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Councilman, Memphis City Council District 3

Coalition for a Better Memphis Candidate Questionnaire Memphis City Council

1. Please describe your background and your qualifications for this position? What experiences caused you to run for this office? What unique qualities would you bring to this position and what differentiates you from other candidates in your race.
 - **B.A. Criminal Justice, The University of Memphis**
 - **20 years of service to and knowledge of local, state and federal government**
 - **Director of Shelby County District Attorney's Mentoring Program for Truant Middle Schools**
 - **Co-coordinator of the National Campaign to Stop Violence Program " Do the Write Thing Challenge"**
 - **Past Chairman, Citizens Law Enforcement Review Board**
 - **Past Chairman, Memphis Area Neighborhood Watch**
 - **Past President, University of Memphis Rebounders**
 - **Past President Memphis Alumni Chapter of Phi Beta Sigma Fraternity**
 - **Past Co-Chair National Convention Phi Beta Sigma Fraternity Memphis 2003**
 - **Leadership Memphis Graduate Class of 1999**
 - **Graduate Nexus Leadership Institute Class of 2006**
 - **Board Member Memphis Athletic Ministries**
 - **Community Advisory Board Member Methodist Health Care South**
 - **Past Moderator, Mississippi Boulevard Christian Church**
 - **President, National Convocation, Christian Church Disciples of Christ**
 - **Please see detailed Resume Attached**

There are many important reasons for my running for City Council. As demonstrated above, I have a history of business, community and civic leadership that gives me a strong depth of experience in representing others. I have worked with others for common interest/goals, and have made tough decisions for the sake of growth and goal achievement, which differentiates me from the other candidates.

Another important reason is for the future of our children. Our children need to see elected leadership as role models- people who are committed to serving the best interest of the community. I believe also that my commitment to my God and the faith community requires me to serve when a need is identified.

2. What is my vision for the City? How would I use this office to achieve that vision?

My vision for Memphis is deeply rooted in the fact that I have lived here my entire life, attended school here and I am now raising my family here. I still consider Memphis to be one of the best places in the Country to live. We only have to believe and trust in one another. Belief and trust only occur when people share of themselves, their personal experiences and honestly work with each other to achieve one common goal. I believe that Memphis can become a safe place for our families, provide quality education of our children, support a plan to increase minority business participation and development and merge common public services.

As the Councilman from District 3, I use this office to promote communication among all the stakeholders. An example of this type of communication is the partnership between the Whitehaven residents and all of the Whitehaven business community.

3. How do I plan on insuring that there is diversity represented in the development of public policy and government?

All my life I have been a part of diverse communities realizing that different ideas and philosophies are essential to a healthy community. I have been very blessed to have developed and sustained personal relationships with a diverse group of people through my service to the University of Memphis Rebounders and Memphis Area Neighborhood Watch. It is important to bring different perspectives with regards to race, age, gender and socio-economic backgrounds to the table to help resolve issues our community faces. I insure diversity by insisting that the Council consider the opinions of diverse group of our citizenry. In order to ensure diversity in development of public policy and government, communication and accessibility is required. I have established open lines of communication for members representing diverse communities of Memphis. We have also developed a cooperative relationship on the Council that allows us to understand our common goals and focus on implementing them.

4. What are the three greatest issues facing the City of Memphis today and during the future?

The three greatest issues facing the City of Memphis today and during the future are: (1) continuing to provide for public safety, (2) making sure that the extra funding the citizens of Memphis provides on education is worth the investment and (3) creating a sustainable plan that will increase the participation of African American and minority owned businesses.

The Memphis City Council during my tenure has made the decision to ensure that all Memphians are safe and able to work and live in their respective communities without fear of violence or becoming a victim of a crime. That means continued investment in local law enforcement and provide the necessary resources and materials to contain and apprehend those individuals who do nothing but commit crimes in our city. That population makes up about 25 percent of the criminal population.

Second, this Council should focus on realizing that our children are not graduating from high school. (Memphis City School data report 2009.) We must realize that some of our children will not attend college, but that does not mean they cannot become contributing members of the Memphis community. The Council should continue to work with the Memphis City School Board to ensure vocational and technical school options as well as college preparatory programs for our children. Also, because the Courts have ruled that the citizens must continue our funding, the Council should hold accountable the Board to make sure that our tax dollars are being used wisely.

Third, the Council should address and consider how contracts are distributed to firms. Memphis is a place with extreme poverty. The Council should engage the Administration to see how we can encourage African American and women owned businesses to increase their share of contracts. This alone, would help reduce the huge disparity that exists between companies doing well in our city and those that are not. This will also help reduce the number of families in our city that live at or below the poverty level. This would take an enormous amount of courage from the Council but in order for us to move forward as a community and become the City all of us wants, these steps will have to take place.

I have spoken with the citizens of District 3 and throughout the city, these are the concerns I hear time and time again. I realize that in order to effectively address these issues, public trust in elected officials must continue to be re-established. The future of Memphis rests upon electing individuals who have a vision for our City and who are committed to its growth and development.

What role should the City of Memphis government play in promoting the economic development for the community? What specific initiatives or actions would you promote and/or support?

The role of the City of Memphis in promoting economic development is vital!! There should be a shared responsibility among City leaders, developers and business owners. It is imperative that we bring the benefits of economic development to all Memphians. By this, the City should ensure that no particular area or community shoulder the burden of other communities receiving benefits. The role of the City should also be one of maintaining accountability. If economic development has been promised or promoted, there should be definitive measurements and results to demonstrate those promises and benefits. Our case in point is the new businesses relocating to Memphis and over 2500 new jobs that are coming long with them. Without the commitment from the Mayor and the City Council, none of these would have happened.

5. How would you strengthen and support neighborhoods that are within the urban core and what barriers to community redevelopment do you see in these areas today? How do you propose to address the current blight in many of these areas?

To begin to strengthen and support neighborhoods within the urban core, we have created forums and opportunities for communication. I have gone to many of the neighborhood associations in my District and asked what they needed or wanted done. Many of them responded that they want to live in communities that are safe, have good schools and provide amenities and opportunities for their families. With this in mind, I have proposed funding to neighborhoods to develop effective neighborhood watch groups. When I was President of that organization, we established neighborhood grants that would empower neighbors to take control of their neighborhoods. Interaction was encouraged such that neighbors met regularly and came to know one another. Neighborhoods such as the Barton Heights Community in Southwest Memphis, Old Hickory Hills in Whitehaven, and Red Oaks near the airport and many others have flourished and continue to do so as a result of this initiative.

This was made possible through funding by the County government. As Councilman, I have accomplished by appropriating funds from the Red Light Camera Project to be directed to re-establish the Memphis Area Neighborhood Watch and provide funds for neighborhoods to do just what they want.

Some barriers I see are the continuing deterioration of our neighborhoods and crime. Many neighborhoods are declining because of blight- run down or abandoned homes and overall neglect. We have increased funding for code enforcement. We have sued owners of properties under the Neighborhood Preservation Act to have these owners bring their properties into code or risk having an Environmental Court order them to do so. My District was the first to accomplish this act, when we sued the Marina Cove Apartment owners and now have this property sold to new owners who are developing this property into a major urban community.

6. What do I regard as the greatest obstacle or barrier to growth in the City today?

The greatest obstacle or barrier to growth in the City today is still the lack of an economic base. This results from the eroding tax base and the fact that the majority of City services are funded through property taxes. This encourages many homeowners to move to the suburban parts of our community. One could also consider the many levels of government, public safety and the quality of our educational system as other barriers

7. What is the role of the City Council? What do you think about the relationship between the Council and the City Mayor: as well as other elected or appointed bodies, such as: Shelby County Commissioners, State of Tennessee Shelby Delegation, MLGW, Greater Memphis Chamber, Downtown Memphis Commission, etc?

The role of the City Council is to pass laws and appropriate funding to the various City Divisions to run our city. The Mayor carries out these appropriations. The Council oversees these appropriations to ensure that the citizens are being served exactly as these appropriations were intended. The role Council is to be the legislative body of the City Memphis. This includes addressing issues that impact quality of life.

I think the relationship between the Mayor and the City Council is a great one. While we may not agree on every single we understand that our relationship must be one that serves the City of Memphis. Our relationship with other appointed and elected bodies is the same. Our goal is to ensure that Memphis receives all the benefit from our work even though we may disagree on the way we get there or even who we associate with along the way.

9. With regard to the crime rate, what current strategies would you support and what changes would you propose?

I have seen how crime and the effects of crime can create dissension between neighborhoods, hostility towards its people and the decline of City revenue. It is no secret that Memphis has some of the most dangerous neighborhoods in America making it one of the most dangerous cities in America. It is the duty of this city's leadership both elected and non-elected to bring forth strategies and solutions to this very important issue. We are proposing several strategies that we believe will be helpful in addressing these concerns.

First we will ask that Memphis make a commitment to ensuring the safety of all its citizens and businesses. This means providing the necessary resources to local law enforcement to apprehend those individuals in our city who make crime a way of life. The Memphis Police department must have the funding to enhance its ability to deter and apprehend those persons willing to commit crimes in our community.

Second, we must continue addressing the growing truancy problem within Memphis City Schools. On any given day roughly 25 percent of all juvenile crime is being committed between the hours of 7am and 3:30pm. By definition these students are truant or suspended from school. We propose that we institute a school hour curfew. Those students that are not in school and do not have a valid reason for not being in school should be picked up, taken to a facility. Parents would be contacted and make themselves available to discuss why their child is not in school. This would create a greater accountability among parents and within the Memphis City School system. Further, this will help reduce potential home burglaries and vandalism as well as reducing the number of students that would engage in gang activity or be susceptible to gang recruitment.

Third, we would propose that we increase funding for community policing. This specialized project was a useful tool in reducing crime in neighborhoods. The officers that patrolled areas in community policing reported an overwhelming acceptance and partnership from neighborhood stakeholders. This allowed officers to build relationships and be present in communities that needed them the most.

Some of the strategies I mention were included in the first Operation Safe Community plan developed by the District Attorney's Office, the United States Attorney's Office, Memphis Tomorrow and many others. These are all still a comprehensive strategy to make Memphis one of the safest communities through 2015.

10. Would you be willing to submit to a background check and then allow the results to be published?

By the very nature of my employment, I am already subjected to criminal background checks. So I say yes.

11. Do you support the local ethics ordinance? Is the Ordinance sufficient, and if not, what changes would you recommend?

Yes, I support the local ethics Ordinance. At its core, I would think that the Ordinance is sufficient. I would modify it a little to allow the council to appoint a temporary member once a Member has been suspended. After we had one of our colleagues to get suspended, we found ourselves needing that thirteenth member on some very important matters.

12. What are your ideas with regards to the City's responsibility for funding Memphis City Schools?

Now that the Tennessee Supreme Court has mandated that the citizens of Memphis continue funding Memphis City Schools I consider this a moot point. But since you asked, I still think this is a mandate that our citizens should not have to endure. We already contribute to MCS through our county taxes like all other municipalities in Shelby County. To force Memphis to pay extra seems a little bit unconstitutional. But, as I said before, since the Supreme Court says we must, then as a Council Member I will do all I can to make sure that MCS funding is in the budget and hopefully not have to tax our citizens too much to make that happen.

13. What are the Council's responsibilities for making the City contract bidding process more equitable and transparent?

The Council responsibility lies in the form of ensuring that all companies and businesses that wish to bid on contract have a fair chance to do so. This means, if we have to break up larger contracts to afford opportunities for smaller companies we should do so. This also means making sure that when contracts are awarded that those contracts be in such a way that companies are held accountable and projects are completed on time and within budget. That is what we did as Chairman of the Council utilizing the Tiger Lane Project. We broke the larger contracts into several parts thereby allowing a larger number of companies to bid and receive contracts therefore increasing the participation and having a greater accountability and transparency.