

Female Speaker 1: Julie Zauzmer Weil

Female Speaker 2: Cecily Montgomery

Male Speaker 1: Nate Fleming

Male Speaker 2: Dexter Williams

Female Speaker 3: Lisa Gore

Female Speaker 4: Anita Bonds

[O/V]: Overlapping Voices

[U/A]: Unintelligible audio

[START RECORDING [DC At-Large Member of the Council Primary Debate Hosted by the Office of Campaign Finance]]

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Julie Zauzmer Weil: Good evening and welcome to the final debate hosted by the DC Office of Campaign Finance. I'm Julie Zauzmer Weil. I'm a DC government reporter

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Julie Zauzmer Weil: for The Washington Post and I will serve as the moderator for tonight's debate. Tonight, we will hear from four candidates competing for the office of At-Large member of the DC Council. We encourage viewers to submit questions via the website dcdebates.com and to participate online using the hashtag #DCdebates2022. Before we get started, let's hear from the director of the Office of Campaign Finance, Cecily Montgomery.

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Cecily Montgomery: Good evening. Welcome to the 2022 DC debates. I'm Cecily Montgomery, the director of the Office of Campaign Finance. The 2022 DC debates are the second slate of debates under the Fair Elections Program. Started in 2018, the FEP is a voluntary public financing program operated by the Office of Campaign Finance to support candidates for

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Cecily Montgomery: local political office in the district of Columbia. All FEP candidates and city-wide contested races in the June 21st, 2022, primary election are required to take part in the debates. Candidates in the traditional campaign finance program are also invited to participate in the debate. It is our hope that these debates will help the public to learn more about the candidates, their positions

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Cecily Montgomery: and policy platforms. We want to take a moment to thank our partner organization and the candidates for participating in this process. Thank you for joining us in our mission to help inform DC voters about the candidates and the citywide contest and their positions. To learn more about the Office of Campaign Finance or the 2022 DC debates, please visit dcdebates.com.

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Cecily Montgomery: The debates will remain on the website through primary day, Tuesday, June 21st, 2022, for those who could not watch or listen live this evening. Again, thank you for your support and with that, let's meet our candidates.

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Julie Zauzmer Weil: Hi-Hi. Sorry, everybody. Thank you for your patience. Let's meet our candidates for tonight. Dexter Williams, a former congressional and DC council staffer. Nate Fleming, DC's former shadow representative to Congress from 2013 to 2015. Anita Bonds, DC At-Large council members since 2012 and Lisa Gore, a ward three advisory neighborhood commissioner.

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Julie Zauzmer Weil: DC council is the district legislative body. In addition to making laws, it oversees many DC agencies. The council has 13 members, one from each of the eight

wards and five members, including the chair, who are elected by voters across the entire city. Tonight's candidates are Democrats seeking one of those citywide at-large seats.

The ground rules for tonight's debate are that

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Julie Zauzmer Weil: candidates will have one minute each for an opening statement. One minute for a direct answer to a question and 30 seconds for a rebuttal. Each candidate will have one minute for closing statements at the end of the debate. If candidates wished to respond to an opponent's answer to any question, please raise your hand and I will be sure to call on you as time permits. With that it's time for opening statements. Let's start with Dexter Williams.

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Dexter Williams: Thank you and good evening. My name is Dexter Williams. I am running for At-Large Council Member and I want to thank OCF and also Julie, for hosting tonight's forum. I'm running to be your next at-large council member because I care deeply about the city. I am someone who was born and raised in DC and my goals are to remove barriers so that all our residents can thrive no matter their zip code and to ensure everyone can fully participate in our democracy. The DC Fair Elections Program is very close to my heart.

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Dexter Williams: I was instrumental in passing this program. It started as an idea several years ago and I worked hard with other advocates around the city to pass it because it's important to me to open doors for every resident that may need from politics. Every candidate here with me tonight has qualified and has benefitted from the DC Fair Election Program. In addition to my work like the DC Fair Election Program, I also

play a key role in passing the restorative vote bill. I have extensive legislative experience

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Dexter Williams: as a former DC council staffer and congressional staffer. I look forward to tonight's conversation and sharing more about my vision for the city and priorities and quality education, housing and public safety. Thank you.

Julie Zauzmer Weil: Thank you, Nate Fleming.

Nate Fleming: Good evening. I'm Nate Fleming,

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Nate Fleming: a husband, former US Shadow representative and a legislative and committee director at the council for the past five years. Growing up education is what took me from a single mother Southeast DC household to Morehouse Berkeley Law and Harvard Kennedy School. So I believe in creating opportunities for others, which is what I'm finding for in this race. The main issues that we have been grappling with for years, education, housing, jobs, public safety have only been exacerbated by the pandemic, which is why there was a need for new

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Nate Fleming: creative problem solving leadership. Many want an alternative to the current council member and one key difference in the race as we have the most experience making change at the council and clear, well thought out legislative plans that we are prepared to successfully implement on day 1. I've written over 50 laws at the council on the issues we care about, manage hundreds of millions of dollars of the DC budget, and conducted oversight over DC's agencies. I've worked on the federal, local, nonprofit, and in the private sector. I look forward to discussing our track record

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Nate Fleming: but most importantly our plan is for the future to empower DC. Thank you.

Julie Zauzmer Weil: Thank you. Lisa Gore.

Lisa Gore: Good evening everyone. My name is Lisa Gore. I'm currently a DC public school mom. I am also the vice chair of ANC 3/4G, which serves both ward 3 and ward 4 and I'm a retired federal investigator. I've been in public service for my entire career. We have in June the opportunity

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Lisa Gore: to elect the council member that truly believes in empowering people from making sure that we have safe, decent, and affordable housing to schools that have equitable budgets, to speeding up our decarbonization efforts. I am not a career politician. I've never worked for council members. I'm independent and I'm not in political team. I've lived my whole life with the values of a public servant that puts people first. I look forward to discussing my platform with you tonight

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Lisa Gore: and earning your vote. Thank you.

Julie Zauzmer Weil: Thank you. Anita Bonds. Council member Bonds might be frozen. So let's move on to the first questions in our debate. Since many of you have focused your campaigns on the issue of housing, we're going to start with several questions about housing policy. Lisa Gore, what's one barrier that you would remove

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Julie Zauzmer Weil: to building more housing in DC?

Lisa Gore: I think the barrier that I would initially start off with is with the housing production trust fund. The housing production trust fund is the fund that is committed to developing the most affordable housing in the District of Columbia. One of the barriers that I see

currently is that the director has the opportunity to basically to determine if a contract is going to go forward

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Lisa Gore: or not, or actually to switch the award of that contract. In some cases, we've seen where that has been done and is actually produced less affordable housing. There are rules on the books that is supposed to alert the council when this is done. However, the council has not done a great job or a good job at all in ensuring that this doesn't come to the detriment of affordable housing. So that would be one of the first things that I would focus on and we know that the Housing Production Trust Fund has been in the news

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Lisa Gore: lately with the inappropriate spending of over 82 million in terms of deeply affordable housing. That's where I would start.

Julie Zauzmer Weil: Thank you so much, Ms. Gore. It looks like we have Ms. Bonds back. So council member Bonds, I'm going to ask you also, what's one barrier that you would like to remove to building more housing in DC?

Anita Bonds: I think we have to start with a couple of things, but I guess the major thing for barriers in the district

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Anita Bonds: is the cost of land. Land price are so exorbitant. It makes it very difficult to build the housing that we need uniformly across the city. So that's number one.

Julie Zauzmer Weil: Thank you. Mr. Williams, what is a barrier that you would like to remove to constructing more housing.

Dexter Williams: I think one of the biggest barriers is that

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Dexter Williams: we have to have a more comprehensive approach to providing more housing options. One of the things that I'm really looking at is a 17,000 vacant apartment units that we have across the city and looking at what type of tax incentive structures we can provide to put people into housing. That's one of the things that I'm seriously looking at and I think that's a barrier because we have the stock, we have the land, we have the resources, but I want to make sure that we're utilizing all the tools available and also looking at conversion in the downtown area

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Dexter Williams: and re-imagining that area so that we can provide more housing options for our residents.

Julie Zauzmer Weil: Thank you. And lastly, Mr. Fleming, is there a barrier that you would remove to constructing more housing?

Nate Fleming: Certainly. Several things we need to do. One, we need better control of the Housing Production Trust fund and we certainly need to have the government be leveraging their market role and ensure that the government takes a role in developing housing. That's the social housing model is being implemented in Vienna very well right now

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Nate Fleming: and we need to do things like that to ribbit the displacement of DC residents and secure permanently affordable housing. So we have a plan on that. One, we need to continue to support the development of a community land trust. Two, move to create more home ownership opportunities for DC. Three, we need to expand rent control. And then finally we have to make sure that we have some guaranteed payments. So many residents need another \$200 or \$300 to report their rental costs. We used to have a shallow subsidy is what it's called to provide that type of resources and I think

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Nate Fleming: those are the types of things we need to do. I have a strong record on housing. I wrote the law at the council that banned evictions during the pandemic. I also wrote the law to expand it more, low income housing being guaranteed funding from the Housing Production Trust Fund, but that law hasn't been implemented well, and I'm running for the council to do so.

Julie Zauzmer Weil: Thank you so much. Since we missed the chance to hear council member Bond's opening statement, I'd like to do that before we move on to another question.

Anita Bonds: Oh, thank you very much and good evening to everyone

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Anita Bonds: and thank you for allowing me to speak tonight. I am Anita Bonds and I am running asking for your vote for re-election as the at-large council member in the June 21 democratic primary. As some of you may know, I grew up in ward seven, attended UC Berkeley and returned to DC as a civic and human rights activists. I am DC raised. The value of my past I bring forward to address many of the challenges of today and these values are more important

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Anita Bonds: and useful today than ever before in our city's history. As an at-large council member for all eight wards I am focused on providing reasonable, resourceful leadership on legislation, oversight, and constituent services with compassion and assuring the residents a house [U/A] students receive a quality public education and young families are making DC their home and the city's economy

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Anita Bonds: has opportunities to grow and include all. These are my goals as your elected official.

Julie Zauzmer Weil: Thank you, Ms. Bonds. Let's go to Mr. Williams for our next housing question. In our debate on Monday for the mayoral candidates, Robert White said DC doesn't need a single new luxury, one-bedroom condo. Do you think DC needs more luxury condos as part of our overall need

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Julie Zauzmer Weil: for more housing or only needs more affordable and family sized units.

Dexter Williams: Thank you and no, I agree. We don't need that. Well, we need more affordable housing, but we also need more workforce housing, [U/A] because they're really being squeezed and pushed out of the city and so one of the things that I want to do is push for that. My understanding is that on the last budget, we only added \$4 million

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Dexter Williams: is my understanding for more workforce, how I think we need to increase our investments in that and so my focus will be also investing in affordable housing, but also workforce housing to make sure that we're investing across the income spectrum.

Julie Zauzmer Weil: Thank you so much. Mr. Fleming, do you think that we need more luxury condos among other forms of housing or not?

Nate Fleming: Well, I know what we definitely need is more affordable housing. We're on pace to spend a billion dollars since 2015 on our Housing Production Trust Fund and that has only yielded

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Nate Fleming: about 7000 units and that's not meeting the need that we have. We understand that access to safe, stable and affordable housing can increase the quality of life for individuals and communities and enhance the connection between the communities. Improving housing standards and options can also work to decrease high rates of

balance, but we have a problem with gentrification in the city, and this issue is exacerbated by the decrease of affordable and public housing, which has contributed to segregation, displacement, and unstable communities. So one of the things that I want to work on is

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Nate Fleming: expanding rent control at the council. I wrote a bill to expand rent control, but it has not passed the housing committee and one of the things that we'll do is instantly by making units that are 15 years or older eligible for rent control, we would increase the stock by 17%. So we need leadership at the council, that's equipped and ready to implement those plans and we can do that from day one.

Julie Zauzmer Weil: Thank you. Very quickly in case I missed it, I don't think I heard a yes or no. Do you think that we do need to build more luxury condos among the other firms of housing?

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Nate Fleming: I think the question isn't a simple yes or no. We need more affordable housing than we need luxury housing, but I think clearly we need all types of housing. We certainly need probably less luxury housing than we've been building in the past, but I think it's not a yes or no question.

Julie Zauzmer Weil: Thank you so much. Ms. Gore, what do you think?

Lisa Gore: I think, you know, to be honest, we need all types of housing. We're not going to get out of our affordable housing crisis with just building one type or

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Lisa Gore: using one type of model. So, we have built a tremendous amount of, if you want to say luxury units or units that are market rate, I would rather say, and we have definitely had less than belts investment in affordable units. So I think that, you know, this to me

is the issue of inclusionary zoning and inclusionary zoning plus not being the only model that we need to strongly invest in. My platform definitely calls for legislation

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Lisa Gore: in terms of looking at new ways to do community land trust. I'm particularly looking at the model used by New York, which is COPA. We definitely have rent control laws that we can strengthen and close loopholes. I think we have to also look at preservation of the units that we have to make sure that we are not losing affordable units when we're doing conversions and things like that in terms of the multifamily market. So there's a couple of things that we can do.

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Lisa Gore: We're going to meet more units, but we are going to have to have strong community engagement and my platform also calls for the creation of anti-

Julie Zauzmer Weil: Yeah, thank you.

Lisa Gore: displacement legislation to make sure we're not displacing our residents in Washington.

Julie Zauzmer Weil: Thank you. That's time. Thank you so much. Ms. Bonds, as you know, the district has many different programs to help people afford housing, like rapid rehousing and vouchers that never expire like targeted affordable housing

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Julie Zauzmer Weil: and permanent supportive house. Recently, the mayor and the council disagreed over whether to put more than \$50 million into the Housing Production Trust Fund to build more units or into vouchers for families. Given how much DC spends right now on all its many housing programs, which one program would you put the next dollars into?

Anita Bonds: Oh my goodness. That is such a tough issue. Because we have a number of

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Anita Bonds: needs and I'm sorry I missed your other question because my system continues to fail, but I will do my best. I think we have to start with a couple of things and let's start with workforce housing and that's the so-called housing in the middle, where people are really feeling the squeeze. We put a tremendous amount of money in our extremely low income households and I think that's good and we have to continue

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Anita Bonds: that because we do not have enough of that type of housing, but we also have individuals that are poised to become homeowners and that's why we have increased the amount for first time homeowners to \$202,000 as the ceiling and I added a provision where 70,000 is the floor. In other words, we are working very hard to turn as many households

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Anita Bonds: into ownership households as possible.

Julie Zauzmer Weil: Thank you.

Anita Bonds: So workforce has

Julie Zauzmer Weil: Thank you.

Anita Bonds: got to be in that lineup. Yes.

Julie Zauzmer Weil: All right. Thank you. Mr. Fleming, what do you think the next dollars should go to if you're going to grow any of DC's housing programs?

Nate Fleming: Well, that's a good question. As I stated earlier, we need to really look at social housing. The federal government has divested from public housing, leaving our public housing in disrepair and disarray from lack of oversight for years and what

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Nate Fleming: we need to do is invest as a local government in public housing and that includes workforce housing. So I think that's very important. The community land trust model is very important for us to build up. As a council staff, where I work to secure \$2 million, the first government investment into the Douglass Community Land Trust. So we should expand that, but the preservation of the housing that we have is very important. So we have a preservation fund that seeks to make sure that existing affordable housing opportunities are maintained. I think that's very important as well

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Nate Fleming: but we also need to promote home ownership. I think the idea of a strike force towards increasing home ownership amongst black residents in DC is something that's important, but we need to make sure that all residents are on the pathway to home ownership. So those are some of the key programs that I think we should increase and I have a record of doing this at the council, including writing the law of the Eviction with Dignity Act of 2018, which reformed evictions in this city where residents from property is not thrown out on the streets anymore.

Julie Zauzmer Weil: Thank you so much. All right, Mr. Williams and then Ms. Gore

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Julie Zauzmer Weil: what program do you think needs the next dollars in housing?

Dexter Williams: Thank you. I think we need to invest more in the rapid rehousing program.

You know, this is a really great concept, but one of the things that it doesn't have is that when residents leave the program, many of them go back into homelessness and that's because we're not providing them with employment opportunities. We are not providing them with educational opportunities to support them and so that's one of the things I want to take a strong look at when

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Dexter Williams: I'm council member, strengthening the rapid rehousing program. We know what the gaps are. We just need to make the critical investments to make it a really strong program as it was intended to be.

Julie Zauzmer Weil: Thanks so much. Ms. Gore.

Lisa Gore: Yes. I would spend that investment in public housing and the reason why is public housing in the state that it's in right now is critical and it's urgent. We've seen

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Lisa Gore: investigative report. We were just talking about one and I've been in public housing throughout my whole career, particularly here in Washington, DC on the campaign trail, I've been into public housing resident home and talking to them about their conditions and the conditions and our conditions in public housing right now is an urgent safety and health issue and that translate into not only safe and sanitary conditions for your health, but also in terms of public safety.

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Lisa Gore: So I call it for an investment in public housing of 60 million, across 10 years, to a point where we can get our units rehabilitated and people live in, in decent human housing.

Julie Zauzmer Weil: Thank you all so much. I'd like to ask one more question about housing before we move on to many other subjects. The housing Production Trust Fund has fallen far short of its legal requirement to spend half of its funds

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Julie Zauzmer Weil: on creating deeply affordable housing for people who earn less than 30% of the area median income? Do you think Mr. Fleming, that spending half of the money on zero to 30% AMI is the right target or would you set the requirement somewhere else?

Nate Fleming: Well, I'll have to say, I think is the right target because I wrote the law that changed the Housing Production Trust Fund mandate from 40% to 50%. So forgive me for sticking with my first mind, but the problem

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Nate Fleming: isn't the target. The problem is that we have not met the target for years and the problem is that we had to reset the target because I was dealing with the issue as a council staffer of seeing our dollars not get the return of investment that we need. So I believe that it was important to set the standard and make sure that the expectation is clear where this money has been going and we have been seeing some improvement since that law has been implemented, but what we have to understand is that at the 0 to 30 level, that you mentioned,

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Nate Fleming: the dollars have to be paired with vouchers and the council has not been making those investments in the vouchers to make 0 to 30 a reality. So as your next council member, that's something that I pledge to do is. As the budget comes through, we'll make sure that we make those investments in vouchers, because that's the only way that we're going to meet our goals and 0 to 30.

Julie Zauzmer Weil: Thank you so much. Ms. Bonds, I know you have expressed some reservations about whether 0 to 30 is the right target. What do you think the target should be for spending the Housing Production Trust Fund?

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Anita Bonds: Well, let me just start with realities and the facts and the facts are that the change in the Housing Production Trust Fund allocation for that bucket of 0 to 30%, I did that and I did that through the Budget Support Act. I just want that to be clear. I know there's

a lot of, you know, back and forth and allegations that I've done this, I've done that, but I've done that. You can check the record and I think you may

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Anita Bonds: have already done that because you interviewed me earlier about some of these things. As it relates to the Housing Production Trust Fund, the difficulty is trying for the developers is getting the assistance through the lending community at that level, they do not fund that level and so the gap financing that we provide as a city through the trust fund is used

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Anita Bonds: directly to make sure that we have that level of unit. I think that when I changed it from 40%

Julie Zauzmer Weil: Thank you.

Anita Bonds: to 30%, it was perhaps not for the best.

Julie Zauzmer Weil: Okay. Thank you. That's time. Yes, I see Mr. Fleming you'd like to rebuttal, 30 seconds.

Nate Fleming: Yes. So I just want to make it clear. So this bill was passed in the Budget Support Act. If you know how the council works, in the budget we pass hundreds of laws.

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Nate Fleming: Many of those laws have been introduced before the budget. I wrote this law. It was introduced that year and we worked to get that included in the budget and council member Bonds has some role to play in doing that, but let's be clear I wrote the law and for current council member to not understand how that law was changed, speaks to the need for a stronger oversight. If you cannot really understand what you're doing, how can we keep a track on hundreds of millions of housing dollars.

Julie Zauzmer Weil: Ms. Bonds, would you like 30 seconds to respond to that?

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Anita Bonds: You know Ms. Weil, you may want to have a little back and forth here, but I will not dignify that erroneous statement made by Mr. Fleming and I- I'll just leave it at that. Thank you.

Julie Zauzmer Weil: Thank you. Mr. Williams or Ms. Gore, I want to give you a chance to join this conversation about the Housing Production Trust Fund. What do you think the target should be for spending whatever buckets you'd like to see the housing production spent on?

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Lisa Gore: I think the [U/A]

Julie Zauzmer Weil: We will go with Mr. Williams first.

Lisa Gore: All right, go on.

Julie Zauzmer Weil: Sorry.

Lisa Gore: Okay. All right.

Dexter Williams: No, I do believe that the target is 0 to 30%. I think the issue is an oversight issue. As you know, last year, the auditor came out with a report that talked about mismanagement of \$82 million and so one of the things that really concerns me is that we have these policies in place, but they're not being implemented well, which sort of makes the point and so I want to make sure

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Dextex Williams: that we're spending the money wise. I want to make sure that we're providing the aggressive oversight, particularly during the budget and performance oversight process and also looking at the gaps in the law that has caused this lack of implementation that we have so that we can make sure that our residents are getting their affordable housing that they need, because right now people are hurting, we're in

a housing crisis and we don't have time for mismanagement of funds that are going towards developers and it should be going towards affordable housing.

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Julie Zauzmer Weil: Thanks so much. And Ms. Gore.

Lisa Gore: Yes. So I do think that we are at the right target and I would agree with keeping the target where it is right now. We have had struggles in meeting even lower target level. So I think the 50% aspiration or the 50% goal or mandate it's been called aspiration before. I'd like to look at it as a mandate, is difficult for us to meet. The question

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Lisa Gore: is how do we get there and how do we get the Housing Production Trust Fund up to a level where we can actually meet this goal and that's where absolutely good oversight comes in and figuring out what the issues are with the agency and internal procedures that are preventing us. One thing could be the market conditions, lending conditions that were alluded to you, but I also believe that there are internal operational issues within DHCD

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Lisa Gore: that we have to look at, including the agency discretion, director's decisions to choose another RFP as opposed to the one that's been recommended by the financing committee. So those are some things that we have to look at prior to reconsidering another goal.

Julie Zauzmer Weil: Thank you so much. All right, Mr. Williams, some advocates say that it would be more efficient to give low-income people cash rather than funneling

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Julie Zauzmer Weil: money through lots of different programs meant to help people with housing and other needs. Are there any social services that you would like to replace with cash assistance to DC residents?

Dexter Williams: Yeah. I think cash assistance programs are very effective. I mean, we had a pilot program during the pandemic that was based east of the river and it was incredibly effective as reported at least about it a couple of months ago about its effectiveness. So I would like to take a look at which programs

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Dexter Williams: I would target for that, but I think in general that they are very effective when you put money directly in people's pockets, there's studies and statistics that show that they do spend it responsibly, so I'm very supportive of that.

Julie Zauzmer Weil: Thank you. Ms. Bonds, do you have any ideas for any programs that you think might be better replaced with cash assistance?

Anita Bonds: Yes, I do and I do believe in cash assistance. I think it's a process

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Anita Bonds: that lends itself to our current times in the District of Columbia. I think housing is one of those programs. When you stop and think about it, the value of a voucher is 187% of the fair market value of rent in the District of Columbia and I think many of our citizens who have need and who would welcome the cash allotment would find

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Anita Bonds: that they could pay for their housing. I think that would lower the cost of housing as it relates to what is housing providers set as their goal and I think that may be a good area for us to look at first and foremost, followed by the area of food and nutrition.

Julie Zauzmer Weil: Thank you so much. Ms. Gore, many downtown storefronts are vacant as a result of the pandemic and some businesses

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Julie Zauzmer Weil: are choosing the suburbs over the district. What's the policy that you would pursue to make the district a more appealing place to do business?

Lisa Gore: One of the things that, um, I would like to look at is, and I believe this has come before the council and it's something that I strongly support is the revitalization of downtown DC into a residential area. We have roughly 17,000 vacancies throughout the District of Columbia. I'm not sure how many of those are

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Lisa Gore: centralized in a DC corridor or downtown corridor, but that is something that we really should look at in terms of how we can convert those vacant office buildings into residential units that would give a population to the downtown area, that to support small businesses and in the meantime we have to make sure, we a lot of times talk about residential displacement, but we also, as you say, have small business displacement. So we have to look at

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Lisa Gore: creative ways to keep and support our small businesses, they've been heavily affected by the pandemic and we definitely want to see them stay in the District of Columbia because they are run by our people here in the district. So we want to support them as much as possible. But I think creating a residential chord downtown is something that we really need to look at.

Julie Zauzmer Weil: Thank you. Thank you so much. Mr. Fleming, what would you do to make DC an appealing place to do business?

Nate Fleming: Well right now, we have to realize we're competing

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Nate Fleming: with the number one state for doing business in the country, which is Virginia and so too often we make policies without recognizing that we need to leverage the areas of investment that DC has a comparative advantage in. We are at a place where you can do business and information, scientific, and knowledge-based jobs at a lower cost than other cities, but our incentives aren't aligned there, but over and all, we do need to promote entrepreneurship, because entrepreneurship has exploded during the pandemic. So for us to come back and build back better

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Nate Fleming: we need to leverage to support our new business owners. I believe we have a plan, one, secure funding for community investment fund targeted specifically for underserved and entrepreneurs. Two, secure funding for the St. Elizabeth Opportunity Innovation Hub to connect DC residents to high quality jobs. We also need to create a new year-round employment program for youth and young adults and going back to your question about universal basic income, I think it's very important to do that and in the area of housing, I already proposed a \$300

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Nate Fleming: shallow subsidy because the goals of this universal income system is to alleviate poverty or replace other need-based social programs that potentially require greater bureaucratic involvement.

Julie Zauzmer Weil: Thank you so much. Mr. Williams, what would you do to make DC a better place to do business?

Dexter Williams: Thank you. I appreciate the question. I remember, we had a similar question at the chamber forum a couple of weeks ago. One of the things I want to do, you know, the tax commissioner is convening,

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Dexter Williams: so they'll be coming out with their recommendations within a year and I'm looking forward to seeing what their recommendations are as it relates to how do we can attract more businesses from a tax and structure, but to your earlier question about small businesses, one of the things I want to do is invest more dollars in [U/A] so that we can provide more grants. I remember during the pandemic, when I was working in the council, a lot of small businesses were calling our office, asking for support, asking for help. They were hurt. I mean,

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Dexter Williams: [U/A] is a small business owner and was struggling and is only in business today because of those grants, but there's a recovery that's going on. So I want to make sure that we're making enough investment to help them, but also creating a platform where, you know, if businesses want to share space to drive down costs, I think that's something that another model that we should really work at next point.

Julie Zauzmer Weil: Thank you so much. You beat me to it on the tax revision commission that might be coming up in our questions later tonight.

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Julie Zauzmer Weil: Ms. Bonds, what would you do to make DC a better place to do business?

Anita Bonds: Well, I think I want to start with the whole concept of how do we look at our downtown core and I think it requires view from thinking about a town and how do we make this town in-town an exciting, vibrant part of our community.

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Anita Bonds: If you look at how we have developed the Wharf area and how we're attempting to develop Walter Reed, and of course, St. Elizabeth. It's more than just residential. We definitely need to have residential in our downtown core. We can do so much more

with that, but also it's an opportunity for our small businesses to have a place to locate at a reasonable rate of rent and so I see that

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Anita Bonds: and also the universities. The universities could very easily come to that part of our city with new structures and maybe even dormitories. We get dormitories, we get people; we get people we began to revitalize. So that's how I'm looking at this.

Julie Zauzmer Weil: Thank you so much. All right. Now, I'd like to ask you all a series of yes or no questions. I'm going to ask you to raise your hands. First, in November, DC

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Julie Zauzmer Weil: voters will vote on whether to require businesses to pay the minimum wage to workers before tax. Please raise your hand if you plan to vote yes on this ballot initiative. That looks like all four of you are voting yes on initiative 82. So we can move on without discussing that because everyone's in agreement. Next, please raise your hand if you support

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Julie Zauzmer Weil: rank choice voting in DC elections. All right, I believe I see three yeses and one no. So let's start Ms. Bonds, can you tell us why you do not support ranked choice voting and then maybe Ms. Gore you can tell us why you do.

Anita Bonds: Yeah, sure. I'll start with why I doubt. I personally feel very strongly that it is a process to [U/A] of the parties and

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Anita Bonds: as you know, I was chair of state party here, democratic party for 12 years and so I'm wedded to that line of thought. I think it's an opportunity where it's very cumbersome. I believe in the one vote, one person; one person, one vote and so to have the opportunity to say, oh, maybe this person is second,

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Anita Bonds: third, that does not in my opinion sit well with how people really view and value their one vote.

Julie Zauzmer Weil: Thank you so much. Ms. Gore.

Lisa Gore: Yes, I do support rank choice voting and I, in fact, testified in favor of it before the council. I believe it's an opportunity for us to have a greater democracy here in DC.

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Lisa Gore: And I believe, you know, the primary opposition to rank choice voting is how do we get this across to voters? How do we make it something that voters can actually understand and employ and that's education. I mean, we have very smart people here in the district. We are used to implementing major reforms from housing to education, to, you know, major health issues. We can implement rank choice voting in a phase way to make sure

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Lisa Gore: that we bring our community members along particular, our senior community members, but I do believe it's something that we need to migrate to, to make sure that we have everybody with the opportunity to have the best and biggest voice in our democratic process if possible.

Julie Zauzmer Weil: Thank you so much. And on that note, please raise your hand if you support allowing people younger than 18 to vote in local elections.

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Julie Zauzmer Weil: Okay, again I think I see three hands and not Ms. Bonds. So council member Bonds can you tell us why you'd like to keep the voting age at 18 and then Mr. Fleming, can you tell us why you'd like to reduce the voting age?

Anita Bonds: I'd like to keep the voting age at 18, because I feel that our young people are still developing their thoughts and their processes. So here I go with that age old approach

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Anita Bonds: that young people may not have the ability to make their decisions. I'm not saying that at all. I'm simply saying that when we talk about voting, let's also talk about the age when our young people can do other things like, you know, the drinking and what have you

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Anita Bonds: and so I just feel like there needs to, if we're going to look at voting earlier than we also have to look at when our young people become of age for many other disciplines within society, as you know many young people are actually indirectly raising families and

Julie Zauzmer Weil: Thank you.

Anita Bonds: so you just have to look at the whole thing. Yes.

Julie Zauzmer Weil: Okay, thank you. Mr. Fleming.

Anita Bonds: I [O/V] so I don't know, you know.

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Nate Fleming: So, yeah, I do think that 16 year olds should be allowed to vote. When I was 16, I did my first internship working for congresswoman women, Eleanor Holmes Norton, and I was prepared to do that and that prepared me to be sitting here today with, you know, over 21 years of legislative experience and I believe we should be putting our young people in pipelines to positive outcomes. So allowing them to vote early makes them more civic minded and it compliments what they're learning in school and I believe that pipelining is important. That's part of, one of the reasons why

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Nate Fleming: I hope to bring Bard Early College High School to DC, where young people in four years, not only earn their high school diploma, but they have two years of college completed. They get their associate's degree because I believe when we let young people get pipelines to successful opportunities at an early age, they're more likely to be involved in positive activities and not destructive activities.

Julie Zauzmer Weil: Thank you so much. I see Ms. Gore would like to respond.

Lisa Gore: Yes. I just want to add that, you know, for me, the reason to let young

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Lisa Gore: people vote and 16 is an age where most of our kids. I'm a mom, right now I have a 17-year-old. He just turned 18 two days ago., but they absolutely need to have a voice in the issues that impact them and you look at some of the major things that are going on in the district, public safety, criminal justice, education, black and brown boys are behind in school. We know that when communities vote, they have power. When they vote, politicians listen.

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Lisa Gore: So yes, they should absolutely have a voice in the elections coming up and be able to vote because they are impacted by some of the most critical issues that we have in the District of Columbia. We have a young person, one in four council member in ward three who has a great progressive platform. So I would love to see a youth member on the council and I do believe that they need to be able to exercise their vote. We have very intelligent young people who could make some decisions in the process.

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Julie Zauzmer Weil: Thank you so much. I bet your new 18-year-old might be proud to cast his first ever vote for his mom.

Lisa Gore: He is.

Julie Zauzmer Weil: Two more yes or no questions. First please raise your hand if you support the bill that would give every DC resident \$100 per month for Metro or bus fare.

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Julie Zauzmer Weil: Sorry. It looks like everyone is raising their hands. Is that right? Okay, great. Then let's do one last yes or no question before we go to a break. Mayor Bowser has a goal of eventually employing 4,000 police officers in DC. Please raise your hand if you support this goal. All right, it looks like Ms. Bonds is raising her hand. So Ms. Bonds, can you tell us why you support more

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Julie Zauzmer Weil: police and then Mr. Williams you can tell us why you think 4,000 is not the right goal.

Anita Bonds: I support the goal of increasing the number of police officers in the city, because as you know, we are down to a little less than 3,500, and that does not seem to be adequate for community policing. I'm a big proponent of community policing.

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Anita Bonds: I really want to make sure that citizens see officers, they develop a relationship with officers on the beat in their neighborhoods and so that is my primarily reason for being supportive of this proposition. Also I think it would give us more officers to help solve crimes. As you know, we are down from 78% to about 14% as far as solving crimes

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Anita Bonds: And so those are my reasons.

Julie Zauzmer Weil: Thank you. Mr. Williams.

Dexter Williams: Thank you. Thank you Julie for the question and I don't support the proposal because, you know, we're having a huge debate in this city about, do we increase police

or do we not? And it's all centered around prevention of crime and addressing crime.

If we want to address crime, we have to look at the root causes. There are studies on this, we know this, and so just saying that we want to add more police

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Dexter Williams: is a very linear and narrow way to really try to look at this very systemic and chronic issue. You have to invest in employment. You have to invest in education. We have to give our young people opportunities and also we have to work with our partners in Maryland and Virginia to have a regional approach. I mean, a lot of the crimes that are being committed, are there individuals coming from Maryland and Virginia. Right now, we don't have that regional partnership and we need to and so I just think that adding more police

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Dexter Williams: is not the most productive way to really address the high crime in the city. I mean, we're a city that has many police agencies, more so than any other jurisdiction and so if the number actually mattered, we wouldn't have the chronic issues that we have now. So clearly that's not the answer to the problem.

Julie Zauzmer Weil: Thank you. Thank you so much. All right. Well, I see that both Mr. Fleming and Ms. Gore want to respond to this. Mr. Fleming, 30 seconds.

Nate Fleming: I agree with Mr. Williams

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Nate Fleming: I don't think there is a magic number and some people debate more or less police, but everybody wants more effective police and I have a key plan on this and one of the things we have to do is empower our young people economically. So we need to create a dedicated employment program for justice involved youth. You have to connect disconnected adults under 30 to jobs in infrastructure, community work, IT, and arts.

We need to make the summer youth employment program year round and I believe in universal afterschool connecting 100% of DCS youth to free high-quality

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Nate Fleming: afterschool opportunities. But finally, we must expand opportunities for youth design programs and campaigns that are related to gun violence. So a comprehensive

Julie Zauzmer Weil: Thank you.

Nate Fleming: holistic approach would not take on this issue.

Julie Zauzmer Weil: Alright, Ms. Gore 30 seconds.

Lisa Gore: Yeah, so I've actually had to deal with this in my profession as a senior law enforcement manager, where do you put resources when you're trying to address an increase in crime? So in that position, which I did for multiple years, I know that there is no one magic number.

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Lisa Gore: So my objection to this is in the realm of my personal experience as a law enforcement manager and as someone that's the oversight professional. First of all, we want to make sure that we understand that there is no magic number and we have to dig into NPD police budget to make sure that they're effectively positioned not only to address issues, not only to respond appropriately, but to do so in an efficient and effective way.

Julie Zauzmer Weil: Okay.

Lisa Gore: And that means making good with what resources we have and making sure that we're not

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Lisa Gore: devoting resources to areas that are not needed.

Julie Zauzmer Weil: Thank you. Thank you all. All right when we come back, we're going to talk much more about crime and policing. We'll be back in five minutes. Thank you.

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Julie Zauzmer Weil: Welcome back. If you're just joining us, I want to take a moment to go over the ground rules again for tonight's debate. Candidates have one minute for a direct answer to a question and 30 seconds for a rebuttal and at the end of the debate this evening, we will hear a one-minute closing statement from each candidate. Anytime a candidate wishes

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Julie Zauzmer Weil: to respond to an opponent's answer, please raise your hand and I will call on you as time permits. I want to thank all of our viewers who've been submitting questions. Please continue to submit questions at dcdebates.com or on Twitter using the hashtag #DCdebates2022. Right, I promise to return with questions about crime. So let's start with Mr. Fleming. What do you believe the council can do to

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Julie Zauzmer Weil: reduce violent crime in DC?

Nate Fleming: Well, the council can do a lot, a lot more and its issue is personal to me. As many know, I was carjacked at gunpoint by 14 [U/A] in the middle of this campaign. So we need a more comprehensive approach to understand the balance must be attached to both in the short term and in the long term. I just talked about some things, which we can do, we can do, but we can do more. We need to strengthen the community policing and the community police board. We need to

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Nate Fleming: reduce recidivism through the incarceration to incorporation program. We need to coordinate our violence intervention efforts. We also need to increase opportunities for DC board residents to serve in the MPD department, but we also have to increase the capacity of our gun violence, domestic balance diversion and victim services programs. So what I would like to do is expand opportunities or you to design campaigns, expand the support services offered to youth at DYRS, but our current diversion program should be streamlined and coordinated, so residents with severe mental health challenges

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Nate Fleming: can be identified to inform our responses to incidents where these residents are involved. So we have to take a very comprehensive approach. Our young people are in crisis, so we have to engage them, not just during the school year and the school day, but all year and all day.

Julie Zauzmer Weil: Thank you. Thank you. Mr. Williams, what do you think the council can do to reduce violent crime?

Dexter Williams: Thank you for the question and I really appreciate the question. As you know, the criminal justice coordinating council actually just recently came out

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Dexter Williams: with a report that talked about what we can do about this very issue and I agree with my colleague, we do need a comprehensive approach and we also need to invest in a cause for addressing and investing in root causes of crime. I know we've been talking about this in every forum, we're talking about a lot tonight, but I want to hammer that point home. We do have to invest in root causes, adding more police to the force is not the answer to the solution. So one of the things that I want to do specifically is make our Summer Youth Employment Program year

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Dexter Williams: around so that we can have year around opportunities for our students and youth. I was a part of the Summer Youth Employment Program that put money in my pocket. It helped me be productive during the summer, but the problem is you need other opportunities throughout the year, particularly with the pandemic now where there's limited opportunities, I think the DC government has an obligation to step up and create more work and education opportunities for our youth so that they can have something more productive to do.

Julie Zauzmer Weil: Thank you. Ms. Gore, what would you do on

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Julie Zauzmer Weil: the council to reduce violent crime?

Lisa Gore: I agree that we really do have to look at the root causes in terms of violent crime and look at our communities through the lens of the ecosystem. So individually social interactions, community-based interactions and how well we are functioning and

supporting those communities, I strongly believe in my platform call for vocational education programming that

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Lisa Gore: re-modernized to begin in the middle school ages where not only kids can come out with a skill, but they also can come out with business opportunity. So we have to start young. School is a great place to catch a lot of the issues that go on set that could lead to incidents of violence. I believe in a school-based mental health program we need to expand that and we need to expand our out of school time offerings for our kids as well. Working in the juvenile justice system

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Lisa Gore: I'm a strong believer also in diversion programs. We need to make sure that we're not putting non-violent offenders in the criminal justice system. So making sure those diversion programs are strong and that way we can, you know, serve people that are most at risk and mostly need it first.

Julie Zauzmer Weil: Thank you. Ms. Bonds, DC spends millions of dollars each year on several programs that are meant to prevent violence before it happens, but violent

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Julie Zauzmer Weil: crime is still going up. Is there anything that you would change about DC's approach to violence interruption?

Anita Bonds: Well, I was about to agree with my opponents as it related to how we can fight this scourge that is upon us, but yes there are some things that we can do that we have been doing, but I think we all have to understand that what is going on in the District of Columbia

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Anita Bonds: now is something that's going on nationwide and more importantly, we have to understand that the remedies that we know can work and do work, they work very slowly and so this is, you know, we're on this road long-term and of course, in doing that, it means that it's going to not feel good for most of us as we are

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Anita Bonds: trying to get instant gratification. The ills of the past are longstanding, the neglect is longstanding, before you and I came on the scene and so it's going to take us some time to really

Julie Zauzmer Weil: Thank you.

Anita Bonds: change things so that we feel comfortable.

Julie Zauzmer Weil: Thank you. Mr. Williams, is there anything that you would change about DC's approach to violence interruption?

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Dexter Williams: Yeah, I really do appreciate this question because one of the things that I've called for in this campaign is an evaluation of our prevention and intervention programs, you know, we have a number of programs and I think they're good, but like, to your point, we still have a lot of crime in the city and so we need to figure out what's working, what's not working. Are there any gaps? Is it an implementation issue? Is it a funding issue? But we don't know the answers to those questions right now because we haven't really done a full scale

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Dexter Williams: evaluation of our intervention and prevention programs.

Julie Zauzmer Weil: Thank you. Mr. Fleming, anything you would change about violence interruption?

Nate Fleming: This is a good question and I do agree that we do have two programs right now, one is run out of the office of the attorney general, one is run out of the mayor's office and often these organizations don't coordinate and collaborate in the way that they should. So we need to make sure that we're looking at this.

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Nate Fleming: We have to also understand that one of the things working at the council, we work to put the dollars in these programs and these programs have been scaled up for a very short amount of time and COVID has had a huge impact on their operations. So we have to evaluate them, but we also have to evaluate them with that context. Right now we need stronger coordination, but we also have to do things like protect and secure our public spaces. Make sure that we reclaim our streets, our parks, our libraries, as places for safe activities.

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Nate Fleming: In my opinion, we need a network of mental health, young adult engagement services that can be run out of our faith-based organizations, our recreation centers and our schools.

Julie Zauzmer Weil: Thank you so much. Council member Bonds recently voted in favor of removing police from DC schools, a plan that Mayor Bowser and Chairman Mendelson disagree with. Mr. Williams, do you believe police belong in DC schools?

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Dexter Williams: No and I think again we have to listen to our youth and young people, you know, during the height of the pandemic, they made it very clear that police made them uncomfortable. They didn't want it. We've had hearings on this issue. We've had many public meetings about it. I know personally I've been to a school where there are police officers and you know, it's not a good feeling when you see a police officer in your

school because they indicate something. It has an impact on you mentally, socially, and also economically.

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Dexter Williams: And so, no I don't support having police in school.

Julie Zauzmer Weil: Ms. Gore, what about you? Would you vote to keep police in school or remove them?

Lisa Gore: No. I, as a mom of a teenage son I definitely would not vote to keep police in school. I do believe they need to be removed from schools, but at the same time, I believe we need to heavily invest in my platform calls for heavily investing in school-based mental health program so that we're catching issues

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Lisa Gore: with our kids. School is the best place to catch it. You know, my platform calls for schools to be more than just the school building, but a building that's surrounded by the community and where the community and kids can get the services they need. So this is one place that we can do that and just to piggyback off of your answer, I didn't have a chance to respond to violence interruption. I think that we need to increase our violence interrupters. We need to play some more throughout the city. Right now, it's been said we haven't invested in that program in long-term, but we know that

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Lisa Gore: you know, there are positive things that come out of that as well as the diversion program. We know that kids that are diverted that have non-violent offenses are less likely to offend and there's data that supports that. So we want to get our community to the point where our kids are not committing offenses, but if there is something they commit they're non-violent, we get them quick and we identify issues with them early, before they escalate.

Julie Zauzmer Weil: Thank you. Thank you so much. Mr. Fleming, do you support

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Julie Zauzmer Weil: police in schools? And then I see Ms. Bonds wants to respond to that.

Nate Fleming: So this is a challenging question. I support making sure that our schools are secure and one of the things most people wouldn't imagine looking at me, I was the head football coach at Kramer Middle School, 2017, 2018, 2019, and that's one of the most challenged schools and I remember when there was a fight or someone was disciplined, they sent them directly to a school officer and I was perplexed by that. I don't think that's the way that we should deal with what basic behavioral challenges

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Nate Fleming: in our schools. So I think that we need to make our schools safe, so we can enhance this and strengthen the training of the security officers we have and if there's a challenge where a police officer needs to be called, we can use the police the same way everyone else uses the police and make sure that that school has a police officer that will respond to incidents inside the school. We need to be commonsensical about the way that we approach these issues. Sometimes we let politics get in the way and I think this is one of those issues.

Julie Zauzmer Weil: Thank you. All right, Ms. Bonds, and then Ms. Gore, I think each of

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Julie Zauzmer Weil: you asked for a 30-second response.

Anita Bonds: Yes. Thank you very much. I think that this is such an important issue as it relates to the growth and development of our young people and that's one of the reasons that I chose to vote no, I do not want officers in the schools. Another aspect of this whole situation is that officers in the schools cannot put their hands on kids and so it seems to me, if there is a fight

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Anita Bonds: how do we separate kids? And if officers can't help with that, then what is their real position to just lock them up and, you know, handcuff them. We don't want.

Julie Zauzmer Weil: I believe the officers who are not allowed to put their hands on kids are the school security officers, not the DC police, that's my understanding. Anyway, Ms. Gore.

Lisa Gore: One of the real issues that we have with police in schools

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Lisa Gore: and even security in school is a school to prison pipeline. We know that police law enforcement in school increases the suspension rates. It increases all types of negative outcomes, primarily for black and brown boys. That's a real issue. That's not political, that's data and that's one of the things that we have to really consider in this discussion. My platform does not call for leaving schools unsafe.

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Lisa Gore: If we increase school-based mental health, counselors, professionals, we will have people that can professionally deal with these incidents with our kids and not run the risk of

Julie Zauzmer Weil: Thank you.

Lisa Gore: having them go to prison on that issue that could be handled by somebody else.

Julie Zauzmer Weil: All right, let's have Nate Fleming respond and then we'll move on to the next question.

Nate Fleming: I agree with candidate Gore on this issue. I think it's important to highlight on the issue of school-based mental health. We've been doing the work.

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Nate Fleming: So in 2020, we funded a budget amendment to increase the amount of money that we received from the estate tax from very wealthy families and we directed that money to school-based mental health, to violence prevention and mentoring, particularly in at-risk schools. So I think that's something that we definitely should make sure that we're doubling down on and investing more into school-based mental health. I really appreciate that candidate Gore.

Julie Zauzmer Weil: All right, thank you. Along those lines, we have a question from the audience for Lisa Gore. What would you do if anything, to take some jobs away from the police and give them to other professionals?

Lisa Gore: So I think, one of the things that we just talked about is definitely police in schools and I really wish we could speak that up. I think we're a few years from getting there and there might be some pushback from the executive administration, but I would love to get them out of schools and those security contracts and take

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Lisa Gore: that funding. Just like we talked about to school-based mental health incidents, also dealing with mental health calls. I've talked to police officers on the street. They really don't want to deal with that. We have better systems in place and we need to invest in those systems, Department of Behavioral Health so that we have a team and I believe we do, we have a team, but it could be funded and we need to make sure that we're offering them enough monetary support and budget funding that the team

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Lisa Gore: is basically able to respond to mental health call without police involvement, unless they're involved in something extremely dangerous that law enforcement needs to be called and sometimes that can be diverted with additional professional counseling as well and

Julie Zauzmer Weil: Thank you.

Lisa Gore: then we also talked about the non-violent traffic incident or non [U/A].

Julie Zauzmer Weil: Thank you. All right, Ms. Bonds, are there other jobs that the police do right now that you think could be done by somebody else?

Anita Bonds: Oh, yes. Most definitely.

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Anita Bonds: We call officers for many things and I think we start with mental health assistance. I believe that every police district should have mental health aides that are available in the district and that they go to the assistance of the community. I know, usually when there is a-

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Julie Zauzmer Weil: We might have lost connection. Council member Bonds, are you there?

All right. Let's move on to, you know, what I was going to do yes or no questions next, but let's wait for Ms. Bonds for that, so that everybody gets a chance to raise their hands. Let's see.

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Julie Zauzmer Weil: All right, let's move to a question for Ms. Gore. How would you rate the district's response to Coronavirus? Going forward do you see the need for any changes to how DC handles the ongoing pandemic?

Lisa Gore: Honestly, this question I'll have to answer it from the perspective of a mom that had a kid in high school at the time Coronavirus started and

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Lisa Gore: it was kind of distracting. So overall though for the city, I would probably give us a B, but I am really disappointed in the response that parents went through in terms of transitioning to hybrid learning, going back to school without testing protocols in place,

lack of transparent data, classroom level data. So there were definitely some issues with the response

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Lisa Gore: in terms of education and just, you know, the masking, unmasking. There was a lot of confusion there. So I think I would give the city probably a B.

Julie Zauzmer Weil: Is there anything you would change going forward as we continue to deal with this pandemic?

Lisa Gore: Absolutely. Transparent data. We're still having issues with the executive office providing the city with the data that we need. We have to have

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Lisa Gore: data transparency so that we can track the transmission rate and we can make good business decisions, not only for schools, but businesses as well. So I think I would definitely, you know, in terms of oversight being a council member demand that the data transparency be a lot more robust than what we're seeing right now.

Julie Zauzmer Weil: Thank you. Mr. Williams, how would you grade DC's response to the pandemic and what would you do differently going forward?

Dexter Williams: I think it's been good.

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Dexter Williams: But I also have to comment from a perspective as a former council staffer when the pandemic hit, you know, in the beginning, the administration was collaborative with the council. It was consistent communication. I do like the fact that the administration held daily press conferences, informing public about how we as a city, we're going to move through this process, but somewhere down the line, you know, the administration stopped communicating with the council. It caused a lot of tension.

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Dexter Williams: As candidate Gore said, you know, there was a lack of communication with our education system and it was just a mess and so we've moved past that, but I think moving forward, transparency is going to be key. I mean, you saw the report that came out. I believe it was earlier this week that talked about the COVID data wasn't even updated. So people have been able to trust their government. People have to feel comfortable with the Department of Health and making sure that they're reporting

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Dexter Williams: accurate numbers and being truthful about what's going on.

Julie Zauzmer Weil: Thank you.

Dexter Williams: Transparency is a really, really big deal.

Julie Zauzmer Weil: Thank you. Mr. Fleming and then Ms. Bonds, can you tell us if there's anything you believe DC needs to start doing as we respond to this ongoing pandemic?

Nate Fleming: Well, Julie, you've been one of the main advocates, encouraging the executive to release reporting data they've stopped and I appreciate you bringing attention to that. So that's something that others have mentioned, but they certainly should be doing that.

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Nate Fleming: I think in terms of our Coronavirus response, one thing I'm proud of, something that I worked on was the eviction ban during the pandemic and we researched what was going on in other cities, other jurisdictions and we wanted to have the strongest ban to make sure that one, we didn't have a clip of evictions essentially and we've had problems with that. Council members wanted to weaken that ban. They put landlords over people and we've had challenges in terms of our state DC program, even for getting money to the landlords. So I think that's an area that I'm proud

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Nate Fleming: of what we've done, but that's also an area that we need stronger improvement on. The pandemic isn't over, and people still need assistance in terms of meeting their rent and utility bills and I want to ensure that we don't have a clip of evictions moving forward.

Julie Zauzmer Weil: Thanks so much. Ms. Bonds.

Anita Bonds: Yes. I think that the administration has done a fairly good job during the pandemic, the transparency of information for the most part.

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Anita Bonds: We began to realize in the last couple of weeks, last month, that there has been a slacking. Somehow it was this agency versus the other agencies saying, you know, why and how we were not getting the information, but I understand that we are going to have a meeting tomorrow, so we're starting again weekly meetings with the executive

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Anita Bonds: and we expect to get that information again and be able to share it with the community and the community really depended on knowing where and how the city was attacking the issue of COVID and what the resources are.

Julie Zauzmer Weil: Thank you. I'd like to give each of you the opportunity now to ask each other a question. Ms. Bonds, is there a question that you would like to ask one of the other candidates?

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Anita Bonds: Let's see. I would like to ask Mr. Williams a question. Do I just go for it? Okay.

Julie Zauzmer Weil: Go for it.

Anita Bonds: Mr. Williams. All right, well, thank you. Mr. Williams, I'd like to know what your thoughts are on the new approach that we're taking to getting at risk money directly to the schools as opposed to

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Anita Bonds: it coming through that filter that you and I talked about before?

Dexter Williams: Now council member, I really appreciate that question, because you know, education is a big priority of mine. I know that there was a back and forth at the council during the budget process on at-risk dollars and actually support Chairman Mendelson's proposal. To tell you the truth, council member, my biggest concern is implementation and as you know, as a council member yourself that's an issue, you know,

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Dexter Williams: [U/A] came out with a report couple of years ago that talked about how at-risk clients wasn't actually being used appropriately. So I want to make sure that these new enhanced at-risk dollars, which are targeted, which I think is very smart and strategic, are actually going to go to the schools and actually be used appropriately, that's why I really appreciate the question, council member.

Julie Zauzmer Weil: Oh, that was a great question. And I see that Mr. Fleming wants to respond to it as well, 30 seconds.

Nate Fleming: Yes, I do.

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Nate Fleming: I'm sorry for beating a dead horse, but this can clear up something earlier. I actually wrote this law as a council staffer. There were 20 schools east of the river that were underfunded in 2020 and part of the reason they were underfunded because they had so many at-risk youths in the schools and the funding mechanism didn't work for them. So we wrote a bill to ensure that schools with 70% or more at-risk students get more funding directly through the budget and this bill, good example, was a bill that just was implemented in this budget. So it was a bill that we wrote and someone said

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Nate Fleming: that's a good idea and it was implemented in the budget. So I'm very proud of that work. So thank you as well.

Julie Zauzmer Weil: Thank you, Mr. Fleming. Would you like to ask a question to somebody else in the room?

Nate Fleming: No, I'm fine. Thank you.

Julie Zauzmer Weil: Well, Mr. Williams, can you ask a question to one of your opponents?

Dexter Williams: No, I'm fine as well.

Julie Zauzmer Weil: Ms. Gore, do you have a question for somebody.

Lisa Gore: Yes. I have a question for council member Bonds.

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Lisa Gore: And my question is the financial reports were recently released and I was looking at a tweet from Alex Koma who highlighted that Brenda Donald, the director of Housing Authority donated a \$100 to your campaign and I also saw that there's a meet and greet, I believe the mayor is sponsoring where you're a guest speaker that's coming up, I believe on the 21st and my question to you is just about the general appearance

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Lisa Gore: of not being neutral. Do you have any concerns with the donation to your campaign or appearing at a mayoral meet and greet where people might say that you appear favor toward one political campaign or another?

Anita Bonds: No, I don't have any problem with it. That's why I'm participating in the Fair Elections Program. It is very clear that that is a process where, you know, these, they call it small donations

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Anita Bonds: can be filtered to any individual who was running. I'm running. I did not know about it until I read it today on Twitter. So I'm thankful for the contributions that I get from wherever they come from our district residents and as far as event that a district member of our

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Anita Bonds: government may be listed with, they know the rules and the rules are that they cannot participate in a fund raiser. Now do I have concerns about it as an individual? Not really.

Julie Zauzmer Weil: Okay. Thank you.

Anita Bonds: Because I think that as long as you follow the law, you are.

Julie Zauzmer Weil: Thank you. All right. Well, we've had two more yes or no questions

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Julie Zauzmer Weil: submitted by members of the audience. One asks, do you support extending the DC street car? Raise your hand if you'd like to extend the street car beyond its current line on H street. Everybody wants to extend the street car. I think our audience member will be happy to hear that. Would you like the Washington commanders to build their next football stadium in the district? Raise your hand if you'd like to see the football team return to DC.

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Julie Zauzmer Weil: None of the four of you would like the football team to play in DC. All right.

Nate Fleming: I love the football team, you know.

Julie Zauzmer Weil: Okay. Well, I have a question for each of you. Who do you plan to vote for, for mayor? Mr. Fleming?

Nate Fleming: Well for mayor, I think I'm focused on my own race and I think it's so important because this race is critical right now. We have housing challenges in this city.

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Nate Fleming: We've had a chair of the housing committee for the past decade and DC has become least less affordable. We've had the highest intensity of black displacement. So what I want to focus on is ensuring that we win this race. We've knocked 20,000 doors thus far and we're really prepared. We're talking to residents all throughout this city and we're really in position to win this race and I think it's important given that there's a lot of residents out there that wants alternatives to the current leadership at the council, that we focus on this campaign and making sure that residents know that we're well positioned to win.

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Nate Fleming: We've built a lot of support. We have the endorsements of Jews United for Justice, the grassroots law project, The Washington Post. We won the straw poll with 75% of the vote. So I'm only focused on my race.

Julie Zauzmer Weil: Alright, Ms. Gore, would you like to tell us who you're voting for for mayor?

Lisa Gore: To be honest with you. Not at this point in time, but I will say that we have.

Julie Zauzmer Weil: Ms. Bonds, would you?

Lisa Gore: Okay, I wasn't finished.

Julie Zauzmer Weil: All right, you can finish, you can finish.

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Lisa Gore: Thank you. What I want to say is that we have great candidates in the mayor race and we have great candidates throughout all these races, you know, Trayon White is in the race. Robert White is in the race. Obviously the incumbent Mayor Bowser and then

James Butler. So there's some strong choices there. I hope everybody does their research and you know pick who is most suitable to them. So, and that's what I'll be doing.

Julie Zauzmer Weil: Okay. Ms. Bonds?

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Julie Zauzmer Weil: We might have lost the council member again. Mr. Williams, who will you be voting for mayor?

Dexter Williams: Yes, I'm focused on my campaign and my race and we were out knocking on doors, talking to voters. We have a lot of momentum. We've been endorsed by the Washington Teachers Union, The Georgetown Voice. We got the highest number of endorsement votes with DC for Democracy earlier this year

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Dexter Williams: and also we've been endorsed by the DC [U/A] at-large council member comes June 21st.

Julie Zauzmer Weil: All right, let's see if I get more answers to another question from the audience. Marvin Crimson asks, what could you do as a council member to move DC to net zero emissions? Let's go to Mr. Fleming.

Nate Fleming: I always get the tough questions first

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Nate Fleming: this is an important issue. DC, we've set these goals to be net emissions free by 2030, and that's actually the most ambitious goal in the entire country. So we're going to have to be really focused in making sure that we meet this goal. I believe in remittable credits; I believe in expanding opportunities for solar. wind energy, but at the end of the day it's going to come down to making sure we're holding that utilities accountable

and right now we have a council that's too cozy with utilities. We have a member that just left the council

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Nate Fleming: council member, Brandon Todd, and now he's a corporate lobbyist for Washington Gas and the members of the council are just far too cozy with these utilities. So to meet our goals, we're going to have to be aggressive. We we're going to have to be innovative. We're going to have to be creative, but more importantly, we have to stop putting politics over people.

Julie Zauzmer Weil: Thanks so much. Ms. Gore, how would you get us to net zero emissions in DC?

Lisa Gore: Yeah, so my platform actually called for a green new deal in three areas

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Lisa Gore: and that's transportation, public housing, and also education. The main focus is basically that one of the things that we can do is look at our buildings. So they are definitely one of the largest source of emissions that we have and then in terms of transportation, we can make sure that our public fleet is a green fleet. I'm very heavily involved in the Brentwood issue, the bus depot issue, where those buses and vehicles are not environmental friendly.

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Lisa Gore: So we can look at our city contracts, also improving solar for all. We have a Solar for All Program, but we know that the participants in that program have come into some hardship with, you know, getting their credits. So we have to strengthen that program and increase the trust in it and that is a program for low housing tenants. So we want to make sure that we're expanding that to them and then just making sure that, you know, building wise that we're using green building standards

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Lisa Gore: to the extent as possible. We have private schools in DC that have solar roofs or green roof, but our public schools down.

Julie Zauzmer Weil: Thank you.

Lisa Gore: So we have to change that.

Julie Zauzmer Weil: Thanks so much. Mr. Williams, how would you move DC toward net zero emissions?

Dexter Williams: Thank you. I agree with my colleagues. We did set an ambitious goal by 2030, and I think that this is an oversight question for the committee on transportation and the environment making sure that we are meeting the standards

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Dexter Williams: metrics every time, I would work with the chair, the committee on transportation and environment, making sure that we're meeting those metrics.

Julie Zauzmer Weil: Thanks so much. All right. Ms. Gore, Robert White, who holds the office you're running for and is now running for mayor, has made some big campaign promises including a guarantee of a job for every DC resident and a plan to open public boarding schools for elementary through high school students whose families want all day schooling.

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Julie Zauzmer Weil: But of course, a mayor can't fund big ideas without the council approving the budget. If you were on the council, would you support funding a jobs guarantee or boarding schools?

Lisa Gore: If I was going to council, I do like the idea of the jobs guarantee and I like my idea that re-imagine vocational education programming for younger kids are even better,

because that sets them up for not only skills, but coming out with business opportunities,

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Lisa Gore: but I do believe that's a good program. I am not sure that I would fund boarding schools in DC. I'm just going to be honest about that. I am a mom, I have a young son, only person up here that has a young son and, you know, I know when kids enter the juvenile justice system, we want to keep them in our communities, as a mom you want to keep your kid in the community with you,

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Lisa Gore: and I would look to look at maybe something different in terms of that. So to be honest, I don't know if I was on the boarding school idea.

Julie Zauzmer Weil: Thank you so much. Ms. Bonds, what do you think about boarding schools and about a jobs guarantee which Trevor White has said would cost \$1.5 billion?

Anita Bonds: Well, firstly, I would not be supporting a boarding school. I understand his proposal actually starts at the

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Anita Bonds: kindergarten level and so I'm definitely not interested in that kind of proposal and I don't believe that the community is interested in it. I try to reflect the will of the community as much as possible and I've already heard from many parents as well as others throughout the community, you know, what is this proposal that one of your colleagues has made as it relates to putting our young people in

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Anita Bonds: they consider it a confinement as opposed to a nurturing home environment. So that's my strong answer to that. I know that we are all seeking opportunities in ways

that we can change the dynamics in the community, particularly for our young people, but I do not embrace that as one of the ways. There are other things that we can do.

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Julie Zauzmer Weil: Thank you.

Anita Bonds: And I do believe all day school is a proposal that we ought to look at.

Julie Zauzmer Weil: Thank you. Mr. Fleming, what would you think about a \$1.5 billion jobs guarantee?

Nate Fleming: I won't focus on Robert's plan, but our plans are relatively similar. My jobs plan is reflective of the new deal and the WPA because coming out of the pandemic in this moment of racial justice, there is an opportunity. We have to connect our disconnected young adults under 30.

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Nate Fleming: Those who are not in school and who are not working into jobs that DC has leveraged over. So in terms of infrastructure jobs, we put millions of dollars out to do construction and they're supposed to be hiring locally. So why can't we train our own residents and then pipeline them into those jobs. They can be doing maintenance work on our recreation centers, our facilities, that type of work is contracted out right now, but also community work. I believe the younger people, young adults are most effective in reaching the teenagers, but finally

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Nate Fleming: we need to invest in the arts. The WPA had a strong arts component, and I believe that's going to engage our young people and put them in pipelines to careers, but generally we have to improve youth and young adult outcomes in the city and that three part plans, one, universal afterschool; two, making the summer youth employment

program year round, I was glad others have called for that; and three, the jobs program that I just described.

Julie Zauzmer Weil: Great. Thank you so much. Mr. Williams, do you think that DC should guarantee every resident a job?

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Julie Zauzmer Weil: And then I see that Ms. Bonds wants a 30-second rebuttal after that.

Dexter Williams: Well, thank you, Julie. I definitely appreciate the question. I think it said a big bow proposal, but as a council member that is something I would want to look at, look at how we're going to fund it and look at the mechanics of it. As I said before, if we want to solve our problems, one of the things that we have to do is get people employed and so something that I'm very interested in and I just want to look at the mechanics of it, analyze it, scrutinize it, and make sure it's something that we can afford. Make sure that the mechanics of it actually

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Dexter Williams: fit for the district.

Julie Zauzmer Weil: Thank you. Ms. Bonds.

Anita Bonds: Yes, thank you. I think one of the biggest hurdles we're facing now in the district is the fact that we have many jobs and we have fewer people interested apparently in taking these jobs and so I think getting jobs and people connected is what we have to do and keeping people on the jobs. I know we talk a lot about jobs

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Anita Bonds: training and trying to, you know, match the skills to the jobs that we have, but I think what we have to do also is to give people an opportunity to these jobs more readily, many do not know about the jobs. They do not understand that we have jobs

that they can take advantage of and so I think it's a complex part of urban living and as we come out of this pandemic

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Anita Bonds: and how do we really begin to rebuild our city and our economy? So getting people in jobs and helping them to stay in jobs has to be key, but it doesn't mean that your kids will be in an all-day confinement so to speak.

Julie Zauzmer Weil: All right. Thank you so much. We have come to the end of our time. I didn't get through all my questions. I know I promised you a question about the tax revision commission

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Julie Zauzmer Weil: but we've run out of time for it. So we'll have to talk about that some other day. Every candidate can now make a one-minute closing statement. Let's start with Lisa Gore.

Lisa Gore: Thank you everyone. Thank you for tuning in tonight and listening to our statements. It's been an honor to serve as a ANC commissioner in ward 3 and ward 4 and represent that community and I am very excited about the opportunity representing DC

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Lisa Gore: as the next At-Large council member. I am a public school mom, I'm ANC commissioner, and I'm a retired federal servant of 28 years. My vision for DC leadership is a council member that fights for equity for this city, fights for housing that is safe, equitable transportation across all 8 wards and environmental justices in neighborhoods like Brentwood and Ivy City and I know in order to do this, we have to have more than just policy ideas. We also need leadership and I have that

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Lisa Gore: over 28 years of executive level leadership in IG's office, fighting for national housing programs and issues that we have, like we have today in DC. I'm an independent voice. I'm not tied to the revolving door of the Wilson Building and I am able to connect with the community on all levels of my lived experience. We don't need more policies or more relationships that reflect old ideology. So I look forward to earning your vote and to learn more about my campaign

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Lisa Gore: Please go to gorefordc.com. Thank you.

Julie Zauzmer Weil: Thank you so much. Council member Bonds.

Anita Bonds: Thank you very much everyone for listening this evening and please reflect on my extensive record of service and progress that I brought, moving government forward, making DC stronger for a brighter future for us all. Since accepting the assignment as chair of the housing committee, my service has not wavered

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Anita Bonds: and during my leadership DC has been recognized as a national leader on affordable housing buildings, preserving, and providing housing at a rent that residents can afford, challenging process, that DC is slowly overcoming, more and more residents have homes at income levels that they can afford. More aging housing is being rehabilitated and more residents began a new office to do like off the streets

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Anita Bonds: and I want to make DC a more equitable place for us to call home. We're also addressing the many other needs throughout the city, healthcare, mental health, substance abuse services, childcare, saving the environment, bike trails and beautiful parks and focused on food services [U/A] and stamp out poverty. So those are the things that I'm [O/V].

Julie Zauzmer Weil: Thank you so much.

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Julie Zauzmer Weil: All right, Mr. Williams, your closing statement, please.

Dexter Williams: Thank you Julie. Thank you to OCF for hosting tonight's forum and for giving me an opportunity and platform to talk about my vision and priorities for this city. When elected as your next at-large council member, I look forward to enhancing the quality of reimagining our entire educational system, providing affordable housing, and workforce housing and enhancing public safety. So I just want to thank everyone for listening to tonight's forum. You can learn more about me and my platform at my website

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Dexter Williams: at dexterfordc.com and please follow us on Twitter at [DexterforDC](https://twitter.com/DexterforDC). I look forward to earning your vote when June 21st. Thank you so much.

Julie Zauzmer Weil: Thank you and Mr. Fleming.

Nate Fleming: Thank you Julie and to the residents of Washington. As your next council member, I'll take on the tough issues, issues like public safety, improving our schools for our families, making our city more affordable, clear jobs, but what's clear tonight is that we have experienced on these issues, clear detailed plans to move us forward

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Nate Fleming: and you can learn more on our website, natefordc.com. I'm ready to move on day one to move our city forward and we don't speak in generalities, such as we have a platform to increase employment. Well, what are you going to do to increase employment? And we talk about the Wilson Building. I've worked there and I'm not an insider. I'm someone that knows I can do a better job than some of our current council members and that's why I'm running. We've written 50 laws. We are prepared

and the other campaigns know that's a strength. I'm a council member that can work with you and has a track record of achieving change

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Nate Fleming: at the council and I'm asking for your vote on June 21st to get ready for the things that I know that we can do together. Thank you.

Julie Zauzmer Weil: Thank you so much. That concludes our debate. To learn more about how to vote in this election go to dcboe.org. That's for DC board of elections, and you can visit dcdebates.com to watch this debate and all the others this week in their entirety. Thank you

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Julie Zauzmer Weil: to all of our candidates, our community partners, and the Office of Campaign Finance for hosting tonight's debate. Good night.

[END RECORDING [DC At-Large Member of the Council Primary Debate Hosted by the Office of Campaign Finance]]