



# The Caribbean-American Political Action Committee

1015 18th Street, N.W., Suite 200, Washington, D.C., 20036 | 202-349-1498 | www.CaribbeanPac.org

## 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](mailto:cpac.dmv@gmail.com) by 11:59 p.m. on Thursday, March 5, 2020. Responses will be shared with C-PAC’s membership.

**Office Sought: Ward 7 Councilmember**

**Candidate’s Name: Vincent C. Gray**

**Current Occupation: Ward 7 Councilmember**

**Party: Democrat**

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

**2619 Branch Ave, SE**

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**vincegray2020.com**

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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 laser focused on improving the quality of life for Ward 7 and the residents of the District of Columbia. I have always run on a platform of ensuring fiscal stability; creating jobs and reducing unemployment; and building on public-education reform and training District students to be the workforce of tomorrow. Under my leadership as Mayor, the District’s economy saw a tremendous economic boom, with nearly 44,000 jobs created and the unemployment rate falling by three percentage points; public education grew at a rate not seen in over 45 years as families returned to the city and to public schools; fiscal responsibility was restored by growing our rainy day fund to \$1.75 billion and a number of longstanding challenges in the areas of human services, critical infrastructure, affordable housing and business regulations were addressed with impressive results.*

*I continue to focus my efforts in those areas mentioned above and have worked tirelessly with the residents of Ward 7 to: improve educational outcomes for our children and youth; restore public safety to Ward 7 neighborhoods; bring economic development amenities and employment opportunities to all Ward 7 residents; and improve the quality of life for all.*



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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?

*It is my honor to have co-introduced Bill 230301, which would establish an Office on Caribbean Affairs to monitor the delivery of services and make policy recommendations that affect the District's Caribbean community. One of the most important parts of our government is the Mayor's Office of Community Affairs. It is where a lot of on the ground community conversations and support happen, as well as an official office where many specific, underrepresented communities can find representation, support, a platform for their voice and an ear specifically and knowledgeably attuned to their concerns.*

*While it was also my honor to have voted in support of this bill, it remains to be funded. I support efforts to fund and staff this office.*

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

*The District of Columbia is not only one of the nation's greatest cities and the nation's capital, it is also a global city that is proud of the diversity of its residents. Our Caribbean and Caribbean American community is a part of that treasured diversity. I support the community with presence, attending and participating in several cultural and policy-based events.*

*As Mayor, I made it a point to make sure that the concerns and interests of the Caribbean-American community were given my administration's attention. Accordingly, through Mayor's Order 2012-127, I established the Mayor's Advisory Council on Caribbean Community Affairs to advise the Mayor and the Director of Community Affairs as appropriate, on issues, matters, views and concerns of the Caribbean-American community that are designed to strengthen the education, social, cultural and economic life of the District of Columbia.*

*I have also assertively advanced policies to positively affect the lives of immigrant District residents, including those of Caribbean descent. As mayor, I declared the District to be a sanctuary city. As mayor and as chair of the Committee on Health in the Council of the District of Columbia, I have made sure that all residents can access quality health care, whether through the health benefits exchange or through the DC Healthcare Alliance Program. I was proud to co-introduce the Sense of the Council in Reaffirmation of the Human Rights of District of Columbia Residents and in Opposition to Bigotry and Violence*



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*Resolution to declare the renewed sense of the Council that the District of Columbia is committed to promoting the human rights and well-being of all its residents, workers, and visitors, to recognize the Council's responsibility to work toward that goal, and to call on the federal government to do the same.. I was happy to co-sponsor the Expanding Access to Justice Act that would provide legal services to immigrants. It was my honor to shepherd the Study of Mental Health and Substance Abuse in Immigrant Communities Act through Committee on Health. I was privileged to co-introduce the Sense of the Council to Preserve the Integrity of Our National Census Count Resolution to declare the sense of the Council that the Council strongly opposes the reinstatement of a question regarding citizenship status on the mandatory short-form 2020 census as requested by the Trump Administration in December 2017 and views the national census as a decennial event that is to account for all residents in this country, regardless of their background or immigration status. Most recently, I co-introduced the Sense of the Council Opposing Implementation of the Public Charge Rule Resolution of 2020 to declare the Council's opposition to the implementation of the updated "public charge" rule regulations by the Trump Administration.*

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?

*Small business development is the heart of the District's economic viability. I have and continue to work with our small business community to identify pressing needs and spur District agencies to develop innovative programs to promote and enhance entrepreneurship and small business development. For example, under my leadership as Mayor, forWARD 8 awarded \$2.5 million in grants to support District-led career-training and business-development projects in Ward 8, START IT in 7 supported Ward 7 Entrepreneurship Week and consisted of a series of workshops, panels and other activities that focused on entrepreneurship, small-business development and attracting retail opportunities.*

*I am a strong advocate for all small businesses, and this includes Caribbean-American owned businesses in my community and throughout the District of Columbia. To adequately address the needs of small businesses within my community, I plan on hosting a series of listening sessions and town halls around economic development and community revitalization. Through these Community and Economic Development summits, I am seeking to hear directly from small business owners and entrepreneurs around needs and ways in which the District can better serve their needs.*



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*Through my work as the Chair of the Committee on Health, I had to confront an issue of a CBE irregularity related to the United Medical Center, and worked with my colleagues on the Committee on Business and Economic Development on small business issues and advocacy as well. I have and will continue to work with my colleagues to use our legislative and oversight abilities to make sure that opportunities for small business are both preserved and enhanced, and that enforcement of small business contract and procurement law is effective.*

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 21<sup>st</sup> century tools and policies?

*Nationally, relationships between the police and many African Americans are challenged. This has been abundantly evident in the emergence of the Black Lives Matter movement. This presents us with a unique opportunity in the nation's capital to forge a relationship between Ward 7 residents and our police that serves as a model – one that embraces community policing and lowers crime. Relationships between Ward 7 residents and the Metropolitan Police Department (MPD) have generally been positive though not everyone has had a positive experience. We must continue to enhance community policing and look for ways to strengthen relationships between residents and MPD. At the Ward 7 Action Summit that I convened, Ward 7 residents proposed recommended solutions as to how to make this happen.*

*Their top three recommended solutions were to:*

- 1. Create opportunities for civil discussion and interactions outside of regular policing;*
- 2. Provide more training for officers, so they can more effectively and sensitively deal with persons of different racial and ethnic backgrounds, members of the LGBT community, and persons with mental health challenges; and*
- 3. Increase positive interactions between officers and students in schools.*

*I have been and continue to be an advocate of the NEAR Act. As the Ward 7 Councilmember, I use my position to advance policy and legislation to meet the needs of Ward 7 residents and the goals of the NEAR Act. I will continue to ensure a more transparent budget process, help to establish long-and short-term objectives and priorities, oversee the performance of MPD staff, programs and policies and ensure the effectiveness of these programs. I voted in support of the Access to Body Worn Camera Footage Emergency Act and have sent a series of letters to MPD calling for the release of stop-and-frisk data pursuant to the NEAR Act.*



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*I meet regularly with Sixth District Commander Habeebullah or her designee to keep an open dialogue regarding community policing, NEAR Act implementation, crime and violence prevention and other public safety initiatives.*

*I have worked tirelessly to direct funding to NEAR Act programs and am a full supporter of the Cure the Streets initiative. The amendment I moved regarding sports wagering also secured a statutory dedication of 50% of all additional certified sports wagering net revenue over the next four years, and then, beginning in Fiscal Year 2024, 50% of all sports wagering net revenue will be dedicated to NEAR Act implementation, which is projected to be over \$15 million per year.*

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

*I have made fighting for health equity for the residents on the East End of the District a top priority for the past decade. And, I believe the 150,000 residents living in the East End of the District deserve a world-class hospital. I campaigned on the promise of bringing not just a hospital but a real comprehensive health care system to Wards 7 and 8. This new hospital will be a state-of-the-art trauma-certified hospital with obstetrical care, which will be connected to a system of urgent care, primary care, ambulatory care and specialty care, including medical offices for independent physicians.*

*As to the state of United Medical Center (UMC), on May 1, 2017, an article by the Washington Post highlighted the worsening financial condition of UMC under Veritas as its operator. Therefore, during the FY 2018 budget process, I worked with my Council colleagues to restore \$300 million for the construction of a new East End hospital. I then supported additional funding for a mandatory Project Labor Agreement on the hospital's construction. Subsequently, OB services at the hospital were shut down leaving residents on the East End of the city with no option to have their babies delivered at an East End hospital. During the same time, the District of Columbia Nurses Association voted "No Confidence" in UMC leadership. Meanwhile, I wrote a letter to the City Administrator requesting the immediate funding of the \$3.4 million retroactive portion of the United Medical Center nurses' contract. These efforts were successful and helped to move forward on the long-delayed raises for the nurses at UMC.*

*UMC's building is over 50 years old which makes it impossible to deliver modern quality health care services without continuously escalating maintenance costs. And despite no cuts to programs or services this fiscal year, inpatient volume at UMC continues to decline. Therefore, we must move with a great sense of urgency. We need a new hospital as quickly as possible.*



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*I am committed to adjusting the statutory closure date of UMC to ensure that we have a continuous hospital presence in the East End of the District and a smooth transition to our new state-of-the-art hospital.*

*I intend to hold a hearing and closely scrutinize the partnership contract when it is sent to the Council. I will not approve it if it does not have strong requirements for training, hiring guarantees for current UMC employees who can pass a skills examination, and neutrality provisions. I am committed to ensuring that the new hospital has obstetrical and trauma care services, however, please note that UMC currently has neither. The District currently has four level-1 trauma centers (Washington Hospital Center, Howard University Hospital, George Washington University Hospital and Children's National Hospital), which is more than many states. I look forward to continuing to work in partnership with residents and other stakeholders as we build a world-class health care system, not just a hospital, in Wards 7 and 8.*

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 am loathed to be associated with the immigration policies that the current federal executive branch has consistently set forth. It is an unfortunate, harmful and scary reality to many DC residents that the current administration is taking advantage of the fact that the federal government controls our national immigration policies to advance degenerative, ill-informed fear-based policies. As such, I support immigration reform to undo the harmful laws and policies advanced by the federal executive branch.*

*One bright light is that local government can also make a difference in the lives of immigrant District residents like Dreamers. I have been consistently and reliably active in local government to increase the quality of all aspects of life for District residents, irrespective of immigration status. As Mayor, I declared the District to be a sanctuary city. As Mayor and as chair of the Committee on Health in the Council of the District of Columbia, I have made sure that all residents can access quality health care, whether through the health benefits exchange or through the DC Healthcare Alliance Program. I was proud to co-introduce the Sense of the Council in Reaffirmation of the Human Rights of District of Columbia Residents and in Opposition to Bigotry and Violence Resolution to declare the renewed sense of the Council that the District of Columbia is committed to promoting the human rights and well-being of all its residents, workers, and visitors, to recognize the Council's responsibility to work toward that goal, and to call on the federal government to do the same.. I was happy to co-sponsor the Expanding Access to Justice Act that would provide legal services to immigrants.*



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*It was my honor to shepherd the Study of Mental Health and Substance Abuse in Immigrant Communities Act through Committee on Health. I was privileged to co-introduce the Sense of the Council to Preserve the Integrity of Our National Census Count Resolution to declare the sense of the Council that the Council strongly opposes the reinstatement of a question regarding citizenship status on the mandatory short-form 2020 census as requested by the Trump Administration in December 2017 and views the national census as a decennial event that is to account for all residents in this country, regardless of their background or immigration status. Most recently, I co-introduced the Sense of the Council Opposing Implementation of the Public Charge Rule Resolution of 2020 to declare the Council's opposition to the implementation of the updated "public charge" rule regulations by the Trump Administration.*

*In these and other ways, I have used the trust that the public has placed in me as a local elected official to fight for the right policy and against policies that are detrimental to the lives of immigrant District residents.*

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?

*I believe that consumer protection is one of the most relevant public policy issues that we are facing. The Debt Buying Limitation Amendment Act of 2019 would, among other things, further prohibit the use of fraudulent, deceptive, or misleading devices or practices to collect a consumer debt and to establish penalties for a debt buyer that violates the requirements. As a member of the Committee on Business and Economic Development, I look forward to hearing from witnesses about this legislation should it be afforded a hearing.*

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 envision a District of Columbia where our children are achieving educational outcomes in ways we had hoped for; where we can all stand and celebrate their successes. I envision a District of Columbia where there is no more achievement gap, where every child – irrespective of racial or ethnic background – is graduating and dropout rates have been eliminated. The continued rise in school enrollment is an indication that people have an increasing level of confidence in public education.*



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*Through my previous efforts as Mayor and Chairman of the City Council, the District has the highest proportion of young children in publicly funded early learning programs in the country, the city's math and reading scores improved faster between 2011-2013 than those of any state or any large city (NAEP), and we focused on increased investments in public education of more than \$100 million.*

*I believe the District must continue these critical investments while also focusing its efforts on improving special education services, significantly increasing the Uniform Per Student Funding Formula and ensuring funding equity at the schools that are most in need. In both the FY18 and FY20 budgets, the proposed budget included anemic increases in public school funding. In FY18, I called for a 4% increase in the funding, and along with my Council colleagues, was able to achieve a 3% increase. In the FY20 budget process, I was able to contribute millions to restoring funding to the 31 DCPS schools that were slated for funding reductions in the proposed budget, many of which were in Wards 7 and 8.*

*As a City Councilmember, I will continue to use my position to draft policy and legislative proposals that will balance the needs of children, youth and their families with undergirding citywide education policy. I will work to ensure a more transparent budget process, help to establish long-and short-term objectives and priorities, help oversee performance of DC Public Schools staff, programs and policies and ensure the effectiveness of these programs through rigorous oversight.*

*Education reform efforts in the District have made significant improvements in student achievement, however there is still much work to be done. As the Partnership for Assessment of Readiness for College and Careers (PARCC) indicates, there continues to be a vast divide between the scores of white students and the scores of students of color. The achievement gap, which in large part is socioeconomically and racially based, is the top issue facing public education in the District of Columbia. Bringing equity to all students is not a simple task. The achievement gap takes many forms, and there is no one-size fits all solution. However, by meeting the individual needs of our students, we can give them the boost they need and deserve to perform at the level we know they are capable of and to work toward reducing disparities. We must stay the course and continue to support our education leadership while encouraging increased coordination and shared planning between DCPS and the charter sector.*

*It's also important to understand the role of the Council in overseeing education. Vigorous oversight is incredibly important, but the role of a legislator is to oversee, not to micromanage the educational policy decisions of the DCPS Chancellor. We need to ensure the Chancellor has the resources required to succeed.*





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*Council performance oversight hearings allow councilmembers and public witnesses to assess whether the Chancellor has been successful in meeting his or her goals and what changes should be recommended in areas such as truancy, student performance, and facilities modernization. The Chancellor and charter school leadership need our support and engagement to close the achievement gap and to continually improve our Ward 7 schools.*

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?

*The District, like much of America, is changing, and urban areas across the country are seeing their senior populations grow significantly. During my administration, I focused on ensuring that the District is friendly to all age groups, including longtime residents as they age and seniors moving into the city to spend their retirement in an exciting urban center. In 2013, I established the Age-Friendly DC Task Force, which developed the Age-Friendly DC Strategic Plan. Although much has been done subsequently to ensure our seniors can age in place, I repeatedly hear from senior residents concerned about being able to afford housing in Ward 7 and are living on fixed incomes dealing with rising property taxes making it difficult to afford other living expenses.*

*In the last budget proposal of the Gray Administration, the \$8.5 million cost of the "Senior Citizen Real Property Tax Relief Act of 2013" was fully funded. It exempted lower income seniors from real property taxes if they are at least 70 years old and have owned a residence in the District for 20 consecutive years or longer. This legislation was incredibly popular among seniors across the District. Unfortunately, the Council chose not to fund the tax relief designed in the legislation. But, I intend to re-introduce this legislation to protect our seniors from gentrification and the rising cost of living in the District. The legislation will provide up to 100% property tax relief for low-income seniors and provide some relief for middle-income senior homeowners. This crucial tax relief will allow Ward 7 seniors and seniors across the District to age in place and ensure that those residents aren't forced to make sacrifices on a fixed income and can remain in the District.*

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

*I am a lifelong Washingtonian. Growing up we had very little, but my parents worked hard and taught me to do the same. Education and community were values that underpinned my upbringing. My entire career has been in service to others. When I launched my campaign four years ago, I said, "The hope and promise of Ward 7 cannot slip away." By working together, we have reinvigorated communities. Projects that were stalled are succeeding now. Progress is no longer something we wait for; it is something we are seeing.*



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*Residents of Ward 7 and people across the District deserve more and that is why I ran for office and am seeking reelection. I have dedicated my entire career to serving and uplifting District residents; especially those with the greatest needs. For every person who we've helped, for every achievement we've celebrated, there are countless others that require our commitment. Our work is not finished.*

*Historically, the most disadvantaged and neglected part of the District, the East End of the city, has suffered from a lack of the kind of intensive economic, educational, infrastructure, and human-services investments that other parts of the District have experienced. Ward 7 is on the cusp of a boom that will transform it. I want to ensure that, as Ward 7 rises, all boats rise with it. As we add amenities that make our community more attractive, I want to be sure that residents who stuck with the District during the tough years can afford to stay and enjoy the good times. Thus, I am hugely focused on early childhood education, especially Birth to Three services to support Prekindergarten; bringing more grocery stores to Ward 7 and the East End of the city; building a true healthcare system and increasing violence interruption services to reduce crime.*

*I believe the top three issues facing my ward include:*

- 1. Lack of access to an adequate health care system for over 70,000 Ward 7 residents:*

*In many ways, the District of Columbia has served as a national model for providing health insurance access to its residents. Even prior to President Obama's Affordable Care Act, roughly 94% of District residents had health insurance. Now, the District's healthcare insurance rate is 97%. We are starting to see the benefits of having nearly all our residents covered. Despite these encouraging citywide successes, Wards 7 and 8 have the worst health indicators in the District of Columbia. Not surprisingly, Ward 7 lacks a comprehensive health care delivery system that serves residents who live on the East End of the City. Building a new hospital that anchors a coordinated health care infrastructure system of ambulatory care and urgent care clinics on the East End of the City is a top strategy to combat the lack of healthcare access for residents living in Ward 7. In addition, seeking to engage proven health care providers as we have achieved with Sibley and Johns Hopkins, which has located its oncology services to Unity Clinic in Parkside, is yet another approach.*

- 2. Lack of economic development amenities:*

*The inequitable distribution of retail, restaurants, and neighborhood job opportunities for D.C. residents must change. We cannot wait decades for this to change gradually.*



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*The Mayor and the Council must proactively focus attention and needed incentives to bring these amenities to Ward 7. I will continue to work vigorously to support economic development opportunities within the Ward and continue to pursue needed investments.*

*As the current Ward 7 Councilmember, I created the Ward 7 Economic Development Advisory Council (Ward 7 EDAC) to examine District-owned land and privately-owned large commercial parcels suitable for retail anchor tenants and develop a strategy for bringing specific types of retail to each site. The Ward 7 EDAC has begun to examine the best use of every piece of unused or underutilized commercial land in Ward 7. Together, we are working to develop a deliberate strategy to offer tax exemptions that attract the right mix of businesses in the right locations in Ward 7.*

### **3. Improving educational outcomes for our Ward 7 children and youth:**

*The achievement gap, which in large part is socioeconomically and racially based, is a major concern of mine and many residents of Ward 7. Bringing equity to all students is not a simple task. The achievement gap takes many forms, and there is no one-size fits all solution. However, by meeting the individual needs of our students, we can give them the boost to perform at the level we know they are capable of and work toward reducing the disparities. Education reform is working in the District, as enrollment continues to increase in both our traditional DCPS and in public charter schools. We must stay the course and continue to support our education leadership and encourage increased coordination and shared planning between DCPS and the charter sector.*

*It's also important to understand the role of the Council in overseeing education. Vigorous oversight is incredibly important, but the role of a legislator is to oversee, not to micromanage the educational policy decisions of the DCPS Chancellor. We need to ensure the Chancellor has the resources required to succeed. Council performance oversight hearings allow councilmembers and public witnesses to assess whether the Chancellor has been successful in meeting his or her goals and what changes should be recommended. The Chancellor and charter school leadership need our support to close the achievement gap and to continue to improve Ward 7 schools.*