

TESTIMONY OF CHAIRMAN KWAME R. BROWN, COUNCIL OF THE DISTRICT OF COLUMBIA

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HOUSE SUBCOMMITTEE ON HEALTH CARE, DISTRICT OF COLUMBIA, CENSUS AND THE NATIONAL
ARCHIVES

Introduction

Good morning, Chairman Gowdy, Ranking Member Davis, and members of the Subcommittee on Health Care, the District of Columbia, Census, and the National Archives. I am Kwame R. Brown, Chairman of the Council of the District of Columbia, the District's elected legislature. I am pleased to speak to you today about the Council's role in developing the District's Fiscal Year 2012 appropriations request.

Budget Overview

This year, the Council has the difficult task of reviewing and finalizing a budget that continues to provide necessary services to the residents, businesses, and visitors of the District of Columbia, despite the slow pace of recovery from the recession. I would like to commend Mayor Gray and Chief Financial Officer Dr. Natwar Gandhi for submitting a balanced and structurally sound budget proposal to the Council. The Mayor's proposal does not use the District's fund balance to pay for recurring services, nor does it use capital dollars to pay for operating costs. Over the next two weeks, the Council will continue to review this proposal before passing the Fiscal Year 2012 Budget Request Act. The Council will continue the District's practice – now entering its 16th year – of submitting a balanced budget to Congress.

Major cost drivers for the Fiscal Year 2012 budget include ever-increasing health care costs, as well as the District's continuing education reform efforts – a commitment shared by both the Mayor and the Council. These pressures, together with revenues that have not yet fully rebounded to pre-recession levels, make it very difficult to keep our tax rates

competitive while providing much-needed services and programs to our residents and businesses. But we will rise to the challenge.

The budget passed by the Council will represent a focus on the District's core priorities: education, economic opportunity, and public safety.

Education

The Council is dedicated to the continued improvement of the District's education system. As products of the DC Public Schools, both Mayor Gray and I understand the opportunities created by a quality education.

More than a quarter of our local operating dollars will go toward education in Fiscal Year 2012. I am proud to say that the Council's commitment to education funding cannot be questioned. In addition to continuing the process of modernizing our school facilities, we will ensure that both public schools and public charter schools have the money they need to provide good education. For example, the loss of \$19 million of federal "Edujobs" stimulus funding in Fiscal Year 2012 will be filled with local funds, and our funding formula will deliver equitable funding to our elementary and secondary schools. And we are continuing our investments in early education and expanding the number of three and four-year olds that we are serving, giving them a strong foundation for learning.

Both our operating and capital budgets will include funding for the DC Community College, a branch of the University of the District of Columbia. The Community College has been a great success not just in educating our residents, but in connecting them with employment as well.

As a parent myself, I know that the most fundamental and admirable instinct of parents is to seek what is best for their children. I cannot look a working mother in the eye and tell her that she deserves less choice, not more. Our low-income families deserve as much choice as possible, including diverse offerings in DCPS, a full menu of charter schools,

and opportunities to attend nonpublic schools. And so, I commend Congress for funding the Opportunity Scholarships program.

Economic Opportunity

I also welcome the federal government's willingness to expand its presence east of the Anacostia River by moving the Department of Homeland Security to the St. Elizabeth's site. I hope that this is a major first step in a continuing commitment by the federal government to do its part to restore the Anacostia to the natural and economic resource that it could be. For too long, our residents east of the river have struggled to participate in the District's economic development, but with appropriate funding, including significant capital outlays by the District in Fiscal Year 2012, we could harness the Anacostia to spur economic activity for residents in Wards 7 and 8.

We will continue to make the District an excellent place to work or start a business. Like our investment in St. Elizabeth's, the investments in our capital budget for projects such as the Skyland Shopping Center, Walter Reed, and a new streetcar line will help to spread economic opportunity throughout the District. Along with an investment in our workforce through the Community College and adult jobs training, these projects will reduce unemployment, grow the District's tax base, and improve the quality of life for our residents and visitors.

Public Safety

Another key component of making the District a first-class city in which to live, work, or visit is ensuring that it is safe. The District is home to more law enforcement agencies than anywhere else in the nation. However, it is our locally funded Metropolitan Police Department that provides front-line patrol, investigation, and protection services to our residents and businesses. MPD Chief Cathy Lanier is doing excellent work, but we need to ensure that she has the resources necessary to run a first-rate police department.

Our public safety agencies provide vital services to the federal government, including police escorts, the housing of US Marshal detainees at the DC Jail, and emergency management and coordination. Therefore, it is imperative that MPD, along with the Department of Corrections and the Homeland Security and Management Agency, receive appropriate support from the federal government to fulfill their vital missions.

HIV/AIDS

Similarly, I must request that the federal government provide us with the resources we need to continue the progress we've made in the battle against HIV and AIDS. In July of next year, the District will host the World AIDS Conference, yet the District still has the highest AIDS rate in the country. Many of our programs have been effective, but with recent reductions in federal assistance, we face great unknowns for the future. This represents a major threat to the health of our most vulnerable residents. I urge you to ensure that the District of Columbia, as the host of that conference, has the funds necessary to continue to employ widely-recognized best practices to combat this terrible disease.

Next Steps

I have elected to address only some highlights of the budget in my testimony, because as I speak, the Council's committees are marking up their budget recommendations. In fact, as chair of the Committee of the Whole, this afternoon I will be chairing a markup of the District's 2012 budget for our schools and other agencies under the committee's purview.

Because of the nature of the ongoing legislative process, and as I'm sure you understand, I am unable to forecast exactly where each dollar will be budgeted for Fiscal Year 2012 until we vote on the Budget Request Act on May 25th. We will comply with our open meetings law by openly debating proposals for spending cuts and revenue enhancements. Each Councilmember's priorities will be the subject of negotiation; every budgetary shift will be reviewed. However, I can guarantee as the Chairman of the Council that we will pass a

balanced and structurally sound budget request to send to this Congress. After the Council reaches consensus and passes the budget, I'd welcome the opportunity to brief any member of this subcommittee personally on the Council's modifications to the Mayor's proposed budget.

Conclusion

In order for the District to provide vital services to the public, I ask that you pass this year's appropriations act in time for the start of the new fiscal year, and that you provide those citizens of the United States of America who call the District their home, the right to govern their own affairs through the representation of their elected officials.

It is to that last point that I will make my final request. Last month, the federal government faced the possibility of a shutdown. Had negotiations failed, and the government shut down, the District of Columbia would have been the only place in the United States of America where US citizens would be left without basic government services enjoyed even by developing countries. Trash pickup, pest control, Braille interpretation services for the blind, streetlight repairs, the removal of dead animals from yards and alleyways – all of these services, and many more, would have been suspended, because the District lacks the power to continue to spend even local tax dollars in the event of a federal shutdown. These are services that no representative – Democrat or Republican – would allow his or her constituents to go without. I strongly urge the members of this subcommittee to work to give the District the budget autonomy that its residents and businesses deserve, by passing H.R.345, the District of Columbia Budget Autonomy Act of 2011, and to protect the District from the effects of a federal shutdown by passing H.R.980, the District of Columbia Local Funds Continuation Act.

Thank you.

Biographical Information

Chairman Kwame R. Brown is an innovative leader and native Washingtonian who has worked tirelessly to improve the lives of District residents; making education, job creation and economic development the cornerstones of his lifelong service to the community. Sworn into office in January 2011, he is the seventh Chairman to lead the Council of the District of Columbia.

As an At-Large Councilman from 2005-2010, Chairman Brown solidified his presence in District government by co-sponsoring more than 170 pieces of legislation. In 2007 he became the Chair of the Committee on Economic Development where he made certain that developers kept the promises they made to the city by creating a Compliance Unit within the D.C. Auditor's office. He has also worked hard to protect D.C.'s communities by increasing the police force, revitalizing neighborhoods, strengthening environmental laws and providing more resources to the victims of domestic violence. His work on the Council led to a landslide victory in his bid for Chairman in 2010, winning nearly 90 percent of the vote.

As a true testament to his leadership, and his firm belief that quality education is a right rather than a privilege, Chairman Brown led the way for the restoration of Phelps Architecture, Construction and Engineering Public High School. At the time of its completion in 2008, Phelps became the first of its kind in the country. Chairman Brown was one of the many students who attended Phelps –before it fell into disrepair.

Chairman Brown is also the immediate past Chair of the Metropolitan Washington Council of Governments. In that role, he presided over the release of a groundbreaking report detailing the steps needed to get residents back to work across the region. He also spearheaded, along with the Greater Washington Board of Trade, recommendations for restructuring the governance of the Washington Metropolitan Area Transit Authority.

Chairman Brown is a graduate of Woodrow Wilson High School. He holds a Bachelor of Arts in Marketing from Morgan State, and has completed the Senior Executives in Government Program at the Kennedy School of Government at Harvard University and the Business Executive program at the Tuck School of Business at Dartmouth College.

He and his wife of 16 years, Marcia, are the proud parents of two children, Lauren and Kwame II.