

## BACKGROUND FOR CANDIDATES QUESTIONNAIRE

We have established a questionnaire/interview process in which we will invite candidates to participate as a way to gather both objective and subjective information. This information will be synthesized and used in the selection of the candidates we choose to endorse. As a multi-media outlet with a primary focus on the African-American community, we've established criterion by which we will select the candidates for endorsement. The process of setting the criterion began with a critical analysis of the current state of African Americans in Memphis.

A brief statistical and empirical journey revealed the following:

- According to the 2000 Census, Memphis had the 8<sup>th</sup> largest African-American population percentage-wise at 61.9 percent, representing 402,367 people.
- According to the 1997 Census data, there were 10,931 black-owned businesses in Memphis and of that number only 1,335 had paid employees. Among those 1,335 businesses, average annual revenues were \$357,000 in contrast to average annual sales for white-owned firms (with employees) of \$4,818,000. Among the total number of black-owned firms, average revenues were only \$64,000 per year. More importantly, the total amount of revenues attributed to black-owned business was less than one-tenth of one percent of all revenues generated by all businesses in the Memphis-MSA. (That's \$705,000/\$90,391,440,000.)
- According to the U.S Department of Labor unemployment figures for 2009, the percentage for unemployment among African-American men in Tennessee was 20.2 percent compared with 11.1 percent for white men and 17.1 percent for Hispanic men. In some areas of Memphis it was estimated that the rate was 50 percent or more and overall the rate was approximately 30 percent.
- According to [www.city-data.com](http://www.city-data.com), there is nearly a 30 percent poverty rate in the African-American community of Memphis, representing over 132,000 residents. There are neighborhoods where over 90 percent of the residents live at or below the nationally defined poverty rate. According to city-data statistics, there are fewer than 20,000 white residents living at or below the poverty rate and negligible numbers of other represented residents of other races.
- According to statistics released last year by Memphis City Schools, only 66.9 percent of the students are graduating, indicating a 33 percent dropout rate in a district that is largely African American. According to a 2008 report by the Schott Foundation for Public Education, Memphis had the nation's highest gap in graduation rates between black males and white males, standing at 30 percent in 2005/2006.

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- Significant disparities also exist in imprisonment rates, health care, crime and violence and more importantly in the availability of resources and opportunities that would open the door for these circumstances to begin to dynamically or even moderately shift towards more positive trends.

From our point of view candidates must intrinsically understand these dynamics and how they impact the welfare of our entire city. We will endorse candidates- regardless of race or party affiliation- that represent the best vision, that can present solution-oriented plans of action, and exhibit the best ability to execute and deliver on their plans to address the issues and disparities facing the citizens of Memphis.

We understand that the issues that exist in Memphis and Shelby County are broad and complex. We know that each candidate must serve and govern in the interest of all voters. However, also our contention that understanding the severity and significance of the issues confronting black Memphis ó and working to address those issues ó will not only serve to uplift the African-American population of Memphis, but in doing so will improve the quality of life for all Memphians, hopefully allowing us to ultimately and truly be òOne Memphis.ö



## CANDIDATES QUESTIONNAIRE

### Vision and Plans

*What is your vision for Memphis?*

Memphis can and, with the right leadership, will be the new growth city of the South. I see a Memphis committed to inclusiveness for all its citizens and one dedicated to giving its people a quality of life unrivalled in the US. To accomplish this will require leadership that is capable and prepared to address the primary obstacle to Memphis attaining the status of new growth city and that is **too many poor folks who happen to be African American** in this community. This fact colors every other situation that exist in Memphis and Shelby County. It prevents not only the community from reaching its full potential, but also limits individual citizens from maximizing their God-given potential. It contributes to an inordinate amount of resources being spent in the short term on everything from crime to social services. We've got to make this a community where all citizens: (1) get an opportunity to live and raise their families in safe, attractive, and nurturing neighborhoods; (2) where all citizens can give their children an education that allows them to compete and excel against children from any other city in the world in the new world economy of innovation and technology; and (3) where all citizens are encouraged to and given opportunities to maximize their skills and potential to the fullest. As I have served as a public official for 15 of the last 20 years, this has been the guiding principle for my service and will always be.

*What is your platform or plan of action for the office that your are seeking? What do you want to ACCOMPLISH while in office and what problems must be addressed in order to achieve those goals and objectives?*

It is my desire as Juvenile Court Clerk to make that office more effective, more efficient, and more user-friendly. ***I will be a bridge between Juvenile Court and the Community to help the Court be a place of hope and healing for the families of Memphis and Shelby County.*** At a time when many of our young people are making bad choices, one of the most important things that the Juvenile Court Clerk can do, is take the data that is collected (the Clerk is the Court's Chief Statistician) and do more than just record that information. He can **use the office to coordinate efforts to do something about the issues and situations that the statistics reveal.** **Youth crime** is at epidemic levels, the Clerk can and should work with those in the Community to provide prevention efforts to keep kids out of trouble. The Clerk should, even though **Child Support** is no longer collected locally, be a catalyst for improving collection and disbursement of Child Support. The Clerk must ensure that **every family** that comes to that Court through the Clerk's office, which is often the first interface with the Juvenile Court System, **is treated with**

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**respect and courtesy**, something that they deserve as users of that System. It is noteworthy that the Court's **customers are overwhelmingly African American** and there is a tremendous **need for there to be someone** at the Court **who can relate to them and who they can relate to**. There is a tremendous need for the Court to be more of a "Family Court" as opposed to just a "Juvenile Court" and the Clerk can help to make that happen. These things will be my focus and I have a number of programs to accomplish these things once elected.

*How do you plan to address the issues listed above through the office you desire to hold?*

Let me say that I will address these issues using some of the same approaches that I used when I last served as Juvenile Court Clerk and by adding a few new ones. First, I will once again enlist the Churches, the School Systems (both Memphis City and Shelby County), the Criminal Justice/Law enforcement officials, Mayors, not-for-profits, and any other citizens or community groups to come together to **create a long-term plan for assisting families to help our young people be safe, make better choices, and help prevent them from becoming a crime statistic**. Additionally we will expand the data collection function of the Clerk's Office to include new ways of collecting information on families in trouble and new methods of utilizing this information to intervene in helping families positively address the issues that bring them to the Juvenile Court. I will modernize the recordkeeping (something I started 10 years ago) so that information is accessible and safe from fire and or water damage. I will get new players involved, including the Medical community and the Business community, emphasizing to them the various impact that having so many hurt and suffering families in our community has on our "Community health and on our Community prosperity and growth". I will resurrect our "Positive Image Tours" where we had young people come to the Court and we showed them the roles that various Court personnel play and encouraged them to aspire to be one of those individuals. Lastly, I will seek to **act as a coordinator to bring programs and people together to around the issue of helping our families provide healthy and supportive environments for our Children** to live in, grow in, and make good choices in.

## **Qualifications and Experience**

*Why are you running for elected office?*

I am seeking to return to Juvenile Court as the Clerk quite simply so that I can be a vehicle for hope and help for the hurting families of Memphis and Shelby County. I have been Blessed with a great education from Dartmouth College (Bachelors in Urban Planning and

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Sociology) and Massachusetts Institute of Technology (Masters of Architecture). I have had the honor to serve this community as a Memphis City Councilman (1989-1994), a Shelby County Commissioner (1994-2000), former Juvenile Court Clerk (2000-2002), and a Shelby County Election Commissioner (2007-2009). I have served in national offices and on the Boards of many local not-for-profits. I have run my own business and have worked to help young men to transition from adolescence to adulthood through my Church's Rites of Passage Program for 6 years. I have been married to my wife, Ramona, for 30 years and am the father of 3 (21-year old son, 18 year-old daughter and a 15 year-old daughter) who is experiencing what our young people are going through first-hand. Having grown up in Hamilton High School area, I also know of the temptation and trials that so many of our African American young men face as they attempt to become productive men in our community and believe that I can be an example to them as to how to overcome the negatives that they face. I am the son of a mother who was a teacher for 33 years in the Memphis City Schools, and of a father who was an elected Judge for 20 years as the first African American in a number of capacities. I believe all these traits make me the right person for the Juvenile Court Clerk position at this time.

*What makes the candidate qualified for holding an office? What previous experience lends itself to success in the office?*

See Above.

*Who has endorsed or express support for your candidacy?*

My candidacy has been endorsed by many prominent elected officials, members of the clergy, civic organization, etc. But the most important endorsement is that of those who were helped when previously I was the Clerk and, that of families throughout Shelby County who know my history of service and concern for helping hurting families.

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## **Ability to Implement Initiatives**

*A clear vision and a plan for the future are important, but it means nothing if a candidate does not have the ability to get anything accomplished.*

*How would you tackle the issues identified as critical for the city/county from the seat you are seeking?*

As previously indicated, the Juvenile Court Clerk must and should be a vehicle for mobilizing and coordinating hope and help for the hurting families of Memphis and Shelby County, especially as it relates to youth crime prevention. As (1) of 13 City Councilmen, and as (1) of 13 County Commissioners, I learned how to get and, in fact developed, consensus around those things that I sought to get enacted. I have a history of performance as an Elected Official and, having been both the Operating Budget Chairman for the City Council and the Chairman of the County Commission, I have shown that I can get others to work together for the common good. As Clerk previously, I accomplished much. As Clerk again, I know that I will be able to build on the experience and knowledge of government that having been an elected official for 13 years provides me.

*What opportunities do you see in working with other cities and counties in the metro area and how do you define your role in government and the overall role of government?*

I have always believed that no matter what the office that I hold, it is my responsibility to work with whoever is working on solutions to better our Community. It doesn't matter whether Democrat or Republican, Black or White, City or Suburban, the goal has got to be to make this the best Community that it can be. I have always believed and said so, that the statutory requirements of any office are the floor not the ceiling. In other words you can always do more than the office requires if you want to. Memphis and its suburbs must find common ground for our efforts in crime prevention. Furthermore, the circumstances that foster criminal behavior in our youth are all around and are not just limited to the inner city. However, the issues, problems, and circumstances that contribute to our youth making bad choices are magnified in inner-city neighborhoods where lack of hope and opportunity combine to create a very negative environment. To the extent that we all work to improve this situation, we all benefit to all the metro area.



*How would you go about building consensus or support to accomplish goals?*

See Above

*Would you demonstrate the integrity and fortitude to stand on principle to accomplish an important objective despite opposition or lack of popularity for an idea? Give an example. Provide past examples of experiences you had where that was the case?*

History shows that I have already demonstrated that I will stand up for what I believe is right. Evidence of my willingness to pay the price for ensuring that those who I serve get the help they need, is the trials and tribulations that I faced previously as the Clerk for actions that I took. While serving as Juvenile Court Clerk before, **I found \$3 million of “so-called undeliverable child support”** that had been put in a non-interest bearing account and sat there in some instances for up to 20 years. **I believed** that with modern technology, that **I could make a strong effort to find and get the mothers and babies the child support that they were owed. I was successful** in getting a significant amount to them in the 6 months that I was able to operate the program before I was defeated for re-election and could not continue the program. Similarly, I found a program that was available to fathers who had warrants out for their arrest because they had fallen behind on child support payment. It would allow them to come to the Court and re-structure payments without being arrested. **This program had been used only for the well-connected. I made the program available to all fathers** in similar situations and over 200 took advantage even though the Court itself sought to block this from happening. These are just 2 examples of my proven ability to do what I believe is right even when it is not popular or politically expedient. Many would say that these actions contributed to my losing my re-election

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in 2002. But I would again do the same things if I were faced with similar situations because the hurting families of Shelby County deserve no less.

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