

2009 SEATTLE CANDIDATES SURVEY ON PUBLIC SAFETY & CRIMINAL JUSTICE

*Accompanying "Protect and Serve?" Candidates' Forum on September 22, 2009.
Partial list of sponsoring organizations below.**

*Candidates: Please return by September 18, 2009 to Sheri Day at
sday@afsc.org to ensure responses are included in mailing to
sponsoring organizations' membership and contact lists.*

RACIAL DISPARITY

A. General

1. Community members have worked with the city of Seattle and King County for several years to address racial disparity across systems. What is your commitment to enhancing that work? I have an ongoing commitment to addressing racial disparity in public safety, health, and other issues to make the City a better place for all of us. My commitment is based on my political philosophy, and is also deeply personal. My son, who is African-American, has been treated in ways that I believe would have been different if he had not been a person of color. On one occasion he was reported as being a "proowler" and taken into custody despite having committed no crime. On another occasion he was treated as being in the wrong in a dispute which was a misunderstanding, and the other party was treated with more respect despite making racist statements and allegations.

2. Seattle and King County both have "initiatives" to address racial disparities. What if anything should be done to increase the effectiveness of these initiatives and their accountability to the most affected communities? While the City's Race and Social Justice initiative is a very good approach to dealing with such issues, it has been focused largely on the City's internal work, and has not yet been very interactive with communities outside the City family. I will encourage continuation of this initiative and broadening its scope to reach out, engage, and address the issues in the most affected communities. We must also continue to be vigilant to watch for any evidence of racial profiling and to monitor and ensure that policies are enforced as they are designed to be. I would support investigation of such cases by the OPA/Auditor system and full reports to the Council so that we can design new legislation as needed.

* Sponsors include: African Descent Youth Affairs (ADYA) • African Youth United (AYU) • American Civil Liberties Union (ACLU) of Washington • American Friends Service Committee (AFSC) – Pacific Northwest Region • Black Prisoners' Caucus (BPC) • Coalition to Undo Racism Everywhere (CURE) • Comité Pro-Amnistía y Justicia Social • Communities Uniting Rainier Beach (CURB) • Corrections Connection • FAVOR • Horn of Africa • Intra-Afrikan Konnection • Legacy of Equality, Leadership & Organizing (LELO) • Making a Difference (MAD) • Minority Executive Directors' Coalition (MEDC) • National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP) – Seattle Chapter King County Branch • One Voice • People of Color Against Aids Network (POCAAN) • Peoples' Institute for Survival & Beyond (PINW) Northwest • Rainier Vista Boys and Girls Club • Real Change • Somali Community Services of Seattle • The Defender Association/Racial Disparity Project (RDP) • Village of Hope

3. How, if at all, do you believe that racial disparity is reflected in our allocation of resources among law enforcement, public health and education, access to health care and community support (i.e. employment services and training, housing, etc.)? It is always much easier to find funding for law enforcement than for human services and community based programs. That is really the critical issue.

4. Do you think that public safety definitions and expectations are influenced by race and class? If so, how? Yes. Unless we consciously apply an antiracism analysis and approach, institutionalized racism means that everything that our institutions create is influenced by race and class.

5. How, if at all, do you believe that racial bias is manifested in our local criminal justice system? Racial bias is generally manifested in the form of institutional racism – the presence of white privilege and the accompanying paradigms and systemic factors that make it more likely that bias will be present in the actions of individuals and institutions within the criminal justice system.

6. Please provide at least one specific example of an issue you would work to address if elected or re-elected concerning racial disparity in the criminal justice system. Please describe the steps you would take to address the issue(s). On the local level, we must ensure that the Racial Profiling Accountability Plan for the Seattle Police Department is monitored and enforced. We must also track the success of the video cameras in police cars and ensure that the Department continues and expands its meetings with representatives of communities of color and immigrant communities. I think it is also important that we exercise leadership on the national level, lobbying for the End Racial Profiling Bill which would set national standards and provide enforcement mechanisms for them. I recognize that this is an uphill battle, but only if we keep pushing will we eventually succeed.

B. Drug Enforcement

1. Government surveys, population studies, and arrest statistics consistently demonstrate that our drug laws are disproportionately enforced against people of color despite roughly equal rates of drug involvement across races and ethnicities. What, if anything, should be done by local government about racial disparity in drug enforcement? We should monitor this closely and ensure that policies are adopted by the Police Department to prevent this from occurring. In the long run, only wholesale reform of the drug laws (such as equalizing the penalties for cocaine use regardless of the form and decriminalizing the possession of personal use amounts of most drugs) along with progressive policies to assist drug users in returning to society will deal with the problematic drug enforcement situation.

C. Obstructing

1. The past few years have seen several publicized incidents in which people who questioned the way police officers were handling a situation were arrested for

obstructing an officer. Questioning an officer is protected by the First Amendment. In cases where the person arrested for obstructing was doing nothing threatening or dangerous what, if anything, would you do as an elected official to address this issue? This is an issue for the courts to address, and we should hold them accountable for ensuring that obstruction is not being used improperly.

IMMIGRATION & CUSTOMS ENFORCEMENT (I.C.E.) & LOCAL AGENCIES

A. "Don't Ask"

In 2003, Seattle adopted an ordinance providing that "unless otherwise required by law or by court order, no Seattle City officer or employee shall inquire into the immigration status of any person, or engage in activities designed to ascertain the immigration status of any person."

1. [For Seattle candidates] Do you support maintaining this policy? Why or why not? Yes. Local governments should not be enforcing immigration laws. Our police should not be placed in a position of authority over an issue that is not within their jurisdiction. Requiring local police to deal with these issues may ultimately increase crimes, as immigrants, even those legally in the country, may be afraid to call for police assistance for fear of this leading to an immigration problem.

2. [For King County Executive candidates] Do you support King County adopting a similar "don't ask" policy? Why or why not?

B. I.C.E. and local justice system agencies

1. If after your election or re-election, it came to light that I.C.E. was sending agents to Seattle Municipal Court [for Seattle candidates]/King County District and Superior Court [for King County Executive candidates], identifying defendants appearing with interpreters, and then conducting checks on the immigration status of those defendants -- what, if any, response would you make to that situation? I'm not sure what authority we would have to address this issue, but I would ask our DC representatives to intervene to prevent such activities.

JAIL EXPANSION

A. General

1. Do you believe that, locally, we have too many people in jail, too few, or just about the right proportion for a community of our size? We have a smaller proportion than most US communities, but the US as a whole has relied too heavily on jails to remedy social problems and reduce crimes. There are better alternatives for many offenders, and even for those for whom punishment is indicated there is ample evidence that swift sentencing is a better deterrent than long sentencing.

B. Seattle/Northeast Cities Municipal Jail project

King County is responsible for all in-custody felony defendants and misdemeanor defendants from unincorporated King County. Seattle and other cities are responsible for their own in-custody misdemeanor defendants.

New projections show that the jail capacity needed by King County, Seattle and other cities in north and east King County combined could be accommodated by the King County jail system, if a long-planned expansion to the Regional Justice Center in Kent were completed by 2016. The same figures show, however, that King County would not need to expand the RJC to meet its own jail needs.

1. If Seattle's jail needs can be met either by building a Municipal Jail (alone or with other cities), or by contracting with King County for jail services, which is preferable? (In other words, all other things being equal, do you support continuation of a regional jail system or do you support Seattle operating its own jail?) King County should be the regional provider of jail services, and a cooperative agreement should be developed that makes that possible.

2. Assuming that King County would expand the RJC in Kent only to accommodate Seattle and other cities' jail needs for misdemeanor defendants, why would doing so be in King County's interest, and what sort of agreement should be reached between Seattle and King County? I am not convinced that expansion is needed if other alternatives to incarceration are developed.

COMMUNITY-BASED DIVERSION OPTIONS

A. General

1. Do you support the concept of allowing law enforcement, using clear criteria, to divert some individuals who could be arrested for certain crimes to a well-funded community-based intervention program rather than booking them into jail and referring them for prosecution? Yes.

B. Funding for diversion strategies

1. Do you believe it would be important for a community-based diversion program to have funding to provide rental assistance or supportive housing, drug, alcohol or mental health treatment, assist with tuition, medical needs, child care and transportation, to participants who are trying to leave the drug economy or prostitution behind? Of course, that is the only way that people will be able to get out of the vicious cycle that they are in.

2. Given the pressures on the City of Seattle and King County general funds, what strategies can you envision for funding such community-based interventions as an alternative to the traditional justice system? The fact is that only funding such

preventive strategies will be effective in the long run in reducing the risks of criminal behavior. Therefore, an investment in these programs will generate much greater savings in the future. We must consider this as a basic social justice/human services/public safety priority.

3. How can the city and county ensure real support in the face of the reduction of DASA and GAU funds at the state level that have effectively reduced the number of treatment options? In the current financial situation, the City will not be able to fully replace the human service programs that are being jettisoned by other levels of government. Nor should we have to accept the responsibility for areas that should, by right, be funded by other levels of government. We are facing significant budget problems of our own, but I am committed to continuing all of our human service programs without reductions, and to looking for savings in other areas of the budget that might be able to address a few of the most urgent human service priorities.

4. What do you feel is needed for successful re-entry into the community after incarceration? What role should local government play? Access to job training, education, and employment, as well as reintegration into the community. Local government can assist with this through programs such as the Seattle Jobs Initiative and partnerships with community colleges, labor unions, and vocational institutions. Reintegration is a key responsibility of community based organizations. Government can encourage this, but the most critical work must be done by families, churches, neighbors, and others who can bring people back into supportive relationships.

YOUTH VIOLENCE

A. General

1. What do you feel diminishes the safety of youth in our communities? I believe that we must treat youth as 'at-strength' rather than 'at-risk'. We can only make our youth truly safe if they are both valued and provided the resources and guidance needed to succeed. There are, of course, many different issues that diminish safety, such as the presence of guns, the erratic results of the war on drugs, and the inadequacies of our education system, and we must act on all of those. But above all we must work with youth, not act on them or for them.

2. What do you see as the role of local government in ensuring the safety and welfare of our youth? Public safety is the critical underpinning for all of our community endeavors. A community that lives in fear cannot effectively address other concerns. Local government must work with schools, community based organizations, business, and community members to ensure the safety and welfare of our youth.

B. Seattle Youth Violence Prevention Initiative

1. What are your thoughts on the current use of city [county, for Executive candidates] funding in addressing youth violence prevention? What if any changes would you pursue? The Council overhauled the proposed youth violence prevention initiative to ensure more accountability and the use of models that have been proven to be effective in other jurisdictions. It is too early to tell if the current initiative will be effective. However, my main concern with it is that it is heavily focused on intervention in early ages; while this has been demonstrated to be effective in the long run, it does not adequately address the older teens who are already in the gang/violence system, and who will continue to pose a danger to others and to their own long run survival unless we can find ways to successfully divert them from their current patterns through education and employment initiatives.

For the forum, please be prepared to spend 3 minutes presenting your priorities relating to the issues addressed in this questionnaire. There will be a period of Questions and Answers for the community at the event as well.

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