this city in any significant numbers. Rather I see that we have upper income level residents moving in at record numbers.

#### 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?

I support public financing and have proposed legislation as well as co-sponsoring with other members of the Council. I have worked closely with Public Citizen in many of my ethics and election reforms and I believe their examples in Connecticut is one in particular that is applicable and would work well in DC. In particular I believe that lobbyists and contractors that donate should be identified as they are under the Connecticut system. I am the only candidate in the race who both campaigns on

#### 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 comes in two forms – traditional affordable housing and workforce housing for those making between \$35,000 and \$65,000 annually. To remedy the problem in DC we need to think entrepreneurially and creatively. First we must treat every piece of land DC residents own as a potential for the creation of affordable housing or to leverage affordable housing. Second we have to see that when any taxpayer dollar is invested in a project we get something in return. For example I have called for workforce housing to be part of the DC United Stadium deal. Yet Vince Gray called this “laughable and absurd.” That is the limited, status quo thinking that got us in this crisis, and will never lead us out of it. Lastly we have to preserve families and seniors ability to remain in their houses by dramatically increasing the local rent supplement program and increase independent living housing

**for our aging population. Though it is outside of this area a bit, as Mayor I would also focus on returning citizens and create programs to provide housing allowances.**

#### 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?

**Our greatest concern should be the quality of education our children receive – no matter where they attend school. As Mayor I would run the school system using my experience from the DC School Board and years as social worker to create a system where every neighborhood has a quality school within walking distance. In Ward 6 I have worked with parents, teachers, school leaders and education experts to build the best and most diverse elementary schools in DC and now we're doing the same for middle schools. When that is our focus, the number of students in schools will increase. We've seen it happen in my ward and I know we can do the same for all of DC.**

#### 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?

**It is my decriminalization bill that the Council is on the verge of passing. When I first introduced the bill a year ago it was laughed at and people said it would never pass – but we are one vote away from it becoming law. I have built a coalition of advocates, citizens, religious leaders, parents, the ACLU and elected officials until we got it done. Both legalization and decriminalization are social and economic justice issues and I haven't been afraid to tackle them on the council. I support creating just such a coalition pass a city-wide referendum on legalization because I don't believe the support currently exists on the Council.**

#### 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 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?

**As the only candidate for Mayor campaigning on environmental issues, I have said publicly that I think DC should set the example for environmental leadership in the**

**country. We are fortunate to have some of the finest environmental policy experts in the world living in DC and as Mayor I would return citizen-lead participation in the process and tap into this resource to improve upon Vince Gray's dismal environmental record.**