



Fair Budget Coalition

Fair Budget Coalition 2006 Mayoral Candidates' Questionnaire

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August 11, 2006**

Safety Net/Quality of Life

Fact: The Fair Budget Coalition surveyed 11 DC Council offices in 2004, and found that three out of every four calls received by constituent services staff were for emergency assistance. (Fair Budget Coalition)

Fact: Some 31,500 children are eligible for free early care and education services in DC. Some 19,000 do not receive those services. (DC Action for Children)

Fact: Together, the House of Ruth and My Sister's Place - both domestic violence shelters - receive 300 calls per week from women and their children who are fleeing domestic violence. Between them, however, they have emergency shelter beds for 14 women and 4 children, and transitional housing units for 57 women and 69 children. (DC Coalition against Domestic Violence)

Question: What would you do to strengthen the District's safety net for vulnerable residents? In your answer, consider the state of the following: emergency assistance (including food); child care; youth, adult, and domestic violence shelter; low/no cost (physical and mental) health care; and unemployment and disability assistance.

Each of these demonstrated facts show the reality facing the poor and working class families of the District... the City is in critical condition and ironically we don't have a public hospital to help. City leadership has failed to provide real solutions for digging out of this hole. Instead we see the Mayor and Council throwing us a bone here and there when advocates have to beg for money just to keep current services afloat.

My campaign is guided by the ideals of the DC Statehood Green Party. These ideals will contend with the root of the problem and work towards a systematic change of government to promote better accountability and real solutions.

No more begging for services while baseball gets all the money it needs and more. No more shallow rhetoric while seniors and long-time district families get booted out of house and home. No more looking to rich suburbanites as the answer to growing this city at the expense of the working class.

All of these injustices must and will end if I am elected as your Mayor.

Homelessness

Fact: In the mid-1990s, the District administered some 600 apartment-style units for homeless families with children, while today it operates only 110. (The District serves some families in congregate-style shelter, although this is a violation of District law.) The demand for family shelter assistance, by contrast, has risen from some 1,300 seeking shelter in 2000 to over 3,300 seeking shelter in 2004. (DC Fiscal Policy Institute)

Fact: Some 44 percent of the people who are homeless in DC are in families. Almost 7,000 children are estimated to have been part of the families that applied for emergency shelter in DC in 2004. Thirty-five percent of these children were 5 years old and younger. (DC Kids Count)

Fact: Some four out of five families that applied for shelter in 2005 did not receive it. (Washington Legal Clinic for the Homeless)

Question: What three steps would you take to address the problem of homelessness among families with children? In your answer, consider whether families can be sheltered safely in communal or "congregate" style facilities. Also consider how you would improve housing conditions in the dilapidated buildings that currently house District-funded shelter programs? Finally, comment on whether the state of the city's homeless shelters is more of a "money" or "management" problem.

I work with the homeless in the City. More recently I have been a volunteer at feeding programs, but I spent a large part of my professional career working directly with the homeless through a DC based homeless services agency. I saw first hand the problems facing this special population. These problems are especially heightened when we are talking about a single-parent mom and her three kids who happen to be homeless. The City leadership has little concern for these families as demonstrated by the said facts. And, the number of homeless families continues to rise, almost doubling in four years and yet services continue to be cut. This is an outrage.

The problem is both money and management. I would like to see 100 million US dollars dedicated to the homeless population here in the District. This is 1/10 of the baseball stadium deal, which I like to use as a marker of funding priority. If we dedicate 10,000 to each person who is homeless in direct aid and capital infusion we would make DC the model for contending with homelessness.

A large component to solving homelessness is preventing homelessness. But how boring the leadership has been in this mission! Instead of building new shelters that house job training programs, nutritional and delicious feeding programs, holistic healthcare services, and personal and professional counseling, we see dilapidated shelters closed down with no relocation plans for these residents. Then the property is

sold to developers for pennies on the dollar. What is this sham? It will end if I am elected Mayor.

Disabilities

Fact: The 2000 Census estimates that there may be as many as 115,000 people with disabilities living in the District, representing 21.9% of the total population-one of the highest rates in the country. (Washington Legal Clinic for the Homeless)

Fact: The ADA requires DC to have an ADA coordinator at each agency. Often, however, the coordinators have little or no training or support and do not know how to make their buildings and services accessible to people with disabilities. As a result, individuals are excluded from much-needed government services and DC is repeatedly sued for violating disability rights laws. (The Arc of DC and the Washington Legal Clinic for the Homeless)

Fact: The District currently ranks at or near the bottom in use of the Home and Community Based model, which is nationally the most accepted model for service delivery to individuals with developmental disabilities because it is more flexible and gives the client a voice in how they are served. The District currently spends approximately 7 percent of total outlays on these services compared to Maryland and Virginia, which spend 75 and 67 percent of their total outlays on Home and Community Based services respectively. (The Quality Trust for Individuals with Disabilities)

Question: Briefly outline your strategy for improving care and services to District residents with disabilities. In your answer consider how you would improve Americans with Disabilities Act compliance in public space, particularly in the city's homeless shelters, and how you would improve services for people with developmental disabilities.

If I am elected Mayor, there will be no more lawsuits about denied access to City services by any disabled person, period. To do this, we will have a team of ADA leaders living in the City to assess all agencies buildings and services and report any systematic and capital problems associated with disabled concerns. Then we can write up a serious budget to remedy all of these problems. We will focus on what works, and seemingly Virginia and Maryland leaders have figured this out, more funding for home and community based services. I can't believe we aren't doing this yet despite what may be pages upon pages of testimony to the Council and Mayor from the disabled community.

Isn't it time leaders listen to our fellow neighbors? I will and so will the DC Statehood Green Party.

Health

Fact: According to recent studies, almost 14 percent of District residents are uninsured. More than half of the uninsured adults are employed. (DC Dept. of Health/Urban Institute)

Fact: Between 2001 and 2004, there was a 41 percent decrease in the number of persons receiving substance abuse treatment in the District (from 13,000 to 7,612). (So Others Might Eat)

Fact: The annual rate of new AIDS cases in the District is more than 10 times the national average and is now believed to be the highest rate of any U.S. city. (DC Appleseed)

Question: Briefly outline your strategy for improving health care in the District. In your answer, consider at least one of the following: how you would improve overall access to both primary and emergency care; how you would locally fund Medicaid and how you would maximize leveraging federal Medicaid funds; any changes you might make to the District's systems for substance abuse treatment and prevention; and how you would improve access to health care for immigrants, particularly considering recent federal legislation that tightens requirements for demonstrating citizenship when applying or re-certifying for Medicaid benefits.

Reopen General Hospital -- Tens if not hundreds of folks have died or were further injured because they had to take an emergency ride from the east side of town to the west. There was no reason that our emergency ward at our only public hospital had to be closed down and it should be reopened. The city lost professional careers and lives because the Mayor and City Council didn't envision the results of such a closure. You can read more about this scandal at >>

<http://www.otten06.com/hospital>

I will undo the damage of this terrible event and we will see DC General at the center of a spokes wheel of public and affordable healthcare services which extend throughout the city but especially serving the needs of our Ward 8, 7, and 6 residents first. Services in this spokes wheel structure will be comprehensive and across all health categories and it will be public so that no resident will ever again be stuck between choosing to pay for heat or medicine or perhaps between seeing a doctor and buying food!

Affordable Housing and Economic Development

Fact: In 2004 there were 47,000 renting households that earned less than \$20,000, but only 27,000 rental units that would be affordable to them (costing less than \$500 per month). (DC Fiscal Policy Institute)

Fact: In 2004, over 43,000 DC households had severe housing burdens, i.e. they were spending more than half of their income on rent. Some 73 percent of those households had incomes below 30 percent of the

area median - \$25,620 for a family of four in 2004.
(DC Fiscal Policy Institute)

Fact: Some 52,000 applicants are on the waitlist for public housing and/or a section 8 voucher in DC. This equates to roughly one in five DC households. (DC Housing Authority)

Question: How can you help people who earn less than 30 percent of the area median to find housing that is affordable to them? To which strategy would you devote the most resources - making existing rental housing more affordable through subsidies or through helping tenants buy their buildings; creating new (permanently) affordable housing; or increasing the salaries of low-income families so that they can afford existing housing? Which strategy do you think is the most cost effective, i.e. affordably houses the most people for the least amount of public investment and in the least amount of time?

This City is filled with intellectual policy writers and strong community activists. When you combine these merits you are dealing with a serious force for positive change. My networks bring me in contact with lots of people from these two backgrounds and I believe I can harness this power to bring about good sweeping change to the City and our direction.

If elected I will employ a diversity of tactics backed up by teams of the folks above to prevent the displacement of longtime District families. One tactic is strong Rent Control based on DC's Consumer Price Index and not that of the entire DC Metro region. Also, strong inclusionary zoning laws will help us reclaim the word revitalization. Gone will be the way buildings are torn down due to age and all the folks are displaced with only a small percentage able to return. All the folks who lived in a redeveloped building must be able to return unhindered by developers and prohibitive rent increases. And, we can't wait ten years for 55,000 affordable housing units to be built. We need those now!

Instead of policies such as those of the current City leadership which sells away public parcels at fire sale prices, we would instead keep this land, find money to pay community-based development teams who are interested helping people and not solely in massive profits, and we will build these units now.

It can be done and we will solve the housing crisis if I am elected Mayor.

Employment and Income

Fact: According to the DC Family Self-Sufficiency Standard, a family of 3 (parent, pre-schooler and school-age child) needs to earn \$22.35 per hour to pay for basic needs (housing, childcare, food, transportation, health care, and taxes) without any assistance. The District's minimum wage is \$7 per hour and loses value each year; the District's living wage is \$11.75 per hour. (Wider Opportunities for Women)

Fact: Some 70 percent of the wages earned in DC are earned by non-residents. (From Council member Marion Barry's testimony offered before the DC Council)

Committee on Vocational Education & Jobs, June 22, 2006)

Fact: The District's unemployment rate (5.7 percent) is almost twice the unemployment rate of the region (2.9 percent). (US Bureau of Labor Statistics) Over one quarter of the residents in Ward 8 between the ages of 20 and 65 are not in the workforce. (US Census 2000)

Question: How can you help more District residents obtain jobs that actually lead to self-sufficiency? In your answer, consider at least one of the following: how you might improve access to job training; how you might address the barriers many residents face in their struggle to connect with training and jobs - literacy, substance abuse, and lack of work supports like adequate child care and transportation; how you might put more DC residents on a path to the higher education needed to get the kinds of jobs being created in the city's job market; and how you might work with (particularly large) employers to ensure that they provide good jobs with decent wages and benefits. Also, consider any changes you might make to the minimum wage or the living wage laws to make work more profitable for low-wage workers.

I look to our neighborhood library system as a key component to improving economic outcomes for the residents of the City. Unfortunately libraries have been neglected for so long that they have fallen in disrepair. This is sad but it has created an opportunity to rebuild and reenergize our library system to once again be a showcase of centers of knowledge for all of our people. Libraries will be easily accessible centers for job-training programs and literacy tutoring. Adjacent to the library will be child care centers which not only provides babysitting services but takes things a step further to include early learning activities.

Libraries can offer information about all City services, so that parents, the homeless, new folks to the City, everyone will be able to get information about City services which can help them. In addition, our libraries will house computer labs big enough to serve 50+ people at a time. This aspect of my plan is most exciting because as we revitalize our aging library system, we can train the next generation of DC Information Technologists. Those who participate in this learn-and-serve opportunity will shoot up the career ladder as it has been shown that IT leaders are worth alot of money in the nation's capital.

Just think of all the jobs created just by undertaking a serious and strong library rebuilding and reenergizing process. I'm talking about architects, construction workers, librarians, technologists, child care specialists, trainers, and much more... all with the potential to be learn-and-serve opportunities whereby DC residents can train with leaders in each of these fields and serve as apprentices. In the process they get the training and experience they need to launch careers and become more self-sustaining productive neighbors.

Feel free to check out my responses about the DC Public Library system at >>

<http://www.otten06.com/surveys>

We can also create lots of jobs around a strong citywide recycling program. I go into details on my website at >>

<http://www.otten06.com/platform>

Youth/Education

Fact: DCPS does not spend more per pupil than other school districts. In fact, DC spends less than Montgomery County, Alexandria, and Arlington. Per-pupil funding levels are inflated by incorrect methodology, which often counts certain types of spending in DC while discounting that spending in other jurisdictions. (Washington Lawyer's Committee for Civil Rights)

Fact: While enrollment has declined in DCPS by some 13 percent since 1990, the number of students with special needs has increased dramatically, resulting in a needier student population. The number of limited English proficiency students and the number of special education students have both increased by 50 percent; and the number of special education students in private school placement has increased by 600 percent. (Washington Lawyer's Committee for Civil Rights)

Fact: The number of Latino children in DCPS has more than doubled since the early 1990s, when they represented 5 percent of the population. Today they represent some 12 percent of the DCPS population.

Question: List the first three things you would do to improve the District's public school system. In your answer, consider how best to manage the funds that will be allocated annually to improve school facilities. Consider at least one of the following: how to build more marketable skills among DCPS and DCPCS graduates; how to decrease delinquency and how to enhance "out of school time" activities; and how best to provide access to public schools to the children of illegal immigrants. Also, consider how you would work with the school board to achieve your objectives.

Improving D.C.'s education system is on the priority list of all the mayoral candidates, however I am unique in my plan specifics. I'd like to see the philosophy guiding school management flip from a top-down bureaucratic system to a ground-up more transparent system with stronger school level decision making. It seems things stall at the management level of DCPS. This includes work orders to repair the buildings and supply orders to make sure our kids have books, computers, and other important resource to learn.

Work order and supply order delays go to steal the vitality and energy from our good principals, teachers, and hence students and their parents. Hope diminishes each day when children slowly realize that so-called City leadership really doesn't have them in their priority list. It's time we enhance the service to our children and take serious action to instill positive energy, people, attitudes, and resources in our schools.

Much like my aforementioned library-rebuilding project, we can use creative learn-and-serve methods to reenergize and maintain our school buildings. We can also offer better nutritional options for our children so they can sustain the energy needed to stay focused through the day. The school's doors don't have to close after the last bell rings. If anything, educational activity can ramp up a bit.

After sitting in teacher-led classes all day, after school students can get the chance to explore more peer-to-peer learning opportunities with solid adult facilitation and guidance. Parents can come in and have access to job-training programs at the schools where their kids learn. So many creative projects can happen... but alas, the conglomeration of bureaucrats at the top seems to be shunting alot of these possibilities.

We can turn this around and promote grassroots learning opportunities at our neighborhood schools and we will not wait ten years to rebuild our neglected schools. We can do this now and I will find the money and resources to do so. If we continue to wait, more and more families will be gone leaving the district for lower rents and better services.

Transparency

Fact: The District's budget documents do not describe the impact (on service delivery) of funding changes, neither in narrative form nor with service level data. (DC Fiscal Policy Institute)

Fact: The District's budget documents do not track local funding for programs/activities. In each year's budget document, the funds listed for previous years combine local, federal, and other funding. Therefore, you could not, for example, use the FY 2007 budget documents to track how much (local) money DC spent on child care or interim disability assistance for the past few years. (DC Fiscal Policy Institute)

Fact: The budget is a "living" document that changes as the fiscal year progresses. Even though the revised budget figures are known when the budget for the next fiscal year is published, that document contains the previous year's figures as they were passed by the Council, and do not reflect how they have been modified throughout the year. Moreover, each year the mayor prepares a list of programs/activities that have been either cut or enhanced. This list is not published in the budget documents. (DC Fiscal Policy Institute)

Question: One of the first duties of the next mayor will be to oversee preparation of the FY 2008 budget. List three steps you will take to ensure a useful and transparent budget. In your answer, consider at least one of the following: any changes you might make to agency performance measures and the presentation of findings related to those measures; the level of detail reflected in agency budgets including the programs and activities under those agencies; and descriptions of the impact of any funding proposal that represents an increase or decrease from the baseline. Also consider how you might work with residents and advocates to revise agency strategic plans and to develop a program, activity, and service structure that clearly matches how services are delivered by the agency.

Working on Wall Street as an analyst and serving as the Director of non-profit has provided a robust experience around organizational budgets. Building a budget has to be transparent as we must be frank and honest about where our funding priorities may be. No longer will you see a mayor coming up with plans in the backroom away from the 'prying' eyes of City advocates concerned about meeting human services. City Council, agency heads, ANC's, policy advocates, community activists, and the general public will be invited to weigh in about funding priorities across all service sectors. I have lots of experience organizing networking events among organizations and businesses and I will use these skills to make sure the aforementioned stakeholders are invited to take more ownership in building our City budget.

All of my agency heads will be skilled in the technology to assess, record, and report on their services. Currently we have many agency heads that can't even use Excel to log their progress or lack thereof. If elected, all of my departments will be prepared to testify before the City Council and submit assessment reports regularly and on time. I've seen testimony where City agency leaders could not produce basic reporting figures readily. Why? What are these people doing if they are not constantly assessing the numbers and progress? These questions will not have to be asked if I am your Mayor.

Creating a transparent government is not brain surgery. Current mayoral appointments certainly have proved they don't deserve surgeon salaries for the work they produce, although some of them get exorbitant salaries. Each of my agency employees will be paid a reasonable salary and rewarded for their solid work helping to save the City money and allowing us to provide much better service.

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