

Black Elected Officials and Faith Based Leaders of the East Bay Questionnaire – Kriss  
Worthington

April 16, 2008

Dear Candidate for Elected Office:

The Black Elected Officials and Faith Based Leaders of the East Bay is an 8 year-old non-profit organization, consisting of African American elected officials and Faith Based Leaders from Alameda and Contra Costa Counties. The goal of the organization is to improve the quality of life in all African American communities and enhance the quality and quantity of African American leadership in politics and the community.

The organization is holding their regular endorsement meeting on **Wednesday, April 30, 6 P.M. – 9 P.M. at Geoffrey's Inner Circle, 410 14<sup>th</sup> St. Oakland, CA.**

Candidates will be expected to fill out the enclosed questionnaire (bring 10 copies to the meeting) and talk briefly about why they are running for office, and what they hope to achieve if elected. After your comments the members ask that you make yourself available for a brief question and answer session.

All endorsed candidates will appear on all election material distributed by The Black Elected Officials of the East Bay. In addition, endorsed candidates can use the name the organization on any campaign material.

The members of The Black Elected Officials of the East Bay applaud you in your efforts to improve the quality of life in your community in these difficult economic times; once again look forward to seeing you on April 30th.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Keith Carson". The signature is written in black ink and is positioned below the word "Sincerely,".

Keith Carson

Chair, Black Elected Officials and Faith Based Leaders of the East Bay

## **Questions for people seeking the endorsement of the Black Elected Officials and Faith Based Leaders of the East Bay**

### **1. Why are you running for office? What is your understanding of the responsibilities of the office you seek?**

I'm running for State Assembly so I can use my years of experience as an activist and legislator to have a greater impact in achieving the progressive change we need in California. I will be a Democrat with backbone, and advocate for the most progressive state budgets and policy possible. I am passionately committed to working on Education, Environment, Health care, Labor, and Diversity, but I have also demonstrated that I can take on hundreds of projects and keep track of and follow through on them. My advocacy against implementation of the already-approved drastic prison expansion may help win us some delay in the horrible budget consequences that will come from operating the extra prison beds built to incarcerate many more minority youth for drug and minor offenses. My passion for education funding starts at preschool, includes strong commitment to vocational and career technical education, and goes all the way through to the Community College, CSU and UC systems. Another goal is to use the bully pulpit of the position to support social movements, disenfranchised people and to oppose racism, sexism, anti-Semitism, anti-immigrant and any and all forms of hate crimes, prejudice and discrimination. I will continue to speak out and stand up against ICE and DEA raids. While I will be willing when it is necessary to be the "Barbara Lee speaks for me" solo principled progressive vote, I will primarily seek to build coalitions to win. While I will actively give encouragement and support to progressive causes, my legislation itself will mostly focus on positive incremental improvements.

As many of the following questions ask about what solutions I propose to the problems that Californians face, I will be emphasizing some of the concrete results that I have worked toward at the local level as a City Councilmember over the last decade. I believe that my experience and track record is perhaps the best indicator of my potential to be successful in the Assembly.

### **2. What do feel are the three most pressing issues facing the communities you hope to serve? What solutions do you propose?**

Education – At the state level, education will be my number one priority. It is at the core of almost every social problem in California. With the Governor proposing to cut into the Proposition 98 funding guarantees (which should be a floor, not a ceiling), it is even more imperative that we prioritize the funding of education, but the equitable distribution of resources throughout the state. We need to find creative ways to support the fundamental need for quality education,

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whether it be through revenue increases or the integration of vocational and career tech training.

Economy/Budget – As a City Councilmember over the last 11 years, I have had extensive experience in understanding and being able to modify the City’s budget to find the necessary money we need in Berkeley to continue to provide the invaluable services we have been for decades. At the state level, I hope to continue my budget work to advocate for and design a budget that is compassionate and accountable to Californians. We also need to work toward addressing the state’s (and nation’s) economic decline, as more and more families are finding themselves caught in the crunch of rising gas prices and increasing home foreclosures. I support and will fight to advance legislation that protects our homeowners and regulates the corporate interests that stand to benefit from these tragedies. I have helped individual homeowners negotiate to prevent foreclosures, and I have sponsored the City Council policy items for the City of Berkeley to address foreclosures.

Environment and Health – Having been a community activist since the age of 14, I have approached the issues of environment and health as invariably linked. I believe that fighting for the environment means not only standing up against pollution, global warming, and the unnecessary encroachment of our open space, but it also means fighting for environmental justice and urban justice as they apply to the quality of life in our communities. We need to strengthen our statewide environmental policies so that they reflect and address the health and community impacts that emerge as California grows. When I was chair of the Sierra Club, I made sure that environmental justice was one of the coalition’s top priorities. As a member of ten regional transportation committees, my work with transportation policy has also had direct impacts on the environment and health of our communities. My Eco-Pass program and my current efforts to expand the Eco-Pass to additional employers have directly affected the use of public transit and access to affordable transportation. I also actively supported a bus pass for kids that was adopted through AC Transit and MTC.

**3. What new revenues (if any) would you propose to address the challenges identified in question 2 given the current budget situation? What would be the source of those revenues?**

The single most fundamental reform for revenue is to eliminate the two-thirds vote requirement to pass the state budget. I would make it a high priority to reform the current requirement by lowering this threshold, and I would approach it practically by looking for 55% instead of a majority if it were clear that we can win. Just as I worked with a coalition where we succeeded in lowering the threshold for passage of education funding, I would prioritize this approach for the statewide budget. Since our successful campaign, many schools throughout the state have been able to get funding for local schools.

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I believe the key to the revenue issue is not only to advocate for raising taxes, but to fundamentally change the way we frame the debate on taxation. We need “tax reform” that addresses the fair share that various entities such as large corporations and the very wealthy should be responsible for. I am a strong advocate for economic development and strong policies to encourage investment at the community level, but I do not believe we should be giving tax incentives and loopholes to millionaires and companies who do not need it nor provide adequate community benefits for the business they generate. We also need to shift a percentage of the tax burden from the middle class homeowners to commercial real estate. I was successful helping to get this done at the city level, and I will continue to do so as an Assemblymember. Strategically, it is important to bring middle class homeowners into our coalition to get them to understand that we support and care about them.

**4. The Legislature and the Governor are considering drastic cuts to the education budget. What would be your strategy to secure resources to facilitate quality education for California’s youth?**

Education will be my number one priority. Given that our reactionary Governor is currently unwilling and unable to see the potential damage that his proposed budget cuts will have on the state’s ability to provide quality education and services, it is more important now than ever to stand firm against crippling cuts to education. We also need to remember that Gray Davis was cutting education funding too. That’s why we need a strong Assemblymember who can persuade Democrats to fund education at its fullest. The Democrats in the legislature have gone along with the governor’s proposed addition of 40,000 prison beds costing the state over \$15 billion in the long term. This will affect our ability to provide education and human services for decades to come. We need to undo the damage that the Democrats were tricked by the Governor into voting for.

**5. If California were a country it would have the 7<sup>th</sup> largest Gross National Product, yet we cannot provide health care for all of our residents; our youth are particularly impacted. What would you do to address this issue?**

I am a passionate supporter of universal single-payer health care. Given our current Governor’s refusal to sign SB840 into law, it is critical that we work in the long term to not only elect a new Governor, but educate the public about single-payer so that future initiatives to attack such a system fail. I have worked alongside health-care advocates to educate and inform the public about single-payer, including speaking to local organizations and leafleting at SiCKO showings this past year. In the interim, it is important to continue to work toward incremental change in helping to expand coverage to more Californians. I would support compromise, but only where it was necessary. As an Assemblymember, I would not cave into the Governor’s tricks knowing that they would lead to little difference in outcome. It is also important to help bring various efforts to reform health care together, so that we have a unified and constant voice in Sacramento.

**6. According to numerous studies, in the private sector equally educated people of color and women make less money than their white male counterparts, what do you propose to change this inequity?**

The passage of Proposition 209 significantly undermined our state's ability to employ affirmative action in hiring, admissions and contracting. However, it did not eliminate affirmative action programs entirely, and there are still opportunities to outreach to and identify qualified people of all races, ethnicities, and genders. At the local level, I have worked with minority and women-owned businesses to find resources and create a more equitable application process for contracting. At the MTC, I have advocated for the unbundling of large contracts in order to help smaller businesses receive those bids. As a city councilmember, I have hired the largest percentage of Asians and Latinos than any councilmember, and I have hired and appointed the most African Americans than any non-African American councilmember. My work toward hiring and appointing women has resulted my being the only man ever to be honored by the Commission on the Status in Women. In addition to supporting legislative solutions pay equity, I support applying direct pressure on major corporations for their racist and sexist hiring habits.

**7. Local, State, and Federal Governments have been cutting services and programs designed to assist young people, what do you propose to reverse that trend?**

I have fought at the City level countless times to ensure that our crucial social services for young people, women, seniors, and veterans are not cut. I have brought together a coalition of labor unions and service provider organizations to stand together for both fair wages as well as the preservation of services in budget discussions. At the state level and federal levels, it is important to continue to pressure decision makers to prioritize youth programs in their funding decisions. Education and services for youth are a fundamental building block for our society, and we cannot afford to shortchange our future. I have testified at the Assembly to oppose Schwarzenegger's cuts to important programs. I have lobbied several times at the state and local level to support youth services and I have worked closely with various state organizations and leaders to achieve that end.

In the City of Berkeley, youth and local education are dealt with in a separate school board. I have worked to get the City of Berkeley to put funding into expanding after-school programs, supporting the health center at Berkeley High School, and funding teen programs. I have worked very close with the youth commission, and I have been endorsed by the only student on the school board and former chair of the youth commission, Rio Baucé. I have recruited and appointed a racially diverse group of young people to serve in important leadership positions and to improve and develop their leadership potential. When we created our coalitions with unions and non-profit organizations to protect

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safety-net services, I actively promoted the inclusion of young people and services for young people.

**8. The Department of Corrections and Rehabilitation has a recidivism rate of over 60%. What strategies would you propose to reduce the rate of recidivism?**

Recidivism rates continue to stay high because our state has been unable to provide a continuum of care for individuals leaving the prison system. Due to lack of health services, transitional social services, and basic housing, many individuals are literally dumped back on the street with little resources to succeed and break the cycle of imprisonment. Instead of funding the construction of 40,000 new prison beds in this state and setting our state back in over \$15 billion in bond-related debts, we need to focus on the “rehabilitation” function of CDCR. I would propose to find creative ways to use existing CDCR funding more creative ways. For example, a coalition of housing and social service providers successfully passed legislation over the past two years and found money in the budget process to use CDCR funding to create a pilot project for a housing-services program for mentally health patients exiting the prison system. To the extent that we can prioritize a safety net for individuals who find themselves without housing, social support, and a path to success, we can dramatically reduce the recidivism rate in California.

I worked to bring together a coalition of labor unions, social workers, service providers and city staff to create a regional detoxification facility. That plan was then taken on by Supervisor Keith Carson and has been successfully implemented. I support detox-on-demand and training and support programs as alternatives to cyclical incarceration.

**9. List major civic activities you have participated in the past few years. For each indicate the nature of your participation.**

- Berkeley City Councilmember, 1996 – present
- Alameda County Congestion Management Agency (CMA) 1998-2008– Plans and Programs Committee, Administration and Legislation Committee, Planning Area Committee
- AC Transit: Berkeley-Oakland-San Leandro Major Investment Study Policy Committee
- Association of Bay Area Governments (ABAG) – City of Berkeley Alternate
- League of California Cities – City of Berkeley Delegate
- San Pablo Avenue Policy Steering Committee – Member (1998-2008)
- Alameda County Transportation Authority/Alameda County Transportation Improvement Authority (ACTA/ACTIA) – Alameda County Alternate 2004-present
- Alameda County Waste Management Authority (StopWaste) – Member 06-08

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- City of Berkeley – Vice Mayor, Telegraph Committee (Chair), Downtown Committee (Vice-Chair), Undergrounding Utilities committee, Parks Committee, Eco-Pass Committee (Chair), Rules Committee (Chair), Joint City/Library Board Selection Committee (Chair) 2007, Housing Authority 1996-2007, Redevelopment Agency 1996-2008, Civic Improvement Corporation 1996-2007, and Holocaust Remembrance Day Planning Committee (Chair) 2004-2008

I am also a member of dozens of community groups and organizations, including: AARP, ACLU, Asian Pacific American Democratic Caucus of Alameda County, BCA, BWOPA, California Democratic Party Disabilities Caucus, CalPirg, Center for Reproductive Rights, Common Cause, Contemporary Jewish Museum, Democrats with Disabilities, East Bay for Democracy, East Bay LGBT Dems, El Cerrito Democratic Club, Environment California, Equality California, Gray Panthers, HRC, John George Democratic Club, Lamorinda Democratic Club, Latino Democratic Club, League of Conservation Voters, Magnes Museum, MGO, NAACP, NARAL, NOW, NWPC, Planned Parenthood, Progressive Democrats of the East Bay, Save the Bay, Sierra Club, Wellstone Democratic Club, WILPF