



2015 Ward 8 Special Election Questionnaire

1. PUBLIC FINANCING

A number of jurisdictions provide public financing to political campaigns who meet certain requirements. The campaign must receive small donations (as low as \$5 per person) from a specified minimum number of individuals. In addition, candidates must agree to certain conditions (for example, limits on how much their campaign may spend, limits on how much any individual may donate, and a ban on contributions from corporations and political action committees).

As a Councilmember would you vote to establish such a system in DC? Why or why not?

With new residents settling in the District, unfamiliar ideas with catchy phrases and seemingly good intentions are coming into play. Before I would vote to establish such a system, I must carefully examine the pros and cons, hold hearings and attend small neighborhood meetings to determine exactly how my constituents want to proceed. With public financing to political campaigns, candidates with meager funds are able to participate in the process. But on the other hand, when you have a large number of candidates such as the 16 we have in the Ward 8 special election, taxpayers dollars would be used to finance a majority of these campaigns. Would this become another tax burden on District residents? Since there can only be one winner, the majority of the funds will go to losers. More time is needed to reflect on this issue.

2. BANNING PAY TO PLAY

In the current Council period, Chairman Mendelson has introduced the *Contractor Pay-to-Play Elimination Amendment Act of 2015*. Instead of using the conventional approach of banning contractors from donating to campaigns, the bill would ban donors from receiving government contracts.

2a) As a Councilmember, will you vote in favor of this legislation?

Yes, I would definitely vote in favor of this legislation. In fact, it amazed me in this special election, the original councilmember that introduced legislation to ensure “ethical” behavior among councilmembers, the mayor, other elected officials and city administrators is “allegedly” currently involved in such “pay-to-play” schemes in her new role as DC Mayor.

At least three developers contacted my campaign because of “alleged” harassment by our current mayor to donate to the candidates of her choice. Not only were they coerced into these donations, each was told that if they did not contribute, she would remember their rebellion after the election. In other words, pay now and pay again and again. Why has this been a common practice in DC where a sitting mayor calls contractors demanding that they donate to a political campaign? I thought about turning this information over to the DC Attorney General’s Office. I am still undecided. This alleged unethical behavior represents the fact that not only are companies seeking to “pay-to-play” but some elected officials and administrators demand it to do business in DC. From what we have been able to ascertain there may be at least three pay-to-play campaign schemes underway with at least three of the female candidates. The mainstream media has also contributed to this phenomena by always declaring the top candidates based on well-financed campaigns, rather than the substance or good organization



2015 Ward 8 Special Election Questionnaire

of the political campaigns. The battle continues on how we get the public to realize that lots of small donations from the people versus big bucks from controlling interests is the best route to take. Nevertheless, pay-to-play must be stopped.

2b) What have you done in the past to limit the influence of monied interests in DC government?

I am a fourth generation native Washingtonian who grew up in Ward 8. I attended DC public schools and graduated from Ballou Senior High School. Unlike some of my opponents, I am the embodiment of what the heart of Ward 8 represents – decent and hardworking Black people caught in the middle of the chaos that has existed for decades. Over the years, Ward 8 became a haven for low income housing where rents were subsidized by the local and federal government. This was and still is a huge “monied” interest in Ward 8. Tens of thousands of Ward 8 residents became dependent on government subsidized housing which is now being threatened due to cuts in housing benefits. Developers and investment owners understand there is more money available from urban professionals seeking a decent, safe and affordable place to live. The biggest question facing “monied” interests is how to attract urban professionals to crime ridden neighborhoods.

*I have served for 24 years as an advisory neighborhood commissioner. In that elected position, I have a proven record of leadership, integrity and commitment to the residents of Ward 8. My focus has always been what was best for my constituents. I held meetings and went door-to-door to obtain feedback on certain issues. The one thing that remains consistent is the need for a sound **community benefits agreement** that must be implemented, unaltered and monitored as designed. In the last administration, when “monied” interests bulldozed a project in Ward 8 only a few people benefited from the experience. With a sound and well-planned community benefits agreement, neighborhoods will reap the benefit of the projects for decades. Thus it becomes a win for all.*

3. STATEHOOD

When it comes to statehood, politicians and public officials are often long on rhetoric and nearly absent when it comes to doing the work required.

What is the most significant action you have taken to promote the cause of statehood, and how do you plan to advance the cause as Councilmember?

My mother, Norma Perry, a well-respected political operative, introduced me to the statehood issue as a young boy. As a man, one who has been in politics for more than 30 years, I have been relentless in promoting the realization of DC statehood every day of my life. I have been elected several times to represent the District as the DC Democratic Committee’s Ward 8 Committeeman with responsibilities to promote DC statehood to thousands of delegates from around the country. I have participated in many parades and peaceful demonstrations to promote statehood. I have signed petitions when called upon to stop congressional intervention on budget autonomy. I have testified and submitted written numerous times about how many malicious congressional acts have affected DC residents. I have participated in monthly letter



2015 Ward 8 Special Election Questionnaire

drops to congressional and senate representatives about the need for DC statehood and a host of other issues where Americans demand action.

4. HOUSING

Mayor Bowser has committed to adding \$100 million to the Housing Production Trust Fund in this year's budget.

4a) Do you stand with the Mayor in her commitment?

I hope the mayor lives up to her agreement. It is my understanding the purpose of the funding is to provide financial assistance to a variety of affordable housing proposals and opportunities across the District. If elected, I will monitor activity of the Housing Production Trust Fund to ensure it is being used for the purpose intended.

4b) Are there any circumstances under which you would vote for a budget that does *not* include the additional \$100 million? If so, please be specific.

If elected I would be able to review the fine details on the initiative to determine whether there are circumstances under which I would not agree. I do believe though, the Housing Production Trust Fund also should include provisions for families that do not fall within the guidelines for subsidized housing that are being displaced due to large rental increases. Many of these hard working families are becoming homeless because they cannot afford to pay the high rent which continues to increase every year.

5. POLICE

The DCFerguson movement was formed to oppose invasive police tactics, particularly jumpouts, targeted to communities of color. DCFerguson demands that the DC Council pass a resolution taking a stand against the use of jumpout squads. See the DCFerguson petition for details: <https://www.change.org/p/councilmember-phil-mendelson-take-a-stand-against-jump-out-squads-in-washington-d-c>

5a) Have you signed the petition linked above? If not, please explain.

About two months ago, I signed the petition to oppose invasive police tactics, particularly jumpouts, targeting predominantly Black communities. Years ago, unlike my opponents, I participated in community-based policing where we transformed a high crime area into a decent neighborhood. This was a more effective tool as compared to "All Hands on Deck" or jumpout schemes that target Black communities and our males in particular. Why? Because we gained the trust of people in the neighborhood which helped us to identify people involved in illegal activities. Once we were able to contact their families to target on key issues, identify the problems, assist in obtaining city services, the majority of the crime activity ceased. Decades

later, the result is a longstanding crime-free community and a safe haven for the residents to live and play where new schools, true affordable apartments and townhouses are being built.

5b) Would you support the Council holding a public roundtable on jumpouts?



2015 Ward 8 Special Election Questionnaire

In my opinion, there should have been public roundtables on “All Hands On Deck” and jumpouts years ago. Studies have shown that these police tactics focus, primarily, on Black communities under the auspice of high-crime areas. As an example, Black residents have served time for possession of small amounts of marijuana which caused individuals to lose their jobs and in many cases families lost their housing due to zero tolerance clauses in leasing contracts. This racially biased policing must stop. Over the years, we have thousands of District residents who have and are serving time for resisting these tactics. One of the ways to bring attention to this situation is to hold public roundtables in strategic areas in Ward 8 and other targeted communities throughout the District. I speak from the experience of actively participating in prison ministry for over 30 years in the DC Jail as well as jails and prisons in the Mid-Atlantic region. I listen, document and articulate on their behalf. Currently, I also serve as The Vice President of 7D’s MPD’s Citizens Advisory Council, that meets with the police chief to bring to the police department community issues and concerns.

6. JOBS

What have you done specifically to help create good jobs with good benefits for Ward 8 residents? If elected, will you introduce/co-sponsor legislation such as [San Francisco’s “Retail Workers Bill of Rights”](#) to give workers greater control over their schedules and promote worker education and training?

I have been an entrepreneur for over 30 years. Currently, I serve on the Taxicab Commission which oversees the industry, holding monthly meetings to hear drivers, owners and riders concerns. I have crafted legislation to protect the rights of the taxicab drivers while understanding the role of the owners. Once elected, I plan to look closely into unregulated private transportation programs that exist to bring it into more compliance with the public transportation industry. I presented legislation that was less punitive on the taxicab industry.

In the last decade, I met with developers to ensure that Ward 8 residents were able to work on building projects such as Giant, IHOP, Unity Health, and St. Elizabeth’s east and west campus. As a result, dozens of Ward 8 residents were hired. But these were temporary job opportunities.

I have also testified against non-discriminatory hiring practices. Many Black Ward 8 residents have experienced being shut out of jobs traditionally held by Blacks due to the increase of the immigrant population. One of the first things that must occur is a policy that requires equal

opportunities to hiring that do not discriminate by language, which has become a tactic to eliminate giving jobs to Black people. Nationally, this matter has been brought to the attention of several congressional leaders who sit on the Workforce Development Committee and Education. I, along with other members of People Demanding Action (PDA), will submit requests to Congress to hold hearings about this discriminatory practice.

7. INCOME INEQUALITY

While income inequality is far more than just a local issue, Washington has been ranked fourth highest among major cities in the country in the size of the income gap between upper and lower income residents.



2015 Ward 8 Special Election Questionnaire

Do you think this broad income disparity is an issue the Council can and should address? If so, why, and what specific proposals/steps do you think should be considered? If not, why?

According to Census data, there are more millionaires and high income families moving into the District than ever before residing in downtown, southwest, Capitol Hill, Columbia Heights and upper northwest neighborhoods. I personally don't think the Council will and should do anything to address this. This type of residency brings lucrative businesses and new revenue streams to the District. When you get boutiques from Hollywood's Rodeo Drive establishing outlets in DC, that's a positive, not a negative. Abandoned properties, downtown strip clubs or whole-in-the-wall businesses are being replaced by stores known to the rich and famous. This is good for the DC economy.

However, there are other income disparity issues at another level that can be addressed starting with discriminatory employment practices by gender and race. It has become an accepted and common practice that Blacks are giving less wages with the same education and experience as their White counterparts. The more well-known income inequality issue is that of equal pay for women who perform the same tasks as men but receive less income. Being raised in a family of six women, after the passing of my father, I was the only male. I have testified, demonstrated, protested, petitioned and lobbied members of Congress to pass the ERA bill and all other corresponding measures to ensure women's equal pay rights. Last month, I hand-delivered letters to 40 members of Congress about this issue.

There is another area that the Council can and should look into immediately to assist District workers, who love in Ward 8. The Council should force DCPS to honor its union bargaining agreements to give pay raises according to the contracts. There are hundreds of bus drivers and attendants, who provide services for handicap and special needs students who are still

waiting for pay raises over a year ago. Honor this agreement. Give the workers their pay retroactively. Many of these workers were former TANF recipients or are recipients on government subsidized programs based on income. When their incomes increase, the government subsidizes less. This should be a no-brainer.

8. DISPLACEMENT

Sanford Capital is seeking permission to demolish properties by the Congress Heights Metro and replace them with luxury apartments. The tenants have organized the Alabama Avenue/ 13th Street Tenants Coalition to buy the properties and form a housing cooperative.

What have you done to date to help the tenants, and how will you help them if elected Councilmember?

As chairman of the advisory neighborhood commission for this area ANC8E, we spoke with residents in the area, including the few remaining families encouraged by outside groups to remain on the property rather than allow construction to move forward. (Please see the attached document that shows a negotiated community benefits agreement with the developer and community leaders.)I have reviewed contracts where developers allowed the original



2015 Ward 8 Special Election Questionnaire

tenants to return at the rate they left. While development was taking place, the management company paid the difference of the increased rent as well as assist with placement of the families. This is a possibility that should be discussed. In some other situations, tenants and those who squatted in the dwellings with no records of being original tenants, were paid substantial amounts to relocate. Regardless, tenants must be willing to negotiate for the betterment of the community.

Our ANC does not want this (almost) vacant property to end up like similar development in northeast and southeast where a few residents remained in housing project previously occupied by almost hundreds of families. New developments were stalled for years in court hearings organized by housing advocates. The scheme worked until Latino workers were killed on the premises while cleaning the area. Now all the buildings at both locations have been raised to the ground, developers pulled out of the project losing millions of dollars with acres of undeveloped land remaining. In the end, the housing advocates returned to their nice, cozy neighborhoods while the Black community suffered huge losses.

Please note my answers will be posted on my website: www.muhammad4ward8.org