

DC for Democracy

Candidate: Councilmember Anita Bonds, At-Large

ECONOMY AND 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. However, this growth has not benefited many people, especially low income and unemployed DC residents. How would you leverage taxpayer funds for economic development in ways that would benefit the neediest DC residents?

I recognize that while our economy is booming, we are leaving many of our longtime residents behind. I believe that residents who have endured the challenging economic times should have the opportunity to stay here during this time of prosperity. I have introduced and co-sponsored several bills to address our city's affordability challenges. Currently, I am hosting affordable housing roundtables with subject matter experts to examine solutions to the barriers to preservation and production of affordable housing units. Additionally, I either authored or co-introduced the following pieces of legislation during my tenure on the Council:

- **Senior Citizen Real Property Tax Relief Act of 2013: This law takes away the burden of property taxes for those District residents who are 70 years or older, have been domiciled in the city for 25 years or more, makes less than \$60,000 in adjusted gross income.**
- **Minimum Wage Amendment Act of 2013: This law increases the minimum wage in the District to \$11.50 in three annual steps, and requires the minimum wage to increase with the cost of living, by the rate increase to the Consumer Price Index**

- **Disposition of District Land for Affordable Housing Amendment Act of 2013:** This bill establishes affordable housing set-aside requirements when District-owned land is being disposed for the development of multi-family residential projects with 10 or more units. A 30% affordable housing set-aside is required for projects that qualify as transit-oriented development, and 20% of other land development.
- **Affordable Homeownership Preservation and Equity Accumulation Amendment Act of 2013:** Currently awaiting vote, this bill revises the resale restrictions associated with affordable for-sale units to preserve affordable units high costs areas and to maximize equity appreciation for homeowners who purchase units in distressed neighborhoods that have already low housing costs.
- **Hardship Green Grant and Rent Stabilization Act of 2014:** Currently under review, this legislation provides residential building owners with at least 20 rental units or more a hardship green grant to cover up to 95% of the costs of installing a green roof or energy efficient materials throughout the property, if owners maintain existing rents for at least 3 years.
- **Standard Deduction Adjustment Act of 2013:** This bill seeks to adjust the standard deduction to \$12,000 for single individual filers and \$6,000 for married persons filing separately, beginning in tax year 2015, for those that have a gross annual income of \$40,000 or less.

- **Tenant Bill of Rights Act of 2013:** This law requires a housing provider to provide tenants with a Tenant Bill of Rights, detailing their rights as a tenant in the District.
- **Housing Production Trust Fund Baseline Funding Act of 2014:** This bill requires that the Housing Production Trust Fund be funded at a minimum of \$100 million annually. The HPTF fund is the District’s premier tool for producing and preserving affordable housing.

2. Seattle has enacted a minimum wage of \$15.00. San Francisco will vote on a ballot initiative in November of \$15.00. The mayor of Los Angeles has proposed a minimum wage of \$13.25, and Mayor Rahm Emanuel supports a \$13.00 wage for Chicago. Should DC set its sights higher? If so, to what level and in what time frame?

As mentioned above, I co-introduced the, “Minimum Wage Amendment Act of 2013”, which increases the minimum wage in the District to \$11.50 in three annual steps, and requires the minimum wage to increase with the cost of living, by the rate increase to the Consumer Price Index. It is important that our minimum wage workers are not put in a position that traps them into poverty and that they are able to earn a wage that will aid them in caring for their family and elevate themselves to a more prosperous future. I would not be opposed to looking into the fiscal and policy ramifications of increasing the minimum wage further.

TAXATION

3. In 2014, the DC Council enacted significant changes in tax law, many of which were recommended by the Tax Revision Commission. What do you think of these changes? What further changes would you propose, if any?

I am in strong support of the following recommendations from the Tax Revision Commission including:

- 5d) Create two sets of brackets -- one for married filers and one for single filers.**
- 5e) Reduce top marginal rate from 8.95% to 8.75% in 2016 permanently**
- 5f) Raise the standard deduction to the Federal level**

Long-time District residents, as well as newcomers to the city, should be provided assistance and incentives to invest in our city. In 2013, I introduced the Standard Deduction Adjustment Act of 2013 to increase the standard deduction for those making less than \$40,000. This will provide cash assistance to our most vulnerable residents, which can be used to assist in paying for rent, groceries or any other basic necessities.

Furthermore, I am in support of the new standard deduction language included in this year's budget support act that raises the standard deduction to \$5,200 for singles and \$8,350 for married residents. Further, in addition to the tax relief granted in 2015 and 2016, the standard deduction will be further raised to \$6,100 for single residents and \$12,200 for married residents to conform to the federal level.

ELECTION REFORM

4. 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?

I do not support a runoff system of voting. Run-off elections historically have had a tendency to negatively impact candidates of color.

AFFORDABLE HOUSING

5. Are our rent control laws adequate? If not, what can be done to reduce the burden on tenants?

I do not believe that our rent control laws are adequate, and I co-sponsored the, "Rent Control Amendment Act of 2014" that amends the Rental Housing Act of 1985 to prohibit rent increases where the housing provider has failed to provide notice regarding the eligibility of elderly tenants and tenants with disabilities for the lower cap on the annual standard rent increase, or where a non-resident owner has failed to appoint and maintain a registered agent.

The bill also lowers the cap on the annual standard rent adjustment for a unit occupied by an elderly tenant or tenant with a disability to 5 percent of the current rent charged, or the Consumer Price Index (CPI-W), or the Social Security Cost of Living Adjustment (COLA), whichever is least, and for a unit occupied by any other tenant to the lesser of the CPI-W or 10 percent of the current rent charged.

Further, the bill permits a tenant to establish elderly or disability status by presenting to the housing provider a completed government registration form and the minimum information necessary to demonstrate qualification for that status; and the legislation prevents excessive vacancy rent increases in high turn-over units by correlating the amount of the allowable increase to the duration of the previous tenancy.

PUBLIC EDUCATION

6. 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?

I am not pleased that the percentage of our children in traditional public schools has declined so dramatically. As a lifetime resident I raised all of my children here in the District and each of them attending DC public schools. The top three challenges facing public education in the District of Columbia is as follows: (1) The lack of access to quality education across the city; (2) The lack of balance between public and charter schools; (3) The need to develop a more supportive teacher evaluation system. There is a recognizable disparity among schools in the District in terms of curriculum, resources, and even the quality of teachers. A balance between the role of policy, administrators, and community must be struck in order to address this challenge.

Currently, I am working on legislation to establish Department of Youth agency to consolidate services and resources available to DC youth (from birth to employment) and their guardians. If assigned to the Education Committee during my next term, I will have direct access to ensuring that necessary funding and budgetary priorities incorporate implementation of the aforementioned.

It is important that we as a Council along with parents and the general community advocate for the need for a challenging curricula enabling top student preparation and advancement in your school system. It is equally important that our children are adequately prepared, and that our teachers are sufficiently engaging, interested, exhibit high morale and have the necessary resources to effectively teach our children. Likewise, we must provide the necessary social services, and access to schools in a safe and clean environment--- for all of our students. This may mean that we have to make difficult trade-offs in order to secure funding for these initiatives. I raised all of my children in this great city, so I recognize the importance of strong support for strengthening our public education system in the city first hand.

EAST OF THE RIVER

7. With respect to development at St. Elizabeth's Hospital campus, what can the Council do to protect the interests of and maximize the benefits to those currently living east of the Anacostia River?

On August 28th, I was a panelist at the Ward 8, “Defining Affordable Housing Roundtable” where I along with Councilmember Marion Barry, representatives from the housing production industry, DC agencies, and interested citizens engaged in a roundtable discussion on housing affordability issues and opportunities at Revival Temple Full Gospel Church in Ward 8. It is important that we make sure that residents and development businesses East of the River have a seat at the economic development planning table. I have been implementing this strategy by hosting affordable housing roundtables of my own that took place during the Council Recess this summer. During these sessions my office brought together a diverse array of housing experts, realtors, and housing policy think tanks to examine ways in which we can preserve and produce more affordable housing across the city---especially in wards 7 and 8. I will continue to host these informative and effective roundtables in the future.

PLANNING

8. The Executive's zoning, planning and historic preservation functions report through the Deputy Mayor for Planning and Economic Development (DMPED). In your view, does this structure work well for the city? If not, how would you alter it?

I do believe it is time to reexamine this reporting structure and analyze what a shift in the reporting structure would look like. I would like to see a greater emphasis on community input and involvement in the zoning process. In January, I hosted a community action summit that allowed over 150 residents to share their input on a number of different issues facing the District, one panel of experts including agency executives addressed various concerns with the Office on Zoning and I think that this method is very beneficial in ensuring that there is an inclusive process for zoning and planning initiatives.