

**Caribbean-American Political Action Committee (C-PAC)
District of Columbia – 2020 Candidate Questionnaire**

Please return the completed form via email to cpac.dmv@gmail.com by 11:59 p.m. on Thursday, September 24, 2020. Responses will be shared with C-PAC's membership.

Office Sought: Ward 2 Councilmember

Candidate's Name: Randy Downs

Current Occupation: Operations Manager, Sierra Club

Party: Independent

Campaign contact information (Address, Phone, Fax, Email, Website):

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1. What specific actions will you take to improve the well-being of your constituents and improve District services and access for all residents?

I am running for DC Council to create an equitable, accessible Ward 2. The District of Columbia is a proud progressive city in many ways, but more needs to be done to advocate for those who are left behind. We also need to protect what's working, especially in hard times.

To improve the well-being of my constituents and improve District services and access for all residents, I will focus on immediate needs to ensure our city can stay resilient through and recover from the **COVID-19 pandemic**. This includes ensuring that workers who have applied for unemployment insurance and have had their benefits delayed due to the backed up DOES system will have their claims expedited and paid retroactively. I will also work to ensure that the much-delayed overhaul of the unemployment application system is finally completed and that our unemployment application system is modern, user-friendly and mobile-accessible. Additionally, I will support assistance for excluded workers who are left out of federal unemployment benefits, including immigrants regardless of immigration status.

I will also work creatively to ensure that our local hospitality industry is supported through the challenges of COVID-19 to come out strong on the other side. I am proud to have been the early leader of the adoption of strEATeries in Ward 2 to provide additional outdoor dining space for patrons and workers, as well as expanded sidewalks to allow people to better socially distance in commercial corridors. As Councilmember, I will ensure that innovations like these become permanent and enact additional solutions to keep our hospitality industry strong and resilient so that businesses can stay open and continue to employ their workers.

I will also prioritize **affordable housing**, as the cost of housing in our Ward is making it hard for long-standing residents to stay here and deterring new neighbors from moving in. I will support investments in the Housing Production Trust Fund, the Preservation Trust Fund, and public housing, so that affordable housing is built and maintained in Ward 2 and District-wide. I will also help individuals and families pay rent by supporting the Local Rent Supplement Program and the Emergency Rental Assistance Program.

Finally, as Councilmember I will **reallocate resources from police** to underfunded, highly needed services that are backed by evidence showing their effectiveness in reducing violence and crime before they start. These include: mental health, social work, and crisis intervention services, violence interruption programs, and homelessness street outreach services to help people apply for housing and needed documentation. I will also advocate to ban stop and frisk, an overly invasive policing tactic that disproportionately targets Black and Brown residents

2. During recent legislative sessions, the D.C. Council advanced B23-0201, a bill to establish a District of Columbia Office of Caribbean Affairs (OCA), which is a long-standing priority of the Caribbean-American Community. Please explain your position on this legislation and whether you will support efforts to staff and fund the proposed office?

I support the creation of the District of Columbia Office of Caribbean Affairs (OCA). I know the power of a dedicated office within District government, as such offices are structured to understand the specific constituencies they serve, build and maintain strong relationships with them, and always keep their priorities top of mind. D.C.'s robust Caribbean-American community would be well-served by a dedicated office to focus on its needs and support its families and individuals, its business community, and its culture within the District. A dedicated office is important to ensure that the Caribbean-American community has a strong voice within DC government and that the Caribbean-American community can easily engage in government processes and discussions.

3. What initiatives did you lead or support that impact Washington, D.C.'s Caribbean-American community?

I have been working to ensure resiliency and recovery through COVID-19, supporting an evidence-based public safety system to eliminate the entrenched racist practices that exist in standard policing policies, and I strongly support policies and programs that lift up and protect Washington D.C.'s immigrant communities.

Caribbean-Americans are important contributors to our local economy in the businesses they operate and they work they do each day, but none of us can work when we do not have proper protections and safeguards from the public health threat of **COVID-19**. As an Advisory Neighborhood Commissioner, I have worked to ensure restaurants can more easily gain access to approval for expanded outdoor seating so that restaurants can preserve their customer base

and workers can engage safely with customers. The model for strEATeries that I created with restaurants in my district on 17th Street in Dupont Circle became the model for the whole city. As Councilmember, I will work to ensure all workers have appropriate training, PPE, sanitizers, and cleaning supplies to be safe while at work. And for those who are out of work during this time, I will fight to improve our city's unemployment system, which has exposed residents to unacceptable delays in providing unemployment benefits.

I am a proud supporter of the Black Lives Matter movement and I believe the District should approach **public safety** with policies that are based on evidence. We should not entrust the safety of our communities with purely reactive measures but instead, invest in preventing crime and violence before they start. Councilmembers must listen to residents and experts and explore innovative, public health approaches proven to interrupt the cycle of violence and crime.

As Councilmember, I will reallocate resources from police to underfunded, highly needed services that are backed by evidence showing their effectiveness in reducing violence and crime. These include: mental health, social work, and crisis intervention services, violence interruption programs, and homelessness street outreach services to help people apply for housing and needed documentation. I will also work to ban stop and frisk, an overly invasive policing tactic that disproportionately targets Black and Brown residents.

I strongly support the District's designation as a sanctuary city for **immigrants** and believe more must be done to ensure our sanctuary city support is made real for all immigrants in the District. MPD should not work with ICE under any circumstances. I support the passage of the Sanctuary Values Amendment Act of 2019. I will fight for Statehood so we can address crimes without the Federal Government interfering. As Councilmember, I am committed to working with our community of immigrants to protect their place in the District. I support permanent legislation on sanctuary city status as soon as possible to have our laws reflect our values and ideals as a sanctuary city.

Additionally, many of our neighbors who are immigrants have experienced especially dramatic hardships due to COVID-19, including because they may be excluded from federal unemployment benefit programs. As Councilmember, I will ensure that all residents are able to take advantage of unemployment benefits regardless of immigration status, as immigrants in our community have worked and paid into the unemployment insurance system through their taxes.

Finally, I will work to decriminalize street vending. For many immigrant vendors, it is their main source of income and an important way of sharing food and tradition from their home country. This cultural practice should absolutely not be considered a crime.

4. Are you familiar with the status and impact of Caribbean-American owned businesses in your community and throughout Washington, D.C.? How will you support the viability and competitiveness of the City's small, minority, veteran, women, and especially Caribbean-owned businesses? In addition, how will you improve procurement and contract opportunities for these businesses?

Yes, the Caribbean-American business community is an essential part of DC's small business network and I believe DC must extend special effort to support Caribbean, minority, women, and veteran-owned businesses, as well as all small businesses. Although Ward 2 is not the central hub of the Caribbean-American business community, I am very familiar with the broad network of small businesses owned and operated by Caribbean-Americans throughout our city and believe they and other small businesses must be prioritized, particularly as the city works to get through and recover from COVID-19.

As Councilmember, I will:

- Support and expand grants to small businesses during and beyond the pandemic.
- Place a moratorium on certain permit fees and requirements until the District is through the pandemic and its immediate effects.
- Streamline overcomplicated permitting, procurement, and contract processes and requirements.
- Provide extensions on deadlines for payment of certain taxes such as sales taxes, eliminate late fee penalties, and allow payments in installments for small businesses.
- Expand strEATeries, parklets, and patios for outdoor dining and make these spaces permanent, including by expediting the process for permits and eliminating unnecessary insurance barriers to expanded outdoor dining.
- Partner with hospitality stakeholders to develop workable solutions for outdoor all-season dining, including through the use of tents and health conscience heating sources, and expedite the permitting process and forgo fees for these solutions.
- Explore making permanent the option for restaurants, bars, and hotels to include alcoholic beverages on their takeout menus as long as they follow reasonable regulations for the safe sale of alcohol.
- Implement a "tax-free weekend" applicable to restaurants, bars, and hotels to draw visitors to District hospitality businesses when it's safe.
- Provide opportunities for businesses to expand their customer base through promotion programs that inform residents and visitors of small, Caribbean-American, women, veteran and other minority-owned businesses.
- Help businesses expand their own foundations in marketing and innovation through grant and technical assistance programs, in partnership with universities and nonprofits, that allow small, Caribbean-American, women, veteran and other minority-owned businesses to learn new skills to aid them in attracting and maintaining customer bases.

- Invest in and support locally developed small business infrastructure, such as locally run delivery platforms that are more affordable and trustworthy for small and local business owners.
- Work in partnership with the hospitality industry to develop and sustain new, world-class events and attractions that bring visitors to Ward 2 and DC once it is safe to welcome them.
- Ensure stronger oversight of requirements that contracts and procurement opportunities are rewarded to local, minority-owned businesses.

5. There are increased concerns regarding violence – especially gun violence – in many parts of the District. What are your proposals to address and stem violence with 21st century tools and policies?

DC has spent large shares of its budget for many years on policing and public safety with little to show for it as violence continues. I believe public safety policies in the District must be based on the evidence of what actually works in decreasing violence. Councilmembers must listen to residents and experts and explore innovative, public health approaches proven to interrupt the cycle of violence and crime.

That means investing in programs like violence interruption and mental health and substance use care. As Councilmember I will closely examine the MPD budget to assess where funding can be reallocated to these evidence-based services that are shown to be effective in reducing violence and crime. And I will advocate to ban the racist, invasive policing tactic of stop and frisk.

6. How do you propose increasing access to safe, quality, affordable mental and physical health care and services throughout the District of Columbia?

As a District we need to ask ourselves both what we value and whether we are getting the results we want from how we currently use our budget. I value safe, quality, affordable mental health care and do not believe we are investing in it as we should. I also do not believe the private sector invests in it as it should, as payment rates for mental health providers in private insurance are often disparately lower than those for physical health providers.

As Councilmember I will look at both our public investments in mental health and what can be done to ensure mental health parity is truly achieved in our health care system overall. Currently there are many mental health providers in DC who do not participate in our public or private health insurance systems but are only available to see patients who can pay out of pocket. As Councilmember I will work to address this and bring more providers into the system so they are accessible to everyone.

Regarding physical health, the District should be very proud that it has a very low rate of uninsurance. I will work to protect our Medicaid, Alliance, and DC Health Link programs and

ensure everyone who is eligible for coverage is enrolled. As Councilmember, I will also break down barriers to enrollment. For example, I will work to ensure that in both Medicaid and the Alliance, which serves our immigrant communities, individuals and families do not have to recertify their eligibility for the programs more often than annually. I will also work with colleagues across the District to ensure that insurance is more than just a card, but actually means there are appropriate providers available to deliver care in a timely manner.

Finally, I believe there is a key link between transportation and health. Too many people face barriers to getting the care they need in the District because of unreliable transportation to doctors, clinics, and hospitals. I will work to ensure that affordable and reliable transportation is available not just in Ward 2, but all throughout the District, so that transportation is not a barrier to health.

7. Unfortunately, the challenges and concerns facing immigrants are increasing at an alarming rate. Do you support comprehensive immigration reform? How do you propose addressing the challenges facing DREAMers, the administration's suspension of temporary protective status for many D.C. residents, and the constant threats facing sanctuary cities?

I strongly support comprehensive immigration reform that will allow immigrants who are a critical part of our community the ability to live safely and without fear in our city. When thinking about the challenges facing immigrants, such as the continuously threatened status of DREAMers, it raises the importance of securing Statehood for DC so that we have true voting representation in Congress to fight back against federal policies that discriminate against and threaten the well being of immigrants.

Within DC, I support further oversight and permanent legislation to ensure that the protections of our sanctuary city are fully available to all immigrants in DC. I look forward to working with the Caribbean-American Political Action Committee and other allies to ensure DC is truly providing the safety immigrants in our city need and to push back against the harmful immigration policies of the Trump administration.

8. There is growing attention and distress about the significant increase in lawsuits filed against District residents by debt collectors over the last few years. What is your position on the Debt Buying Limitation Amendment Act, which is pending before the D.C. Council's Committee on Business and Economic Development and the Council's Committee of the Whole?

Debt collectors often use misleading tactics and disproportionately target Black people with unscrupulous collection techniques. I believe the District must do a better job at regulating this predatory behavior and therefore I support the Debt Buying Limitation Amendment Act. As Councilmember I would support and work for its passage.

9. What concrete steps will you take to improve the District of Columbia's Public School system – including facilities and equipment, teacher treatment, relationships with parents, as well as education standards and test scores in all wards of the City?

I am very proud to have earned the [endorsement](#) of the Washington Teachers' Union for the Ward 2 general election due to my focus on eliminating the outcomes gap across DC schools. To achieve this, as Councilmember I will prioritize teacher retention, including by modernizing the evaluation system for teachers, more effective learning strategies, and better facilities and equipment, including digital access for all DC students. Ensuring all students have access to computers and the internet is especially important during COVID-19, but this was an issue even before the pandemic struck. As Councilmember, I will engage the entire community of students, educators, parents, and administrators to ensure a good learning atmosphere and shared responsibility for better student outcomes and a better DC school system overall.

10. In Washington, D.C., many seniors seek to age in their homes and/or communities. What efforts will you take to improve service accessibility, support for families, and the quality of programs offered to the City's senior citizens?

In Ward 2, the affordability of housing is one of the key barriers to seniors being able to age in their home and community. To ensure those who have lived in our community for a long time can stay in their homes, I will focus on affordable housing to:

- Review and address property taxes that are creating barriers to affordability.
- Support investments in the Housing Production Trust Fund, the Preservation Trust Fund, and public housing, so that affordable housing is built and maintained in Ward 2 and District-wide.
- Help individuals and families pay rent by supporting the Local Rent Supplement Program and the Emergency Rental Assistance Program.
- Ensure affordable Senior Housing is available in the Ward and District-wide.

11. What priority issues inspired your candidacy for political office?

I entered the Ward 2 general election after serving two terms as an Advisory Neighborhood Commissioner to ensure that residents have a choice of candidate who will offer ethical, bold leadership. Our Ward has experienced years of ethics issues from our Council seat and residents have raised concerns that we may be on the path of continued ethics issues with the current Councilmember. Given the pressing issues facing our community, including COVID-19 and long-standing racial inequities that have been called to the forefront by Black Lives Matter and others protesting for change, I am committed to lead as a Councilmember focused on making Ward 2 equitable and accessible for all.

As the candidate with [the most](#) Ward 2 and DC support behind me and the largest grassroots team fueling my campaign, I am confident about my path to victory in the general election. I look forward to serving DC's Caribbean-American community and all DC residents as DC Councilmember for Ward 2.