

Coalition for a Better Memphis Candidate Questionnaire Memphis City Council

Janis Fullilove – Dist. 8 Pos. 2

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?

I have served on the Memphis City Council for four years, and during those four years I have sponsored many Resolutions and Ordinances.

The Utility Assistance Program that would provide citizens struggling, to pay their utility bills... This includes Head of household and those who are disabled, along with women with children, I also, introduced and Ordinance Prohibiting Unfair Discrimination in City Hiring Policies against Persons Convicted of at least one felony: Ban the Box. Our mission was to assist those who wanted to become productive citizens in Memphis, by allowing them to seek employment, in areas, in which they were skilled. I also sponsored and lobbied for a Resolution to support the inclusion of a Non Discrimination Ordinance in all city contracts for services or use of city facilities and the City for Lesbian, Homosexuals, Transgendered individuals, to be incorporated within the Personnel Manual; I was also worked very diligently with residents in the South Memphis area in which I was reared, in order to revitalize the area, that was once a productive community: I along, with Councilman Harold Collins, also sponsored the City of Memphis Suit Against Property Owners who had abandoned their property resulting in blight in the African American Community:

In collaboration with, the Human Resources Director, Quentin Robinson, I sponsored a Resolution, creating, permanent part time positions in city government, instead of temporary positions, which would save the citizens of Memphis, millions of dollars: I also called for an audit of the Memphis Police Department; along with calling for action that would eliminate Colonel positions and go back to the previous administration, that would

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save millions of dollars for the citizens of this wonderful city. Because there are so many felons in the city, introduced a Resolution that was passed, banning the Box on employment applications that would could give ex felons an opportunity to apply for positions that they would have skills allowing them to compete, as well as, become productive citizens if the city of Memphis. I worked with the Memphis Chamber of Commerce on Pilots programs to attract more businesses into the city, offering them incentives, with the hopes of hiring more local individuals to reduce the high unemployment rate.

I decided years ago to run for office, after listening to the complaints and the voices that were silenced within the Memphis Community. As a former talk show host and television personality, I came across a cross section of individuals, from the business community to the homeless, who shared their views on what they would like the city of Memphis to become. Their cries, and concerns, led me to seek office to become a servant unto them.

I bring a spirit of fairness, compassion and vision to this office. I know the work that I have done in these last four years is not complete. I know that there are seniors out there, who are hurting because of what is not being made available to them, and someone must be their voice, and I try hard at being that voice. I understand that affordable housing is needed in the North and South Memphis communities and that is work that I am currently working on and would like to see that continue. I look at the infant mortality rate in certain zip codes and understand that community clinics must be made available to young women who otherwise would not see a doctor. I would like to make that a reality. There is so much work to be done here in the city of Memphis. I would like to make possible those individuals who work outside of the city, but don't pay taxes, pay. It's not responsible government that continues to ride the backs of its constituency. There must be mechanisms put in place that those who work here and live outside of Shelby County contribute to this tax base, I am working to make that a possibility.

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2. What is your vision for the City? How would you use this office to achieve the vision?

Cities and towns across the country are embracing smart growth as a better solution to meet the needs of their growing populations. Smart growth principles accommodate growth and development while saving open space, revitalizing neighborhoods and helping cool the planet. Planning and design strategies

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that support the development of urban community gardens as sustainable places for education and recreation

- Approaches to design processes, construction, and stewardship that utilize volunteer and community participation and create a sense of community

- Programs that enable gardens to serve as a resource for social justice for low income and minority communities, immigrants, and seniors

- Opportunities to develop active-living frameworks by strategically locating community gardens and linking them with other forms of recreation and open space as part of pedestrian-accessible networks.

I would use the office of the council, as I have these last four years, creating partnerships with business, community and church groups to work on projects for the betterment of all the citizens of Memphis.

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3. How do you plan on insuring that there is diversity, (including race, age, gender and socio-economic) represented in the development of public policy and government?

As a member of the National League of Cities, and representation for Arkansas and Tennessee with The National Black Elected Officials, through many classes at various conferences hosted by NLC, I have gained tremendous insight into what other cities are doing to create a diverse community and government.

The first southern city to hang a sign marking its formal participation in NLC was Little Rock Arkansas. Little Rock has worked diligently to create an inclusive community over the past fifteen years. Since its inception, more than 60 communities around the country have joined NLC's partnership working towards inclusive communities. The goal of the NLC program is not only to celebrate and honor diversity in communities across the country, but also to encourage citizen participation and involvement in local government.

The concept of inclusiveness not only relates to race and ethnicity, but also encompasses age, culture, disability, and even income level. The program seeks to foster an attitude of acceptance, promote justice among all citizens, and support inclusionary zoning.

To help encourage participation in the program, the National League of Cities provides a variety of tools and resources on its web site.

I was recently was asked by TEP, the Tennessee Equality Project, if I believed that, issues affecting the gay community should become part of the Multicultural Division of City government. While I know many would frown upon this, we observe Ramadan, Kwanzaa and other celebrations, along with others' cultures, why should people learn to accept others, that reside within the city of Memphis. We are a diverse city, and one is never too old to learn, though people can embrace that which they choose to embrace.

I am not suggesting that it will be an easy task. Nationally, other cities are focused on doing the same. However, if you don't try you will never succeed. And all people regardless of their race, nationality, age, socio-economic background, should be made to feel

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belonged in the city in which they reside. Many of the Ordinances and Resolutions that have been presented, by me, and others on the council are doing just that, making people feel included in public policy. We still have a long way to go, but we are heading in the right direction.

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

I believe the three greatest issues NOW facing the city is loss of revenue, crime and economic development.

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5. 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?

First, the city is giving away the pie so to speak. It's ok to offer businesses tax incentives, but not at the expense of the taxpayers. Take for example Electrolux. The city signed a contract with the company, which will spend 190 million dollars to build the plant that they claim will hire almost twelve hundred workers. However, while the city, gave them incentives to move here, along with the State of Tennessee, the contract that was signed said nothing about using local labor or either training locals to work in the plant. There was a payment in lieu of tax agreement given to the company. Many of their employees will come from their company in Quebec, and not from locals who are in desperate need of employment. Our tax base continues to decline as people are moving out of the city, because of blight, crime, higher taxes, and moving into other areas, Southaven, Olive Branch and other areas, because of low taxes and better schools, and little or no crime, in comparison to Memphis.

While we, the city, are elated that companies move here, and we offer them Pilots, we, the city, should also make sure that there is a contractual agreement, that these companies hire a percentage of Memphians, and Shelby Countians, and train these individuals if necessary.

The Obama Administration launched Strong Cities, Strong Communities, and a new and pilot initiative to strengthen local capacity and spark economic growth in local communities while ensuring taxpayer dollars are used wisely and efficiently. There were six cities selected, and Memphis was amongst them. There will be teams that will work with our government, the private sector, and other entities, to use federal monies to support the projects that will be done on a local level, which will encourage economic development. I certainly support this effort on behalf of the Federal government. It will be a boost, I believe, to our economy

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6. How would you strengthen and support existing 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?

As stated, earlier, I worked for more than a year and a half with The University of Memphis, St. Andrew A.M. E. church, and residents of South Memphis, to revitalize, that area, that was at one time, thriving and a place of pride for its residents. Out of that collaboration, came the South Memphis Revitalization Project, which will rebuild the area, with affordable homes, community clinics, neighborhood parks and small malls for businesses to move back into the area. I along, with Councilman Harold Collins, also sponsored the City of Memphis Suit Against Property Owners who had abandoned their property resulting in blight in the African American Community. With this particular Initiative Landlords, absentee or not, have a certain amount of time to clean up their property face heavy fines and even face criminal charges.

I firmly believe that if people are proud of where they live they will take care of where they live. Affordable housing, not projects are what's needed in all impoverished communities, and we have many. I believe in community gardens where people can take pride in growing their own vegetables, community policing, where people can feel safe within the confines of their community. Community parks for children and families to gather.

- I believe the barriers are realtors who are unwilling to go into crack infested neighborhoods and rebuild as they did within the Uptown. But it's going to take that type of commitment from government and realtors to do what many believe is the impossible.

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

The fact that our tax base is dwindling and that there is no new revenue being generated. You cannot continue to tax the citizens of Memphis in order to balance a budget but there must be visionaries willing to look outside the box, so to speak, to create money making venues.

Our city doesn't appear to have long range plans on what to do with our great river. While attending a conference, NLC, in San Antonio last year, I saw what government had done with their river. It was absolutely fabulous. Many of the visitors, me included, were awe struck how the river was utilized near the Convention Center and in the downtown area. There needs to be some marketable plan to utilize the Mississippi River to the best of its ability. While Germantown and Collierville have plans for its architectural structures, the city of Memphis does not. Our City Planners need to be visionary, not just when it comes to Title VI monies from the Federal Government.

Government should always encourage the opinions of its citizenry on what they would like to see within the city proper.

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8. 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 County Delegation, MLGW, Greater Memphis Chamber, Downtown Memphis Commission, etc.

The City Council is the legislative branch of government. It carries out duties in accordance with the city's charter, and the laws of the state, and is primarily responsible for making laws which govern the City of Memphis. The Council proposes, debates, and votes on legislation governing and/or affecting the city. Our body also approves appointments as provided by the Charter, regulates revenues and expenditures, incurs debt, and approves the final operating and capital budgets for the city. The Council is responsible for the introduction of legislation generated by the administrative branch of city government. As a legislative body we may also introduce legislation generated by individual Council Members or the Council as a body.

While no one agrees on everything, all the time, I must say we have an amicable relationship with the Office of the Mayor, the Shelby County Delegation, along with the County Commissioners. As Chairwoman of MLGW, I have had heated debates with President Collins, however, those debates have led to policy changes within MLGW, for the betterment of the citizens of Memphis. There have been no problems with the Chamber; however, there have been with the Center City Commission when it came to the city's homeless population. Again, that disagreement was worked out, and we are amicable.

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

I am willing to stand behind the new Police Director Tony Armstrong, because he, along with his staff, has the expertise in policing, I don't.

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

Yes, my life is public already.

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

Yes, I do support the local ethics ordinance.

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

I believe, and my public stance is well known, that Shelby County should be the sole source of funding the Memphis City Schools. The citizens of Memphis are being doubled taxed, and it's unfair.

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

The mayor is the sole contracting authority for the City of Memphis, however, I do believe when contracting out certain city services comes before us, that we need to have an understanding as to why, the cost savings to the city and how it will affect the residents of the city of Memphis.

When RFPs' are sent out, whether by the council, or other divisions of city government, the council is always apprised of what's taking place, how long it will take place, and whether or not there is an appeal regarding the bid. Transparency in that area is not a problem.