

DC for Democracy

Questionnaire

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 would prioritize and advocate for greater affordable housing and job opportunities in our city. With respect to affordable housing, the government should fully fund the Housing Production Trust Fund, investing resources in mix-used developments; improve oversight of funding to ensure that residents are truly being served by affordable housing investments; and work closely with proven third-party and nonprofit partners to enhance affordable housing alternatives across the city.

With regard to job opportunities, government and business must work together closely to ensure job training aligns with future opportunities; our city should create a strong community college that furnishes residents with an opportunity to develop skills and transition careers; and government should spur job growth, by streamlining processes and providing incentives for small businesses and entrepreneurs.

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?

DC should consider a higher minimum wage in the future. Under the current law, the minimum wage is set to hit \$11.50 by 2016, or about \$23,000 per year, with adjustments for inflation thereafter. When enacted, it was the highest minimum wage in the country. Given cost of living in DC, however, daily life remains a struggle for minimum wage earners. DC should reevaluate the minimum wage in the future.

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 generally support the revisions to the tax law, as they provided tax relief to DC residents and businesses. In particular, I support a lower individual income tax rate of 7 percent for those earning \$40,000 to \$60,000 and a reduction in the business franchise tax from 9.975 percent to 9.4 percent. In the future, I would support further tax reductions, whenever financially feasible, that provide additional relief to residents.

ELECTION REFORM

4. Do you think that public financing of elections is an effective way to reduce the influence of large contributors on legislation? If yes, what model do you favor? If not, what alternative do you recommend?

In theory, public financing of elections seems like a very appealing idea to reduce the influence of special interests. In practice, however, these public financing models are difficult to implement and have serious, negative (though perhaps unintended) consequences of their own. This is especially true in light of Supreme Court precedent permitting the use of third-party expenditures in elections.

I think our most important underlying principle should be transparency, rather than restriction. We must focus our efforts on bringing campaign contributions and expenditures into the light of day, so we as a citizenry can be fully aware of and weigh the influences in our system. We waste much in the way of restricting that should be spent revealing. As Justice Brandeis once said, sunlight is the best of disinfectants.

5. 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 would seriously consider a runoff system that elects DC candidates with a majority of votes. It has the potential to avoid some political gamesmanship and free voters to voice their true choices. We would need to ensure such a system is implemented properly, if adopted.

AFFORDABLE HOUSING

6. How do you propose we better use development projects on public land for affordable housing, particularly housing for low-income residents?

In development projects on public land, I propose that we set aside 20 to 30 percent of units in mixed-used developments for low-income residents

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

I do not see rent control laws as a great solution. The government can more effectively reduce the burden on tenants through zoning laws, economic stimulus, and other governmental services that reduce costs.

PUBLIC 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?

It is a striking statistic worth examination. Charter schools are evidently here to stay, and a number of them do provide a fantastic education for children. There is a natural tension between traditional public schools and charter schools, because they are competing for students. This is not necessarily a bad thing.

We do face problems, however, when the playing field between these two systems is not even. We must ensure a fair and transparent relationship exists between charter schools and traditional public schools, including funding per student and admission/expulsion policies, so that students in fact benefit from greater school choice and higher quality of education.

EAST OF THE RIVER

9. 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?

The Council can work closely with residents to ensure their voices are heard and interests are considered. The Council can engage businesses and nonprofits to take a stronger interest in the area. Based on that community dialogue and feedback, the Council can encourage development that serves the best interests of the local community.

PLANNING

10. 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 not necessarily take issue with this structure. However, I do believe these functions could be substantially improved through greater government transparency, accountability, and community outreach.