

Courtney R. Snowden
Candidate, DC Council At-Large
September 12, 2014

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 live in Ward 7 in the Deanwood Community, where like most neighborhoods east of the river economic development lags behind significantly compared to other areas in the city. In my view, government has a responsibility to leverage taxpayer funds to help development happen where it cannot happen organically.

Anytime we consider leveraging taxpayer funds, it is critical that we ensure that taxpayers across the city see a clear return on investment. Similarly, these investments should help to spur additional development, particularly in places that are underdeveloped.

When developers seek tax incentives to develop in DC, they commit to a host of promises – hiring DC residents, establishing affordable housing units, et cetera, but they do not always follow through on those commitments – in particular harming the most vulnerable of our city's residents.

As a councilmember, I will work every day to hold developer's feet to the fire to ensure that they make good on their commitments to the city and our residents. It is central that we enforce current laws, and when developers do not meet these commitments we need real tools to hold them accountable.

Furthermore, our tax dollars do not support enough minority and women-owned businesses. These are the very businesses that would help to spur growth and development in economically depressed neighborhoods. In order to tackle the severe underemployment and unemployment in communities where unemployment continues to be a problem, city government must create incentives to spur growth and investment through the development of minority-owned business in these communities.

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?

I support an increase to the minimum wage to at least \$13.00, and as a councilmember, I will work with key stakeholders - labor, business, advocates, and residents to ensure there is a clear path forward.

As we consider how to raise the minimum wage, we must figure out how to relieve burdens on business – particularly small businesses that work on very thin margins. Any discussion of an increase in the minimum wage must be a part of a comprehensive conversation about

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how to ensure that business can continue to do what it does best – create jobs for District residents.

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 excited that the Council was able to work through a broad coalition of unusual stakeholders to pass critically important tax cuts for DC residents, but of course, as with all complex policy measures, the final package was not perfect.

As a member of the Council, I would revisit the gym tax. Nothing is more important than the health and wellness of our residents, and it is incredibly important that we do not create new burdens for DC residents – particularly low-income residents – to take care of their health.

Additionally, I would fight to ensure that the *Senior Citizen Real Property Tax Relief Act of 2013* was implemented as originally passed – to exempt long-standing residents over the age of 70 from paying property taxes on their homes. Unfortunately, the budget bill replaced the automatic tax exemption with a tax deferral – putting an undue burden on the heirs of seniors who benefit from the initiative. This will ensure that residents of our city who have lived, worked, and raised a family here can stay in their homes. For many families, homeownership creates wealth, particularly in communities of color. The District should have a tax structure that rewards the hard work of our city's residents and sustains generations of Washingtonians.

ELECTION REFORM

4. 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 think public financing is an incredibly useful tool for making elected office more accessible to District residents who often become unmotivated to serve in this way because raising large amounts of money is very difficult, time consuming, and takes precious time and attention away from the things most of us would rather be doing – talking to voters and identifying solutions for the problems that have haunted our city for far too long.

I support “clean elections,” and I would vote to support a public financing for candidates that meet a certain threshold like in the state of Connecticut.

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?

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I do not at this time. Having reviewed arguments from every side of the debate on runoff systems, I have concerns about the impact of runoff voting systems on minority candidates. I would want to ensure that run-off voting does *not* make it more difficult for candidates of color to win elections, before I would feel comfortable supporting such measures.

However, I believe that we have a moral imperative to increase voter participation in municipal elections in the District. I would support efforts to expand the ways in which voters can exercise their civic responsibility. I would strongly support voting by mail, increasing numbers of early neighborhood voting locations, in addition to the traditional Election Day voting.

AFFORDABLE HOUSING

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

Our rent control laws are inadequate and antiquated. Under existing law, rental units built after 1975 are not subject to rent control restrictions. Newer/new buildings can raise rents more often, and to any amount they choose. It is imperative that we make rent control more broadly available. More importantly, to address the issue of the overall cost of living in the District, city government must be an incubator for fostering the education and training necessary to move our city's residents in the middle class.

Moreover, we should provide incentives for public safety officials and teachers who work in the District to live in the District. The rising housing costs have pushed police and firefighters to other areas in the region. These are the individuals who help make our communities stronger, and we should incent them living in the District.

Likewise, the mayor and the Council should work together to provide incentives for small businesses, startups, high-tech companies, and manufacturers to find a home in our city to provide not just the jobs of today, but to ensure the District is leading in preparing our city's residents for the jobs of tomorrow. In my view, the answer to the rising cost of housing in the city starts with a focus on jobs.

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?

DCPS is moving in the right direction. This is the first time since the Nixon Administration that DCPS has experienced an increase in enrollment – for two consecutive years. So, clearly some good things are happening in DCPS, and we should applaud good news when we can.

I'm a parent to a five-year-old, who I very much want to attend public schools. Unfortunately, though, I live in a community where we have a high population of school-

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aged children, but few high-quality public or charter school options. It is imperative that we quicken the pace of transformation in DC Schools to ensure that every child has access to a high-quality public school in their neighborhood.

I believe we need to identify more resources for blended learning models and extended learning – particularly in the lowest performing schools. Similarly, I support making schools community centers where the city provides some wrap around solutions to lift low-income neighborhoods. This means we must look at a model where we keep schools open longer for academic and recreational purposes, create school-based health centers, making them available for community needs, and increasing access to mental health professionals.

Importantly, we must provide increased resources to expand extracurricular and academic opportunities beyond the classroom including travel abroad, more music and art offerings, and more diverse athletic programs. These types of opportunities broaden the worldview of DC students and offer a more comprehensive academic experience that parallels the nation's most-high performing K-12 academic institutions. Some students will not pursue post-secondary study in a four-year college or university; and for those students we should make available robust opportunities for vocational training in high school and in the District community college.

As a councilmember, I will partner with the deputy mayor on education and the chancellor in an effort to improve the lowest performing schools and to provide the adequate amount of oversight not politically motivated, but grounded in empowering communities.

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?

Number 1,2, and 3 is to listen to the residents in Ward 8. In my view, the most critical piece is ensuring that development occurs in a way that supports East of the River with a focus on empowering the residents who live there. Too often, development in parts of our city happens to DC residents, and not with DC residents. My job on the Council will be to always be a voice for all of our city's residents to ensure that development is happening with us and improving our quality of life.

As a councilmember, I will fight for policies that will not lead to the displacement of current residents east of the river, and I will fight to ensure that neighborhoods are mixed income to diminish the overwhelming concentrations of impoverished District residents east of the river. In addition to development, I will fight to ensure that Wards 7 and 8 residents receive priority in hiring for new development projects. Again, development should happen with us – particularly east of the river where development can really change the community in a way that allows for all to prosper by creating jobs in the neighborhood, new retail, and a better environment in which to raise our children.

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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?

Yes. I believe that we have a balanced system of independent review agencies that represent the interests of citizens and a streamlined organization within the Administration to ensure that the DMPED can move the executive's vision for planning and economic development. However, I firmly believe that the DC Council has conducted incredibly poor oversight generally. As a member of the Council, I will lead the effort to bring excellent oversight that keeps the executive and government agencies accountable.