1. DC has a deep-seated problem with income and wealth inequality that falls along racial lines. Median income in Ward 8 is $39K versus $143K in Ward 3. Worst of all, there has been no significant progress in reducing inequality, and the growing wealth of the city is concentrated increasingly at the top. Is this a serious problem in your view, and if so, what is your most transformative proposal to deal with it?

The idea of equity and opportunity for all should not be radical, yet we are so far from equity that its achievement will be the most transformative thing our city has seen in decades. We have been on a path to making our city wealthy, and we have seen incredible success. However, with rising wealth has come rising inequality. Far too many of our residents have been left out of increasing opportunities and have not been able to share in the progress of our city. I know that with the right investments and focus, we can be a city that is not only wealthy but wealthy and just.

To get there, we need to transform the priorities of our government. Right now, the parts of DC government that build wealth and economic development work well, while the agencies meant to help everyday people get ahead do not. Agencies, like DCHA, DCRA, DCPS, and DOES face constant scandals, misuse of resources, and negligence because the mayor does not prioritize them. As your mayor, I will recalibrate our priorities to invest in and prioritize the policies and programs that help create justice and equality, especially in communities of color.

My plan to transform DC will begin with making sure our agencies are accessible and accountable to the people they serve. I will build a government rooted in transparency and integrity, not political patronage. We will recruit only the most dedicated public servants - not those with the most political connections. I will hold all of our agencies accountable to their missions and I will not be satisfied with a government that does the bare minimum for working families - I will ensure agencies meet the highest possible standards.

As a Councilmember, I have championed many transformative ideas, like restoring voting rights for all incarcerated residents, transforming older office buildings into workforce and
low-income housing, challenging the status quo on education, and developing the most progressive early childhood education agenda in the country. As your mayor, I will ensure our government is equipped to deliver on transformative proposals such as these to create affordable and middle-income housing, close the opportunity gap in our schools, and ensure all residents can work with dignity. Our government will become a system of equity, transparency, and opportunity, and we will be accountable.

2. DC residents of all races and ages share the view that the DC government needs to work better, and frustration with agencies and programs that are often ineffective and unresponsive, has only grown during the pandemic. Reforming DC government agencies is a long-term endeavor and one in which Mayors have struggled to succeed. Which three government agencies would you prioritize for reform in your first term, and how would those reforms benefit the lives of working families?

Across the government, I will bring in the best and brightest talent to help lead our government in a full transformation, and I will hold every agency director accountable. We will center agencies' efforts on providing opportunities for working people and families. While I will approach this as a full government mission, there are three agencies that will require special attention.

The first is DCPS. Education is the backbone of equity. Without improving education outcomes, we will never solve the problems of crime, poverty, or displacement. We are experiencing a crisis in education that the current administration refuses to acknowledge. The racial disparities in outcomes are stark. Only 40% of our youngest Black and brown students are reading at grade level. This is unacceptable. We need a mayor who will acknowledge our education crisis and take responsibility for addressing it. We need a mayor who will close the opportunity gap, retain talented teachers, listen to parents as key stakeholders, and rebuild the broken trust in our public schools. I hear far too many stories from parents who have to jump through countless hoops to get their children’s needs met. And too often, my DC Council colleagues and I have to intervene because the Mayor and DCPS will not listen to parents and teachers. This is not how we run or improve a public education system.
Robert White
Mayoral Candidate Questionnaire

Despite spending millions of dollars, we have not seen the outcomes from DOES that we should expect given the amount of money we pour into the agency. Too many residents want to work and have participated in one DOES program or another, but remain unemployed. This cycle breaks the spirit of residents who are struggling and perpetuates the vast wealth disparity in our city. We need to evaluate where programs are failing and ensure that the money going to DOES produces the results we need. As mayor, I will conduct a thorough, data-driven investigation to determine which programs are producing results and eliminate programs that are not successful. In addition, I will implement evidence-based best practices from around the country to make sure all our residents, particularly residents of color, are able to get a foothold in our economy.

Finally, we need to reform the agencies that are meant to address our affordable housing crisis to ensure they can meet the scale of the problem. So many of us were disturbed to learn that $82 million that was supposed to be used to provide housing to our poorest residents was instead misused by DCHD. While we are in the midst of an affordable housing crisis, there can be no excuse for this kind of negligence. We need to demand far more accountability from DCHD. The oversight role of the Council is compromised when the agency’s responses are intentionally vague or information is withheld for political reasons. In addition, we need to address the problems at DCHA which have led to abysmal public housing conditions. The people placed in leadership positions must be there because of their experience and dedication to serving District residents, not their political loyalty. Far too many families experience housing instability in our city and we must ensure that the agencies that are there to support them are well-run and equipped to address their needs.

3. Recently, several failures in the handling of programs intended to increase the amount of affordable, and especially deeply affordable, housing in the District have come to light. If elected, what goals would you establish for creating deeply affordable housing in all wards of the city and how would you hold your administration accountable for meeting those goals?

Of the over 16,000 units that have been built in the past couple of years, fewer than a quarter of them have been deeply affordable. We need to dramatically increase the number of deeply affordable units in all areas of our city and we can do so with concerted attention and effort to both building and preserving affordable units. We need to work with
developers to incentivize building not only studio and single bedroom units designed for transient young people but affordable, family-sized units so that native Washingtonians and long-time residents, as well as newcomers, are able to establish families and raise children in the district. We need to put our residents ahead of developers and ensure all Washingtonians have safe and stable housing.

As a Councilmember, I introduced innovative approaches to housing, including pushing DC government to work with office building owners who own older, vacant office buildings to convert them into affordable housing. I also wrote and passed a bill to add unprecedented transparency to economic development projects by requiring public reporting of promises made on the front end of projects that get public money, and reporting of the outcomes on affordable units created, local jobs, and economic impact on the back end. As Chair of the Committee on Government Operations and Facilities, I am pushing agencies to formally identify unneeded District-owned properties so that we can examine whether the buildings or land can be used for housing. As mayor, I will continue working with experts to come up with creative solutions and will move rapidly to implement these crucial strategies.

4. The DC Housing Authority board of commissioners continues to suffer from scandal and dysfunction, and the people who are most harmed by the dysfunction are public housing residents. What are your plans to create a better DCHA board?

When it comes to staffing the DCHA board, and all agency leadership, we need to appoint the most dedicated, experienced, and competent people to positions. That means we need to end the current practice of appointing people based on political loyalties. We need a DCHA Board composed of a diverse group of experts. While developers should be at the table, we need advocates and community members there too - especially community members who have been directly impacted by housing insecurity or homelessness.

I led the effort to increase the public housing maintenance fund to $50 million. With a diverse board focused solely on the mission of the agency and not distracted by politics, we will turn a corner in our service to public housing residents.
5. There is a highly charged debate about community safety. Some say the answer is to invest in more police. Others say we should address the root causes of violence by investing in housing, education and basic needs, as well as alternative approaches, such as violence interruption services. What policies or budget changes will you prioritize for the safety of DC residents?

People are dying needlessly in our streets from gun violence. These are mothers, fathers, friends, sisters, and brothers. Too often, children are dying from gun violence. We must treat this issue with the solemn sensitivity it deserves. The people who say that we need more police, and those who say we need to address the root causes of violence are asking for the same thing - to be safe in our city. Growing up in DC in the 80s and 90s, during the most violent period in our modern history, I know that more police is not a solution to crime because police respond to crime, they don't prevent crime.

Investing in the root causes of violence keeps people safer by actually reducing crime, and it is far more humane. We cannot continue the cycle of crime that comes from the over-incarceration of people of color. The punitive strategies we have been using for decades have not made us safer. People who have good jobs, safe housing, and the mental health resources they need generally do not commit a lot of violent crimes.

We need to invest in housing, education, and employment programs. We need to take a proactive approach to eliminate the conditions that lead to crime, such as unemployment, homelessness, mental health, and drug addiction. We also need to seriously expand our violence interruption efforts. We must professionalize, train and adequately compensate violence interrupters who are trusted community members and can help target the people most likely to become involved with violence get on a safer, more productive path.

Our police officers are also undeniably overworked and stretched too thin. The solution to this is not to keep pumping more and more taxpayer dollars into the police department. We have been doing this for years and we have not seen murders decrease. Our murder rates have followed national trends. Instead, we need to reduce the responsibilities of MPD officers by shifting the non-public safety responsibilities away from MPD so that they can focus on public safety. Mental health crises, noise complaints, and non-dangerous traffic violations are examples of issues currently in the MPD portfolio that do not need to be
handled by police who are not trained or equipped to best respond to these situations. We need to establish alternatives to the police and ensure the appropriate responders have the resources they need to step into these roles.

6. **Ranked Choice Voting (RCV) is becoming more popular as a solution to the problem of candidates being elected with less than majority support. RCV is effective in cities and states across the country, and has proven an effective tool for strengthening our democracy. Councilmember Christina Henderson has introduced an RCV bill (the VOICE Act) that has been gaining momentum. Do you plan to support the bill? If not, what are your concerns about the bill and can the bill be changed to address them?**

I am in favor of any measure that expands voting access. That’s why I was proud to introduce a first in the nation bill to restore voting rights to all incarcerated DC residents. I do have some concerns about RCV that remain. Historically, in the At-Large Council race where voters have two votes, there is a significant undervote, especially in the lower-income and predominantly Black wards, indicating a widespread practice of bullet voting. The question we have to answer is what happens to the integrity of our elections if our system relies broadly on people voting for multiple candidates in a jurisdiction where people show a historic propensity to bullet vote? I worry that the practice of bullet voting in DC may mean that RCV unintentionally limits our marginalized communities’ voting power. As anyone who knows me knows, I like to be deliberate and hear from as many experts and residents as I can before taking a formal stance on an issue. I am incredibly grateful to the many RCV advocates who have sat down with me to discuss this issue and share their perspectives, and I will continue to have these conversations in the upcoming months as I determine my ultimate stance on this issue.

7. **Most Washingtonians believe that "taxation without representation" is immoral. Yet “permanent residents” who make their homes in DC and pay the same taxes as citizens but do not have the right to vote. Ward 1 Councilmember Brianne Nadeau has introduced the Local Resident Voting Rights Act to grant those members of our community voting rights in local DC elections, such as Mayor, Council, School Board, and ANC. Do you support this bill?**
I was proud to co-introduce this legislation with Councilmember Nadeau. If the past six years have taught us anything it is that we cannot depend on the federal government to protect the many immigrants who are so vital to the District’s culture and community. During a tumultuous time, which hopefully we will not return to but need to be prepared to once again face, undocumented communities looked to our local DC government for safety and reassurance. It is crucial that these communities have a say in who these elected officials are and can ensure that elected officials are responsive to their unique needs.

8. **The revolving door between the Wilson building and corporate lobbying is a major source of corruption. If you are elected Mayor, will you commit to NOT work as a corporate lobbyist doing business with the DC government for at least 4 years after you leave office, and will you ask for the same commitment from your deputy mayors and other top appointees?**

As Mayor, I will hold myself and my team to the highest ethical standards and ensure that all of my deputy mayors and other top appointees are in their roles because of their dedication to public service. Furthermore, I will demand ethical and transparent decision-making from all leadership. As such, I believe a cooling-off period is appropriate to ensure all decisions are made in the best interests of DC residents. We need to ensure we are recruiting not only the best and the brightest for government leadership, but those who have a deep commitment to serving our residents.

9. **How do you envision the newly formed Executive Office of Racial Equity functioning to ensure that city policies and actions both do NO harm to members of Black and brown communities AND increase racial equity in all wards of the city?**

Under my administration, the Executive Office of Racial Equality will be treated as the crucial tool that it is and their recommendations will be given significant weight. Equity has to be at the center of all government decisions. While many organizations and governments have begun talking about racial equity over the past several years, too many have stopped short of taking action. It is not enough to talk about racial equity. We must make it a key principle of our city. I look forward to working with EORE to ensure that no policies
inadvertently exacerbate racial inequality. Unfortunately, many policies in the last few decades that seemed like good ideas for development have had unintended consequences for communities of color. I will lean heavily on EORE to ensure that my decisions do not cause harm to Black and Brown communities, and I will actively work to address existing racial inequality.