

DC For Democracy Questionnaire
Response by Muriel Bowser, Democratic Nominee for Mayor

ECONOMY AND JOBS

- 1. According to the American Communities Survey (US Census), DC's poverty rate has increased fairly steadily from about 16% in 2007 to about 19% today, which is higher than all but five US states. How would you bring this rate down? What targets would you set, if any?**

In many ways, poverty is barometer of how well a government is comprehensively serving all of its residents. Poverty is a function of myriad variables. We need policies that promote quality schools for all eight wards. We need an affordable housing policy that funds the production of new housing while preserving the units we already have. Combatting poverty also means targeted job training, and the promotion of a diversified and stable economy that offers a pathway to the middle class. As Mayor, I am committed to identifying greater economic opportunities for all so we can decrease poverty in DC.

- 2. Seattle has enacted a minimum wage of \$15.00. San Francisco will vote on a ballot initiative in November to enact a minimum wage of \$15.00. 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 than the law enacted last year? If so, to what level and in what time frame?**

DC has the highest housing costs in the country. As we continue to grow it will be more expensive to live here. I was proud to increase the minimum wage to \$11.50, but there is much more to do to ensure that all residents are able to secure a future and a pathway to the middle class. I am steadfast in my belief that access to the middle class is an American right and that the government has a duty to ensure a fair and equal pathway to upward mobility. As Mayor, among my top priorities to reach that goal includes:

- Fostering a diversified economy to allow small businesses to grow and thrive, creating good paying, quality jobs right here in DC.*
- As mayor I will reshape the way we spend \$100 million in job training funds by directing them to programs that work, like a public works academy that puts DC residents in DC government jobs.*
- Producing affordable housing is critical. I proposed a bill to spend \$100 million each year. Preserving affordable housing is also critical. That's why I called for an analysis of the costs to preserve 6,500 units of public housing.*

Read more about my priorities here: <http://murielformayor.com/press/priorities-for-district/>

TAXATION

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

I was proud to support many of these recommendations approved by the Council this past summer, and I believe that the District's unique position necessitated them. For instance, the primary driver of our economy relies on the spending of the federal government—which has been reduced in recent years. Moreover, many commuters, business, and property owners don't pay taxes here. Thus, it is incumbent upon city leaders to continually examine ways that not only manage this risk but also use our tax policy to attract new businesses, new residents, and grow our economy and our middle class while providing a robust safety net.

I voted for the FY15 budget, which included many of the recommendations of the DC Tax Revision Commission, with the understanding that the government is facing a \$181 million gap in projected revenues. Without knowing if this gap will be filled by February 2015, it would be pre-mature to change course on the current plan. I am committed to adding predictability to our tax structure, not the reverse.

ELECTION REFORM

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

Voter participation is best increased by government engagement, on government time, in DC residents' neighborhoods and homes and when it is convenient for them. And we must do so in a meaningful way. DC residents must have a seat at the table when their government makes big decisions. As Mayor, I am committed to including all residents, whether they have been here for five minutes or five generations. Additionally, DC residents must believe that their government is open and ethical. As Mayor, I plan to further my Council record on ethics reforms reform and open meetings laws.

5. The electoral system in DC allows candidates to be elected to office with a plurality, rather than a majority, of votes. Do you support any type of runoff system? If yes, what mechanism do you favor? If not, why not?

My overriding principle is to promote an election system that promotes legitimacy. Therefore, I am open to a discussion about a run-off mechanism that is the result of very careful research, case studies, and based on best practices. As part of the discussion, we should examine the election schedule in order to maximize voter participation and study how our early and absentee voting can be improved.

AFFORDABLE HOUSING

6. Large numbers of properties financed under the Low Income Housing Tax Credit Program have exceeded their 15 year mandate to remain affordable.

What is your plan to ensure that these properties, and more nearing the sunset, remain affordable?

Data from the National Low Income Housing Coalition shows that more than 123 buildings with over 17,000 units are in danger of being lost in the next ten years. We cannot let that happen. There are two approaches to curbing this trend. The first is to extend Tenant Opportunity to Purchase Rights to residents of these buildings so that as soon as the 15-year mandate expires, residents have a chance to purchase the property and maintain its affordability. The second approach is to provide residents of these buildings with the financial backing of the District so that the buildings can stay affordable and well maintained.

7. More than 60% of DC residents rent their homes. Given the ever-increasing demand for, and ever-decreasing stock of affordable units, are our rent control laws adequate? If not, what would you change?

The District's rent control regime is established by the Rental Housing Act of 1985; approximately 79,000 housing units are subject to the law, accounting for 66% of the rental housing stock in the District. Rent control is not perfect but it does work for tens of thousands of renters in the District of Columbia. One particular problem involves the abuse of the hardship petition process, which I am proud to have curtailed. The solution will protect close to 80,000 tenants from unexpected rent increases. The Rent Control Hardship Petition Emergency Amendment Act of 2014 limits to 5% the conditional rent increase that landlords may charge while an application for a permanent rent increase is pending. Current law sets no limit. In one particularly egregious example, a landlord increased rents by 34%—a significant financial burden, especially for senior citizens, which can lead to tenant displacement and litigation. Making this law permanent is a critical step to preserving rent control units.

PUBLIC EDUCATION

8. The percentage of children in traditional public schools has declined dramatically, 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 address this trend?

Just this year we've seen enrollment in both traditional and charter public schools – a good sign. Increasing student enrollment in DCPS is a function of convincing parents that our public schools offer a safe, high-quality education equal to that provided at any private, parochial, or charter school. I will work to expand quality early childhood education programs to reach more students at a younger age across the District to ensure that all children are prepared to succeed in K-12 education and beyond. That means accelerating the pace of school reform by discontinuing ineffective programs and policies and replicating those that have demonstrated strong outcomes. Middle schools are a particularly challenging area. I will also focus my efforts to completely transform the District's middle schools by

2020, a process that will include the identification of those schools that need change the fastest, the renovation and/or construction of new buildings, and the evaluation and innovation of the curricular and extra-curricular offerings at each of the District's 13 stand-alone middle schools. Some schools will require more attention than others. That is why I will create a strategy to provide additional resources to chronically underperforming schools in all eight wards, with a specific focus on the 25 lowest performing schools in the District. With additional concentrated resources, evidence-based interventions, and the creative efforts of the Mayor's office and education leaders, these schools can and will be turned around to better prepare students for long-term educational success.

9. What changes, if any, would you propose to the system of mayoral control of DC's public schools? Is there a need for greater accountability in our schools?

We must accelerate the pace of school reform with a renewed focus on accountability and results. We must ensure strong, innovative, and mission-driven leadership in our schools. We must also increase coordination between DCPS and charter schools, target schools on the brink of greatness, and expand early childhood and science, technology, engineering, and math programs.

EAST OF THE RIVER

10. With respect to development at the St. Elizabeth's Hospital campus, what would you do to protect the interests and maximize the benefits to those living east of the Anacostia River? How would you ensure that Anacostia's longtime residents can continue to afford to remain in this redeveloped community?

The DC Sustainability plan projects that 250,000 new residents will arrive over next 20 years. Already we are home to some of the highest housing costs in country, according to the Bureau of Labor Statistics. The question of making the city's future accessible to all, new and old, means implementation of robust affordable housing policies; it means a tax policy that protects seniors; and an economic development plan that delivers jobs. As Mayor, I am committed to funding the Housing Production Trust Fund with at least \$100 million per year. I will support tax breaks for longtime residents whose neighborhoods are becoming increasingly expensive. And I will use the largesse of the District's contracting dollars to deliver jobs to District residents. The most critical component to ensuring that all residents are treated fairly and can participate in our prosperity is simple: a mayor who understands the needs of her residents and is committed to having them at the table at every turn.

PLANNING

11. With a number of development projects (e.g. McMillan Park) generating controversy around the city, how would you direct DC agencies to revise the

way the city makes decisions about public investments, and, more broadly, how and where to undertake these projects?

The District is in the midst of several large-scale redevelopment projects, the results of which will forever change the landscape of our city. These projects are critical because they represent an opportunity to generate tax revenues that can be used for safety net programs, for parks, for schools, and other neighborhood amenities. They are also critical drivers of affordable housing, and of the creation of restaurants, parks, and retail options that may not organically develop without the government's participation. There are many good reasons why a vigorous economic development strategy is important. But, the only critical component of that strategy is that the community adjacent to a proposed development participates from day one. The redevelopment of Walter Reed in Ward 4 is a great example of a community-driven project that will work for neighbors and for the District of Columbia. Like with Walter Reed, I am committed to bringing the community together, ensuring that community input is incorporated in the process and that the community is informed and engaged throughout the development of the project. This is how you create accountability around affordable housing, transportation, planning and other community needs.

ENVIRONMENT & ENERGY

12. According to the District Department of the Environment, DC today gets 12% of its energy from renewable sources, with a goal of reaching 50% by 2032. What goals and plans, if any, do you have to increase DC's use of renewable energy?

I was proud to co-introduce legislation to reduce the District's reliance on non-renewable sources because I believe that healthier and greener cities dramatically improve quality of life for residents, save city and rate-payers' money, and increase the city's competitiveness and ability to attract new residents, businesses, and tourism. The District of Columbia should be at the forefront of these efforts, both regionally and nationally, and, as Mayor, I am committed to making that happen. As Mayor, I will expand the District's tree canopy, include greening initiatives in all economic development proposals, and work to make solar power more accessible and affordable to all DC residents.