

DC4D Questions

1. Bills now before the DC Council are intended to reduce the influence of big money donors through several approaches:

- banning corporate campaign contributions,
- keeping donors who make very large contributions from getting government contracts and special tax breaks, and
- providing for public financing of political campaigns through a system that matches small donations, similar to what it used in New York City.

Where do you stand on each of these approaches?

RW – I believe that the current fundraising system undermines democracy. Period. I believe that it has corrupted national and local politics. Money makes campaigns less about the best ideas and character and more about influence peddling. We stand together in seeking better alternatives to giving candidates for political office a mechanism – paid or otherwise – to share their platform. Ultimately, that’s what the money is used to do: introduce, influence, and persuade. If we leveled the playing field and offered people a balance of choices, I believe that our democracy would work better.

On each approach and starting with a holistic perspective:

The best way to reach the objective of a fair system for residents and voters is public financing. I support full public financing. As a fall back, I support a small donor program that unlocks public financing like the one used in NYC. On the Council, I would champion public financing and work with colleagues who support this.

I believe that corporate contributions should be banned. Contrary to the US Supreme Court, I do not believe that corporations have rights equal to those of people. I would vote for banning corporate contributions.

I believe that most businesses and government contractors feel harassed by people in power, and their contracts are held over their heads with the express understanding that they must contribute or else. Particularly in local politics, this pay-to-play perception leads citizens to rightly think that it’s a rigged game. Most small and medium sized businesses are good partners in their communities. I want them to take the money they would have felt forced to spend on pay-to-play politicians, and give that money to local non-profits or give employees raises. To help them do that, I would vote for a prohibition on contributions from those people whose businesses hold government contracts, and I would raise the amount of the financial penalties for anyone who is proven to have skirted the contribution prohibition.

2. Do you support the pending ballot initiative to gradually raise the DC minimum wage to \$15 by 2020, and to eliminate the difference between the tipped minimum wage and regular minimum wage by 2024 ? If not, please explain your reasons.

RW – I support raising the minimum wage to \$15. Let's do it.

I also support largely restaurant employees earning much more. If a tipped worker makes on average more than he or she would from a flat-rate system, I think we need to give that employee the opportunity to maintain the higher income level. I don't want to see people fall behind; I think we all share a desire to see people move forward.

A higher minimum wage is only a small part of the equation. Job training and movement to career track positions matter more. Right now, DC is considered an unreliable partner for job training and is notoriously known as the worst partner for job training that the federal government has in the entire United States. For that reason, the federal government has threatened to pull back TENS OF MILLIONS OF DOLLARS in job training monies for the District, and my opponent, the incumbent, is Chair of the Committee that has oversight. I believe that he has failed the working families and those beyond the edge who still have hope for a better future.

So on the Council, one of my key priorities is straightening out this mess and making sure that the citizens of the District have programs that actually put them on an upward track.

3. Child care on average costs \$21,000 a year for families. What would you do to ensure access for all families? Do you support universal child care?

RW – I do support universal child care. This is a wrap-around service that forms the core of how I see improving the lives of residents, and this aspect ties directly into raising the minimum wage, job training, and ultimately adding stability to the homes of working families and those on the edge. As a soon-to-be first-time father, my wife and I are struggling to understand how we will afford child care, and we are not alone. Universal child care that offers productive and educational opportunities also goes a long way to better preparing our kids for school and can result in stronger academic achievement for many of our students from low-income families who now do not have the same early education opportunities as their more affluent counterparts. When our kids have a stable situation, when parents have hope and know their schedules, and when parents can afford extra time with their children, I believe that we'll see improvement in the classrooms.

4. In recent years, DC has lost tens of thousands of units of affordable housing. Over the next few years, we are projected to lose thousands more. How many of these units should the DC government replace or preserve? What steps do you propose to replace and preserve that many units?

RW – The DC government has a responsibility to maintain no less than the current stock of affordable housing units. It's a disgrace when the city does not fix, repair, and maintain the housing units we have or ensure that building owners do so, and when the city allows our needy families to live in dangerous and unhealthy buildings. It's morally wrong.

In addition to maintaining the current stock, I believe we should do a few more things. First, we have to enforce affordable housing requirements in new construction; it's the rule, not the exception, that waivers are provided to developers (which leads us back to pay-to-play). I regularly meet developers who would like to develop real affordable housing projects, but they are leery of the Wilson Building and being ensnared in what is seen as a corrupt system. We need to make registration of developers simpler, we need to be more inviting, and we need to provide incentives to those providing real affordable housing: a discount down to \$1700/month is not affordable housing.

Second, I believe that we need to make some transportation improvements, specifically with bus corridors and bus only lanes to connect parts of the city that could house more families and better connect communities that are currently more isolated. To this point, under-used commercial and retail corridors should be rezoned, and with modifications to zoning for affordable housing, we could add vibrancy to many parts of the city.

5. What actions would you take to enhance public safety and reduce violent crime while reforming racialized policing that unfairly targets people of color?

RW – As a Black man, you don't need to point out of me the challenges of being myself and walking in my own shoes. Regardless of race, we all want safe neighborhoods. Black, white, red, brown, yellow – we all want to feel and be safe in our communities.

I speak with and have good relationships with members of the Black Lives Matter movement and with the police force.

A few things that I would do differently? We need more police in our communities that the people on each block know. We talk about it a lot, but we don't see it enough. This is one of the things I have been trying to do as President of the Brightwood Citizens Association. We need real relationships between the cops on the beat and the residents of neighborhoods. When you know someone by name and when you see each other often, reactions change from confrontation to support.

We also need to hold the Police Chief accountable. I'm not comfortable with the range of reasons that we hear on why crime is spiking and with what is happening. I don't believe that we need more cops behind desks focusing only on synthetic drugs. A few should do that, but most should be where we see them. But they must be properly trained in cultural competency and how to deal with various types of interactions.

I also support body cameras, which was long overdue. Body cameras offer us clear insight onto what is happening in a given situation, and they offer us insight into how we can train police officers to handle difficult situations differently than they may otherwise handle them. There are always going to be problem situations, but they need to be more rare and more limited.

6. Good government requires checks and balances between the council and the mayor.

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Which policies do you support that are different from Mayor Bowser's policies? Please be as specific as possible.

RW - Essential to a system of checks and balances between the Council and the Mayor is having independent members of the Council who are not hand-picked by the Mayor. This is healthy for our city and ensuring that residents feel like they have a voice in our government.

While I want this and every Mayor of DC to succeed and will support them in every good policy, as a voice for real people, I will disagree with the Mayor. Specific to this Mayor, I strongly disagreed with her effort to create Fresh PAC because it was contrary to the public interest and to our system of checks and balances; with her crime bill because it was regressive and took an out-dated and unproductive approach to addressing crime by relying on punishment instead of resolving the symptoms of crime; with her approach to withholding significant amounts of body camera footage from FOIA because it denied the public access to information necessary to evaluate police encounters; and the rollout of the new emergency shelters because the public has been given insufficient information and it is not clear that public funds are being spent judiciously – per the Washington Post they are exorbitant – and that contracts adequately address a long-term approach to ending homelessness, particularly since many of the shelters are leased properties with those leases expiring in only 15 years.