

Baltimore Sun Questionnaire

1. Please describe your educational and professional background and how it has prepared you to serve as council president.

I have been involved with independent party politics since 1992, fighting with my colleagues against the powers that be (in Maryland mostly the Democrats) who insist that only one party and one set of ideas should live. Baltimore City needs someone with determination and grit to pull away from a largely failed 40 year monopoly—and the Republicans are not the answer.

2. Why do you want to be council president? What would your top priorities be if you are elected?

The office of City Council President is independently elected, so it should be filled by an independent minded person. I am that individual. I will not get in to “go along to get along.” Moreover, I will take the lead by effectively cutting my own salary and benefits—putting a portion of my salary as City Council President in an escrow account to start paying down the city debt - and encouraging and even demanding that the rest of the City Council members do the same, if they want to consider themselves leaders and not rulers, living off the citizens of Baltimore.

3. Do you support Baltimore’s current crime-fighting strategy? What changes, if any, would you pursue to improve public safety in the city?

Young people see elected officials and school leaders cheating on tests and taking advantage of others for their own benefit and feel free to do the same. Churches and other institutions need to work to reverse this trend and talk about loving your neighbor and respecting others. Until we accomplish that, and remove leaders who cheat and lie, we’re not going to see much of a change in crime. The city of Baltimore does not need more police; we need to utilize what we have more effectively. Also, criminals need to know that the citizens of Baltimore are able to defend themselves effectively, and are not just sitting ducks.

4. Do you support the recent reforms in the Baltimore City school system? Do you believe any changes are needed in the schools’ governance structure (such as direct mayoral control or an elected school board)?

Baltimore needs an elected school board. The only meaningful system that will provide real reform is school choice for parents in every possible configuration. Top school administrators need to get off their financial high horse and take pay cuts – and when they talk about the children, they should be doing more than just talking about their own children.

5. How would you address the city’s backlog in school maintenance and renovations, estimated to be as much as \$2 billion?

This is the 21st century. We don’t need more school buildings. We should recognize that education can be transmitted through the internet, the media, community associations, etc. We need to be investing more in libraries rather than school buildings - reversing a trend that has been going on for many years now. Such as it is, most of the school buildings in Baltimore resemble penal institutions more than anything else. What child can possibly learn in such an environment? In terms of school repairs, whoever is contracted to do these repairs needs to be followed like a hawk – and look out for the sweetheart deals between the city rulers and these contractors. Shoddy work should not be expected – in spite of Councilman Curran’s opinion expressed a few years ago.

6. Property taxes have become a major issue in this year’s election. Do you believe the city’s tax rate needs to be cut? If so, by how much, and what steps would you take to keep the city’s budget in balance while lowering the rate?

Property taxes may be a major issue this year, but actually they have been a major problem for decades. It’s good to see the ruling crowd finally waking up—at least some of them. Taxes need to be reduced, and sometimes eliminated (container tax and snack tax). Property taxes need to be reduced but also reapportioned, taxing only the value of the land and not improvements. Taxing improvements punishes those landlords and property owners who make improvements to their property. When it comes to the percentage by which property taxes should be cut, 20 percent is a good start.

7. The city has faced large budget shortfalls in recent years. If that trend continues, what top priorities would you protect from cuts? In what areas would you pursue spending reductions?

To keep things in balance, let city government concentrate on the things that are truly legitimate to it—such as infrastructure and public safety. No more handing of public money over to private enterprises in so-called public-private partnerships that do nothing but put public money in some peoples' pockets. The only areas whose budgets need defending are infrastructure and public safety. Everything else is subject to cuts – and when it comes to public safety and infrastructure, the streamlining of how money is spent will make it easier to track where the money is going and keep an eye on those who claim to be working on public infrastructure.

8. Baltimore has lost tens of thousands of jobs in the last decade. What would you do to encourage economic development and provide employment opportunities for city residents?

Reduce property taxes, piggy back taxes and sales taxes. No more snack taxes and bottle taxes that drive businesses and jobs into the County. Zoning laws that prohibit multiple use—commercial and residential—must go, so that people can start conducting businesses out of their own homes. Encourage Baltimoreans to be independent, not dependent on politicians, both in DC and Annapolis, that promise everything and decades later haven't delivered because it was all bull.

9. Do you support construction of the light rail Red Line? If so, what would you do to mitigate concerns in some neighborhoods about the impact of the project? What other changes to the Baltimore mass transit system would you pursue to provide transportation options for those who lack access to a car?

Construction of the Red Line brings up the specter of eminent domain and the abuses connected with that. In fact, the more appropriate name for the Red Line would be the "light rail red herring." Baltimore mass transit is in the stranglehold of the MTA and the medallion system for taxicabs (probably the world's priciest decal). Free up public transportation in Baltimore – put it in the hands of the local entrepreneur. So long as the chauffeurs have good driving records and they and their vehicles meet insurance, safety and emissions requirements there should be no other barriers to providing transportation to the public in Baltimore City. Central planning failed in the Soviet Union and Nazi Germany; we the people don't need it again.

10. Do you support the Greater Baltimore Committee's proposal for an expanded convention center/arena/hotel complex downtown? If not, what alternative, if any, do you support for replacing 1st Mariner Arena?

We don't need to replace the 1st Mariner Arena—certainly not with public money. The grand schemes of the small-minded parochial rulers of our City—like the expanded convention center, the hotel complex, etc., are just more examples of "follow the money" —who's going to get rich doing this nonsense? The fact is that our center city and inner harbor areas are in pretty good shape in spite of lots of things. Do we want to attract people to Baltimore? Let it be known that it's safe and affordable—a beautiful, historic city with lots of friendly people. Put the grandiose, Peter the Great type projects in the dustbin of history where they belong.

11. Do you support current plans for redevelopment of the West Side Superblock and the State Center office complex?

Keep them well maintained; keep them clean, and use every square foot in the area. No more throwing of good money after bad. I oppose this type of spending at any time, but particularly now is not a time to be launching massive new public works projects. We need to work on maintaining our existing infrastructure of roads, bridges, tunnels, and water and sewer lines.

12. Do you support the city's plans for a slot machine gambling parlor near the downtown stadium complex? Would you pursue any changes to the program, through either local or state legislation? Would you support an eventual expansion to table games there or elsewhere in the city?

The entire slot machine boondoggle was highlighted by changing the State's constitution to indicate where gambling parlors could exist – a rape of the State's constitution because of too many cowardly state legislators who could not put their names behind a yes or no as to whether slot machines could be allowed anywhere in Maryland—a very shameful event that touches Baltimore. So now you ask me what I think about a plan for slot machines in the downtown stadium complex. My answer to that is, if the businesses involved in that area think it will be beneficial to them they should go ahead and do it, but not a penny of city or state money should go to them. The role of government is to ensure that no force or fraud occurs in those establishments. I don't gamble outside of some gambling in the stock market, so I wouldn't even go to these gambling establishments, but the process put in place by our cowardly legislators is the real shame—far worse than any gambling that might be going on here.

13. Recent corruption scandals in the police and fire departments and other city agencies have diminished public trust in government. What steps would you take to ensure that the public is receiving the honest services of all city employees and elected officials?

Diminished public trust in government has been going on far longer than the recent corruption scandals in the police and fire departments. Anyone just becoming more distrustful of government because of these problems alone has probably been in a deep political coma for the last two decades in Baltimore City. We've lived through seven years of a mayor who spent his time running for governor while the city streets' potholes lived on, and police commissioners who were being removed or let go, some under questionable circumstances. We've lived through a city school's CEO whose chauffeur was making more than \$100,000 a year in public money. We've lived through a mayor who had to step down in disgrace. Right now, in addition to the scandals in the police and fire departments, we have a mayor who will not debate her challengers in the Democratic primary—and this is just the tip of the iceberg. What steps to take to ensure that the public is receiving the honest services of all city employees and elected officials? Well, the steps to fix this, like all the steps required to fix the economic mess of the city, would be harsh—mass resignations, for one, might be appropriate, not just saying “I'm sorry. We'll make a commission to study the problem.” Of course, the voters of Baltimore City are not scot free on this one. For over 45 years Baltimore City has been driven into the ground by an incestuous relationship between the Democratic Party and whatever crony capitalist friends they had. Based on their record, the answer is not to turn to the Republicans—they, too, had their chance for the last 45 years. Baltimore voters need to demand transparency from their elected officials and those the officials appoint, and Baltimore voters need to understand that any publicly funded gravy train they might benefit from is only going to keep them mired in the mess we have.

Thank you for the questionnaire.

Sincerely,

Lorenzo Gaztañaga
Baltimore City Council President candidate
Libertarian

P.S. – I've been dealing with campaigning scheduling and power outages. I realize my submission is a few hours late.