

**Minutes From Kalorama Citizens Association-Reed Cooke  
Neighborhood Association Candidates Forum 2010, August 31, 2010 7 pm**

After opening remarks and welcome by Maureen Gallagher, President of Reed-Cooke Neighborhood Association and Denis James, President of Kalorama Citizens Association, the candidates for At-Large Councilmember were introduced. They gave the following opening statements:

**David Catania (I) (incumbent)** emphasized his interest in and commitment to solving problems of health disparities, underinvestment and priorities. He worked to cut the rate of childhood uninsured in half, which is now the lowest rate in the country; also worked to cut the rate of adult uninsured, now second lowest in the country.

**Phil Mendelson (D) (incumbent)** emphasized his long experience with District government: ANC commissioner 20 years, staff for former council members, and two terms as council member. He emphasized recent work on juvenile justice and medical marijuana.

**Michael D. Brown (D) current shadow senator** said that we need change: 30% unemployment, widening gap in schools, need more affordable housing, DC is not allowed to tax those who work in the District, keep jobs in city.

**Darryl Moch (SG)** said that all of us need a voice on council in order that all communities have improvements and that DC should become a model for dealing with poverty.

**Clark Ray (D)** noted his long record of public service for Clinton administration and two mayors; experience working in government both in the legislative and executive branches.

**David Schwartzman (SG)** Howard professor and environmental scientist, his priorities would be to abolish child poverty in DC, make our tax structure more progressive, establish a DC municipal bank, and reduce corporate welfare

*Members of the audience then asked the following questions:*

**Given the high % of children in poverty: would you support a tax increase for those incomes over \$200K?**

All candidates answered “yes”, with caveats. **Catania** thinks that it’s time to look at rates, but we must look at the issue in context. It would be a hollow victory if people with that level of income moved out of the District as a result. **Schwartzman**: That’s a myth. MD taxes are higher than the District’s, VA taxes have always been lower. If they do move, increase their property taxes. **Moch**: Support what’s fiscally sound, don’t make decisions based on emotions. **Ray**: There are so many inefficiencies in government, first make sure they’re eliminated before any taxes are raised. **Brown**: We need statehood. We’re leaving \$ 2 million uncollected income taxes in MD and VA from those who work in the District but live outside.

**Their position on Michelle Rhee’s record:**

**Schwartzman**: He agrees with parents and school workers, is against the flawed teacher evaluation model, and thinks we should end mayoral control of the schools. Rhee should be fired. **Moch**: This administration views input from others as irrelevant, is against the subjective evaluation of teachers. Rhee is not the answer to the District’s education problems. She should be allowed to live with her husband in CA. Her replacement should be found among those with experience in a diverse community. **Ray**: Has a Masters in Education, supports school reform and mayoral take-over of the schools. While the issue is bigger than Rhee, she should be retained for the sake of continuity, but her people skills need improvement. **Brown**: Believes that it’s a mixed bag with Rhee and mayoral control. He has 3 kids in DC public schools, his wife is a school employee. Under Rhee, school renovations have been much quicker, tests scores trending up, and the drop out rate has to be improved. However, the impact tool for teacher evaluations is

a Trojan horse-- mostly subjective, with no retraining and no recourse. We shouldn't use a single data point to judge teachers. **Catania:** No simple solution. Doesn't think Rhee's perfect, but supports her. Sees education disparities as the biggest racial issue. Rhee's gotten a buy-in from staff and those around her, we would lose trajectory of improvement if she doesn't continue. **Mendelson:** Rhee should continue. We need continuity in the system. Mistakes have been made. We need to encourage parental involvement; dedicated funding for improvements. Quality public education in the District is imperative. DC should be a model urban school system.

**Medical cannabis:** Asked whether the candidates supported the differences between the ballot measure passed many years ago and the new law, specifically in relation to disallowing growth for personal use, limitation of distribution to non-profits, and requirement to hand over medical records to police:

**Schwartzman:** Agrees with all three points. Given the impact of the drug war, he's for legalization. **Moch:** Believes that we should respect people enough to assume that they will make good decisions for themselves. **Ray:** First time he's been asked about this. You shouldn't have to turn medical records over to the police. **Brown:** There are differences since the referendum was enacted, primarily the experiences of other jurisdictions with the issues. You shouldn't have to turn records over. But he doesn't have an issue with whether dispensaries are profit or non-profit. **Catania:** Under the proposal, no one will not have to turn over medical records to police. The referendum didn't require physician recommendation because physicians were concerned that they'd be prosecuted. But case law has limited that as a problem. The proposal requires a physician recommendation. We have to consider Congressional oversight of the District. We don't want to lose the initiative by being excessive. If Congress changes hands, we're likely to face the same problem as the past. **Mendelson:** The proposal requires a physician's recommendation, but has no requirement to turn over medical records to police. Drafted with the idea that we should start out on the strict side to go forward without Congressional interference. Believes that the proposal strikes the right balance, if problems are encountered as the program is implemented we'll deal with them as they come up.

**Noting that strong interpersonal skills are necessary as council member, give an example of a concrete instance in which you which acted poorly, what you learned from that mistake, how it improved you:**

**Brown:** As he grew his business, everything was done by a handshake. After his parents died, he dropped out of high school. He's always regretted that. He's worked hard at whatever he's done-- always tried to move positively. **Catania:** The example of how he and Mendelson moved legislation resulting in improvements to gay marriage bill. Access to acute care in Southeast has been a long time issue, he needs to do better to get it accomplished. **Mendelson:** Points to his ability to get a majority on major bills going through his committee, for example, the independence of the Attorney General, revision of criminal law, equal access to marriage. His success has been dependent upon working with those outside the Council, finding the appropriate balance. **Ray:** While working as DPR head, he planned to transfer childcare control to the department of education. The mayor decided to privatize childcare instead. Mistake was in not getting the solution he'd found to mayor. He learned that he must take time to provide solution and explain it before just trying to implement it on his own. **Moch:** Emotions can run high, understands that not speaking up, allowing himself to be overwhelmed, led to certain voices not being heard. He learned to speak up. **Schwartzman:** Ask my 3 ex-wives. As educator, knows that we must encourage critical thinking; instead we're teaching to the test.

**Closing:**

**Brown:** We need statehood and we need change in leadership to accomplish that. **Catania:** He's working hard and delivering; community healthcare access act his particular priority. **Ray:**

We need new energy and new ideas. He has a record of working with citizens. **Moch:** He promises to be a voice for all of the people, some of us are not being heard, some of our needs not being met. **Mendelson:** A record is important. He's a thoughtful, accessible and hard-working legislator. DC should be a model in many areas, that's his goal. **Schwartzman:** his 50 years of being an advocate qualifies him for the position. His first priorities would be to end poverty, implement a green justice approach, and get apprentice programs in schools.

***The meeting proceeded to Ward One Councilmember candidates, who gave their brief opening statements:***

**Jim Graham (D) (incumbent):** This is not the time for on the job training. He noted his accomplishments in public safety, the vision for the future Adams-Morgan streetscape, the re-opened Champlain Street, bringing Harris-Teeter into the neighborhood; and daytime commerce on 18th, including the hotel proposal for the Christian Scientist Church location.

**Marc Morgan (R)** He doesn't support the loss of jobs and small businesses in the District, losses of affordable housing, failure to bring money back to DC. 12 years is long enough; we need new ideas, green economy and development.

**Jeff Smith (D)** As executive director of City Voice, an advocacy group, he brings necessary experience for the position. We need to make Ward One a great place to live and work. We've had the same council member for 12 years, but have had no leadership on crime and safety, responsible development, or quality public education.

**Bryan Weaver (D)** Politics is about the improvement of human lives. There's been no decrease in muggings over last 10 years. He also worked on bringing Harris-Teeter to the neighborhood. But most employees hired by Harris-Teeter have been laid off or had their hours reduced. We need a reallocation of resources, muggings are not happening where police are deployed on 18th, but in the residential neighborhoods. We've had two murders this summer in the neighborhood; the juvenile justice system is not working and needs change.

***Questions from audience members:***

**How would you ensure access to good jobs, affordable housing, and public safety by African Americans?**

**Smith:** It's more about those who need access, not just a black/white issue. He's been endorsed by the police, a number of DC building trades unions (recognizing his support for apprentice programs), and the DC Chamber of Commerce (small/med sized businesses).

**Morgan:** We need housing policies that could lead to balance. Police are underfunded. We need more foot patrols, training and retention.

**Weaver:** We're becoming a ward of the haves and have-nots. We've done a good job of high end development, but a horrible job of maintaining housing for the working poor. Oversight of existing law is lax-- only 2 of 16 development projects met the apprentice-jobs requirements of the contracts. We need to make penalties for noncompliance greater, need to close the achievement racial gap in education and rectify the disparate funding on either side of 16th St.

**Graham:** While on the council, we've seen building developments on vacant lots, reducing gang activities without displacement. We have said we want people to live and work in this ward-- witness the rehabilitation of 3000 units of low-income housing. No member of the council is stronger on tenant rights, witnessed by his endorsement by TENAC.

**What will you do to make sure the neighborhood is safe?**

**Weaver:** Public nuisance is a crime problem in this neighborhood, officers on 18th need to make triage decisions due to having to come off street to book arrestees. Nuisance tickets with

substantial fines are necessary. 2000 juvenile offenders, but only 60 beds—this throws the system on its head.

**Morgan:** It's a revolving door problem. We need to work with the courts, fund recreational facilities, fully fund police, work with residents, get private money for things like crime fighting

**Graham:** We need to focus on the root causes of crime, youth need a sense of opportunity in life. We must prevent crime before it happens, ensure quality police action. In fact, police have been fully funded for at least 5 years. Much of the violent crime in this neighborhood is gang related. He has funded gang intervention program of \$2.5 million. Swift justice is necessary. There was an arrest within 24 hours of the recent murder. We have come a long way.

**Smith:** We need to focus on education. When did the current councilmember ask about retention rates in schools? This councilmember interferes with cases in the system. We need alternative re-entry routes for offenders. We need more jobs in this ward. In the 14th Street redevelopment, no one from the community got jobs that can support their families. 9 of 16 development projects failed to employ 50% DC residents as required.

**The audience member asked separate questions for each candidate, except Morgan:**

**Weaver: where did funds donated to Clinton campaign come from?**

He detailed his work experience (no current salaried position) and funding for his 501 (c)(3), Hoops Sagrado.

**Graham: If leading by so much, why not allow businesses to put others' signs up?**

He appreciates his lead, but is running a hard campaign and doesn't want to take anything for granted. He supports the exercise of people's right to disagree.

**Smith: What about your criminal record?**

Said that he has no criminal record, despite what City Paper said... the incident involved trespass at his home by another and the confrontation that followed.

**Nightlife vs. all other businesses: What criteria should there be for multi-year tax abatements; ethical to accept money from developers?**

**Smith:** It should be illegal to take money from developers who receive tax incentives on their projects. The District should be offering incentives to develop affordable housing for teachers and other city workers.

**Weaver:** Corporate contributions, the way we do it in DC, funnels money in an unethical way. The LLC exception leads to a lack of transparency. A reform of system is necessary. The current system has the appearance of pay-to-play. Other cities have done it... just Louisiana and Florida do it like DC does. Also, an independent auditor is necessary to determine whether the projects would be truly in the public interest.

**Graham:** No one has done more to reduce costs of Adams Morgan BID. The new hotel will make big difference. Jubilee Housing provides low income housing. Other developments have low income housing. He would favor forbidding corporate contributions, but the recent Supreme Court decision is contrary to that.

**Morgan:** New business is low because it is so challenging for small business. Developers have destroyed our local businesses. They get the tax incentives. The District should look for minority-owned businesses... they've moved out of the District.

**Closing statements:**

**Weaver:** Never separate the words you speak from the life you live. The current system is not transparent. We must give teeth to recycling laws. We need oversight, transparency, and a reform of the system.

**Morgan:** Said he's a fair-minded Republican. He worked in an AIDS organization. He worked on gay marriage. This campaign is about jobs, putting everyone on the road to success by improving our substandard education system. The solution isn't four more years.

**Graham:** Said he has a constituent-based solution to problems. Few in this room haven't had contact with him, leading to better service from the District. He has been there for you. It is time for seasoned leadership that has produced real results. (**Editor's note:** At this point **CM Graham** mentioned the Walter Pierce Park Archeology Project and the names of Mary Belcher, Community liaison to the project, and KCA President Denis James, in a reference to the benefits of earmarks. The project received an "earmark" from DC for \$200,000 to provide funding for Ground-Penetrating Radar and other research, and for the provision of a "Master Plan" for Walter Pierce Park. The funding went to Washington Parks and People. I wish to make this clear to anyone who might have thought KCA received an earmark. We have not. Through individual contributions, KCA funds the outreach and education activities of the project. – Denis James)

**Smith:** 16 years would be too long. Graham has 400 absences over 12 years. Consider Smith's many endorsements. If they trust Smith, please do so as well.

*The evening concluded with remarks by and questions to the Council Chairman candidates.*

**Kwame Brown (D):** In his opening remarks, he emphasized modernizing schools, improving access to technical vocational education (keep them open nights and weekends for adult re-education), reducing domestic abuse, and holding teachers accountable.

**Vincent Orange (D):** Said that he's running to bring leadership to the chairman's position, to tackle tough financial issues, noting that when he came onto the Council, DC was in receivership, by the time he left, the Financial Control Board was out, the Mayor was back in power, and the Council worked well together, and to move forward on educational reform.

*Questions from audience members:*

**What are you going to do to hold Pepco accountable for power outages?**

**Orange:** Said that he will bring insight (he was VP for public affairs/policy for Pepco) to the issue. The problems will be improved by new two-way communication for outages-- smart grid technology; will look at infrastructure problems. The Council doesn't have direct power over Pepco, but will study the proposal for putting lines underground.

**Brown:** There is considerable frustration about outages by both business and homeowners. He will make sure that issues that come up will get hearings--how to have better communication, how to improve services.

**What environmental initiatives (e.g. energy rebate programs, solar investments, green building/roadways) do you support?**

**Brown:** Bag tax: As Councilmember, the Council had to force the Mayor to use the funds generated for Anacostia River clean-up. The Department of Environment was created with his support and he has been chair of committee. He has the Sierra Club endorsement and Councilmember Cheh's endorsement.

**Orange:** Emphasized clean and affordable energy bill goals. The money was collected on Pepco bills. The mayor used it for purposes other than those objectives to be determined by coalition (e.g. weatherization). We should be getting federal funds to deal with Anacostia clean up and healthy kids programs.

**What can be done to encourage small business and job creation in Ward 1?**

**Orange:** He'd do what he did in Ward 5: they had all the "don't want" enterprises, they got big box stores into the ward, worked on getting folks into jobs there, improved McKinley Tech, relocated public access TV, brought in Home Depot and other RI Metro stop development with the requirement of local business participation, and got more money for small businesses.

**Brown:** We must help businesses survive: Limit costs of regulations, make neighborhoods safe, build on Cardozo training center and the Carlos Rosario expansion for training for medical jobs, find alternative uses for vacant buildings, fund Main Street program.

**As to the role of the Chair: What do you perceive as the role and what do you bring to it?**

**Relationship between Chair and mayor:**

**Brown:** Chair needs to work with different personalities for common purpose. Linda Cropp did a great job (she has endorsed Brown). Every colleague but one has endorsed Brown. He has known Fenty for years and had a long relationship with Gray, so he would have phenomenal relationship with either. Will work together as a team.

**Orange:** Emphasized the need for change-- no longer would every member get a chairmanship of a committee. We need to recognize that the Council is a co-equal branch and can change things with a 9 vote majority. Let the executive run the executive branch. He would empower the financial committee chair. The education committee should not be a committee of the whole. There should be a chair of the committee and members of the committee assigned to particular problems. Chair's role is to lead legislative process transparently, exhibit maturity, and be responsible.

**Do you know the people who can bring capital into the District?**

**Brown:** Worked with Walmart, the Clinton administration, and Citybank.

**Orange:** Can manage a \$ 10 million budget. Convinced retailers to come into DC. We need to trap our tax dollars at our borders (e.g. build special education capacity in the District instead of spending the money on institutions outside the District).

**How would you work with the Chancellor's office to improve education?**

**Orange:** Educational reform is here to stay. He has a strong passion for education. We need to get the teachers off the bubble.

**Brown:** Education reform is our most important problem. He has two kids in DC public schools and his wife works in a DC charter school, so he understands the problems. He would work on better communication with Rhee; would ask steadiness in reform if Gray elected; focus on world class middle schools.

**Give an example of conflict or a problem while on the Council that demonstrates consensus building and what quality is worrisome about your opponent?**

**Brown:** Co-star relocation: he worked with Evans to determine how much was needed and how to guarantee that jobs would actually be created. Mayor had already dealt with company, Brown was able to use consensus to make the deal work.

**Orange:** Brown's inability to manage his own personal finances and his campaign finances troubles Orange. He worked with the Council to remove DC Counsel, create DC Emancipation Day, and to ensure children get books for core subjects.

**How do we keep people in the District?**

**Orange:** We have major economic development projects in the works: Homeland Security HQ, SW development project, convention center site, Walter Reed. We need to get our people trained to be ready to work on those projects by providing workforce development.

**Brown:** We need affordable housing, good schools, putting people back to work to keep people in the District. The Compliance Act now requires conformance to affordable housing standards but we have to incorporate family housing into the solution.

**Closing:**

**Orange:** It's been a long day. His wife works for District schools special education. We need all kids to graduate. He would bring leadership and maturity to the Chair position. Finance and education are the two most important issues.

**Brown:** We have to move forward together. He has the confidence of his colleagues, and a number of diverse groups like the police, fire department, DC Chamber of Commerce and others. The public should be included in all decisions.

The meeting concluded at 10:20 pm

Minutes taken by KCA Secretary Ted Guthrie, edited by Denis James