

**Caribbean-American Political Action Committee (C-PAC)  
District of Columbia – 2016 Candidate Questionnaire**

*Please return the completed form via email to [HYPERLINK "mailto:cpac.dmv@gmail.com"](mailto:cpac.dmv@gmail.com) [cpac.dmv@gmail.com](mailto:cpac.dmv@gmail.com) by Friday, April 15, 2016. Responses will be shared with C-PAC membership.*

**Office Sought: Councilmember, Ward 7**

**Candidate's Name: Vincent C. Gray**

**Current Occupation: Former Mayor**

**Party: Democrat**

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- **What policy actions would you propose or support to improve the opportunities and rights of Caribbean immigrants in the District of Columbia?**

I support access to the educational benefits every other resident is afforded, especially providing additional financial resources for immigrant children to support their success. I also support access to health care resources for all residents regardless of their immigration status. Finally, I believe the best policy to support immigrants in the District, is to push for sensible immigration reform by the federal government.

- **How do you plan to help D.C.-based small and medium sized – especially Caribbean-owned -- businesses realize a greater share of D.C Government contracting opportunities?**

There are numerous existing options and funding for small business grants and technical assistance. Often, the hard part is connecting the business with the resource. I have supported the growth and improvement of DSLBD and look to them to help coordinate resources and outreach through their Small Business Resource Centers. In addition, I have supported the growth of the \$85,000 Great Streets Small Business Capital Grants from 1 corridor to 11 corridors. As mayor, my administration awarded \$2.1 million in grants to 29 recipients. Additionally, I will continue to support Community-Based Organizations such as the Washington Area Community Investment Fund, which provide key technical support to small businesses in the District, and are available to assist Caribbean owned businesses.

- **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?**

Ensuring equal access to quality education across the city, including the east end, has long been one of my top priorities in my years of service to the District. There are three areas on which we must focus to close the quality gap that exists in too many neighborhoods in the District. First, we have to make sure that our schools have adequate resources to meet the needs of their students. This means that schools with a high proportion of students living in poverty and

students who are academically off-track, have the resources they need to address these barriers in effective ways. Evidence-based strategies such as extending the school day and year, and providing critical support services to students, are examples of the type of interventions we can employ with additional resources.

Second, we have to intervene early to make sure we level the playing field for our students and set them on a path for success throughout their educational careers. In 2008, I lead the passage of the Pre-K Expansion Act, making us the nation's leader in early-childhood education. While other cities and states are still focused on pre-K quantity, we have shifted our focus to increasing quality. As mayor, I worked to ensure that our youngest children benefit from quality child care. We started the process of establishing an innovative community-based Quality Improvement system that will allow children and families to benefit from comprehensive child-development and family-support-engagement services. I believe the key to future success is a strong educational foundation; and universal early-childhood education provides the building blocks for our children and for families.

I heartily support increasing investments in the infant and toddler system towards creating a universal approach. In order to reach the most economically challenged families whose children may be at great risk, it would be wise to have a means tested system of eligibility, thus facilitating reaching the optimum number of children with the most formidable needs. This will bring us closer to having comprehensive early childhood education that reaches the maximum number of families and children in an economically integrated system. Ultimately, the goal should be to have a high quality system that includes:

- Prenatal care
- Infant and toddler services
- Pre-kindergarten for three and four year olds in public education schools.

The District has made enormous strides in achieving such a system that ultimately will reduce the achievement gap and will markedly improve the quality of life for the most challenged children. The reduction in children with special needs and in our juvenile justice systems, as well as, the number who suffer from under achievement will significantly contribute in human and financial terms to paying for the cost.

Third, we have to ensure that we maintain a culture of high expectations, and match that with rigorous and engaging school programs, in schools throughout the city. The District has made great strides towards raising the bar in terms of what we expect our students to know, and training our educators to meet these higher standards. We have to continue this work by ensuring that all of our schools have the types of course offerings and enrichment experiences that students in our most sought-after public schools have. As I did as Councilmember and Council Chairman, I would use the budget oversight powers of the Council to ensure that the District does not overspend on contracts and services in other agencies of the government, so that funds will be available for educational priorities.

Finally, the District has made enormous investments in modernizing our schools. I heartily supported the renovation and rebuilding our of schools as mayor and will enthusiastically continue to do so as Councilmember.

- **What efforts do you support to make higher education accessible and affordable to all D.C residents who aspire towards completing collegiate and advanced degrees?**

I believe all students who desire access to affordable higher education should have it. I support having a guidance counselor at all high schools, and mandating that they work with all high school seniors and their families to develop a “College Bound and Job Ready” personal action plan. I support developing and offering citywide senior summer and first year college preparation programs to high school seniors, at low or no cost, to bridge the gap between a high school diploma and what is required in the first year of college.

Finally, I believe it is important that we use our community resources and work with private institutions and the business community as resources.

- **How would you propose improving access to quality, affordable health care services to DC residents, especially those who reside East of the River?**

As the country moved into a new era of health-care delivery, I worked to keep our public health system on the cutting edge – ensuring that the highest percentage of residents possible not only have health insurance, but also access to high-quality care providers. Under my administration, the District moved aggressively to implement President Obama’s Affordable Care Act, setting up one of the nation’s most successful statewide insurance marketplaces, DC Health Link. DC Health Link has served more than 63,000 District residents, small business owners and employees who have chosen a health plan or qualified for Medicaid coverage.

As mayor, my administration took several major steps to reform longstanding problems with the District’s Medicaid program that contributed to taxpayer dollars –including dramatically reducing fraud in the Medicaid Personal Care Program and improving the way public providers billed Medicaid services – resulting in more than \$10 million reclaimed for the District from Medicaid over the last three years, with more savings expected in the future.

Further, as Mayor, I introduced and signed legislation that allowed all D.C. government employees to enjoy eight weeks of paid family leave, allowing new parents the opportunity to bond with their child and family members the ability to care for loved ones without worrying about leave time or whether they will have to forego paychecks. When I announced this new policy, I challenged the federal government and the city's private employers to similarly offer paid family leave. Currently, only 16 percent of state and local governments and 12 percent of private employers offer it. I believe paid family leave for employees is the right thing to do to show employees they are valued and respected.

The bill is currently being modified by the Council Chairman, who apparently is proposing 12 weeks as opposed to the 16 weeks that the current bill has in it, but I am in support of paid leave for all DC residents, whether government or private sector employees. As a councilmember, I will work to ensure there is compatibility between the time that government employees and private sector employees receive for paid family leave.

- **For many years the Caribbean Carnival was a fixture in the District of Columbia. Would you support the return of the Carnival to DC with financial support from the DC government?**

A's Councilmember, Council Chairman and Mayor, I heartily supported and participated in the Caribbean Carnival. As mayor, I worked hard to resolve outstanding financial issues. While Carnival organizers agreed to a plan to meet the outstanding financial obligations, the commitments were not fulfilled with thousands of dollars in outstanding debt not being liquidated. While I would like to see the return of the Carnival, there would have to be a plan developed and agreed upon concerning the outstanding debt and future support.

- **The City's Caribbean Community has consistently called for the creation of an Office of Caribbean-American Affairs in DC. Would you support the creation of such an office?**

Yes, I would support the creation of an Office of Caribbean-American affairs.