

DEMOCRATIC NOMINEE, WARD 6 CANDIDATE QUESTIONNAIRE

Charles Allen -- Ward 6

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ECONOMY & 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 lower income and unemployed DC residents. How would you leverage taxpayer funds for economic development in ways that would benefit the neediest DC residents?

I believe that public funds to spur economic development can be a valuable tool to help neighborhoods and residents leverage the most out of the public investment. Each decision should be made on the merits of the proposal – including, but not limited to, how an investment creates or preserves affordable housing and at what levels, how an investment creates new public spaces or amenities, how an investment strengthens neighborhood public transit connections, and how an investment creates local jobs and locally-owned businesses. Any public investment in economic development should be subject to a robust public discussion.

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

The District's increased minimum wage was a great step forward for DC residents and workers. The reality is that a family cannot survive on the minimum wage. I strongly support the phased in approach and would work with businesses and advocates to review the impact and explore how the city continues to support increasing wages. I do support an increase in the tipped minimum wage. In the same way we built a regional coalition to successfully increase the minimum wage in the District and neighboring jurisdictions, I would like to see a similar effort for tipped employees. In addition, I am very concerned about allegations of wage theft and the lack of a strong and accountable enforcement body in the District government. I believe these reforms should go hand-in-hand to have the greatest effect and benefit for workers.

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?

The Tax Revision Commission has put forward a comprehensive set of proposals and I commend the hard work, and negotiation, of that group. There are several elements included that continue to correct a regressive tax system – including one proposal I have been championing for the last several years, a change to the Standard Deduction to allow working families to keep more of their paycheck at home. In addition, the multiple tiers created for individual income tax create a more progressive structure.

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 no, what alternative would you recommend?

Yes, I strongly support public financing of campaigns, in

particular the form found in New York City. But I also believe that the District shouldn't simply study proposals, but should move to implement and fund appropriately. I am concerned by one funding proposal that would take 1% of all District construction contracts to fund public financing of elections. A mechanism like that will only increase costs for development projects and as a city, we should place a high priority on creating a strong funding commitment within the District budget.

Until public financing is approved, I believe the District should prohibit corporate contributions. I not only support such legislation, but I am the only candidate in the Ward 6 Council race who has pledged to run a campaign without corporate contributions. I believe very strongly that if our elected leaders are to repair the public trust that has been broken over the last several years, then candidates and elected officials should hold themselves to a higher standard and ensure voters have 100% accountability and transparency for every dollar put into our elections.

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 believe instant runoff voting can be a successful way to capture voters' intent. I believe an appropriate method to introduce this may be with non-partisan elections such as Advisory Neighborhood Commission and Board of Education.

HOUSING

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

Affordable housing is a priority of my campaign and one reason compelling me to run for Council. Our city is creating affordable housing, but is not doing so in a way that helps all residents, in

particular working families. Too often, the city's policies lead to the creation of affordable housing in the form of studios and one-bedroom units. That's important for a segment of our city's population, but we are losing affordable housing for families. I will put a renewed focus on the creation and preservation of family-based affordable housing. To ensure we have an ongoing pipeline of housing creation, I will work to have dedicated funding for the Housing Production Trust Fund become a part of the city's annual budget commitment; not something that is at the whim of the housing market through the deed and recordation tax. To ensure the development of housing moves forward, the HPTF needs certainty and stable funding. In addition, I would like to work with housing advocates to revisit our Inclusionary Zoning policies – which are successful for a portion of affordability – but relies on a market-based approach that doesn't build the continuum of affordable housing our city needs. Finally, I support legislation to require 30% set-asides for affordable housing of public land developed privately.

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

The District needs a strong rental market to ensure the city remains an affordable place to live. I will work to strengthen the city's rent control laws and keep these important rental units a part of the housing marketplace. They are critical to ensuring affordability in our city. I will also look to improve the city's TOPA program that helps long-time residents and renters continue to call their apartment home. In Ward 6, several neighborhoods are going through ownership changes of residential buildings and navigating the city's TOPA process can be difficult and daunting. I have successfully worked with several resident councils as their buildings went through these transitions and know where the process can be strengthened to protect residents.

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?

This trend is partly due to the result of diminished parent confidence in their education choices and achievement gap. However, in Ward 6, school enrollment is increasing and outcomes are improving. How we continue this growth in Ward 6, and city-wide, relies on the resolve and urgency I have made a key part of my campaign.

In recent months, the Council took action to provide additional funds to students at risk of academic failure. More often than not, these are the very students impacted by the significant achievement gaps witnessed in our city. In addition, the Mayor's office released an DC Education Adequacy Study that also spoke to the need to provide additional resources for at risk students and possible changes to the per-pupil-funding-formula. I believe that this type of investment in our school system is critical to meeting the gaps that exist.

However, funding alone is not the answer. I believe DCPS should provide greater principal and community autonomy. School communities know best – often better than the central office – what their students, educators, and families need and how best to address those challenges.

Finally, DCPS currently does not create a unified vision for the pathway of a student – from pre-K, through elementary, into middle school, and culminating with high school. As a result, academic tracks start and end abruptly, and there is no unified vision through the feeder pattern to help a student succeed. This hurts our at-risk students in particular because there is a lack of academic continuity and stability provided.

These combined approaches will allow us to reverse the trend noted in the question and give parents greater confidence in the DCPS traditional system.

PLANNING

9. 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 would like to work with the new Mayor to increase the leadership and authority of the Office of Planning. There are instances where it is in the city's best interest to have the Office of Planning separate from and independent of the economic development pressures.