

Candidate Pre-Interview Questionnaire

The Committee for a Better Atlanta (CBA) is a coalition of business organizations concerned about Atlanta. In 2009, CBA is interviewing candidates for mayor, City Council president and City Council with the intent of publishing a voter's guide of candidate evaluations. The evaluations will be based on the answers to the questions in this document, plus in-person interviews to be held this summer.

Your answers to these questions are very important to the CBA interview and evaluation process. *Candidates who do not complete this questionnaire will not be scheduled for an interview with CBA.*

Please complete this questionnaire and deliver it to the Committee for a Better Atlanta so it arrives **no later than 5 p.m., July 31, 2009**. Questionnaires can be filled out electronically and emailed to cwatkins@macoc.com, or mailed to:

**Committee for a Better Atlanta
235 International Blvd., NW
Atlanta, GA 30303
Attn: Che Watkins**

If you have any questions about completing the questionnaire – or about the CBA process – please contact Che Watkins at (404) 586-8468.

Candidate information:

Name: State Senator Kasim Reed

Position Sought: Mayor of Atlanta

Address: PO Box 312027

City, State, ZIP: Atlanta, GA 31131

Telephone: 404-758-3433 Cell phone: 404-392-3175

E-mail address: tharon@kasimreed.com

Campaign Web site address: www.kasimreed.com

Secondary contact information: (If you prefer that CBA direct scheduling inquiries to someone other than the candidate, check here. **yes)**

Name: Rashad Taylor

Relationship to candidate: Deputy Campaign Manager

(e.g. Administrative assistant, campaign manager, etc.)

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Please answer the questions in the space provided on this questionnaire.

1. In your opinion, what are the three greatest issues (problems or opportunities) facing Atlanta?

The three greatest issues currently facing the City are all serious challenges. But like most problems, there is great opportunity for the City in finding solutions, and furthermore, none of these are issues the City cannot overcome. The three greatest challenges currently facing the city are: (1) public safety, (2) city finances, and (3) economic development.

First, with regard to public safety, I have made fully funding and expanding our police force a central campaign issue since day one. It is critical that we do absolutely everything we can to improve public safety, or we risk reversing the progress we have invested so much time and money to produce here in the City. Public safety is directly linked to our ability to expand convention business and tourism and the continued migration of residents into newly-revitalized neighborhoods. As public safety improves and these trends continue, our tax base grows, making an investment in public safety one that pays for itself. I am the only major candidate to actually propose and introduce legislation to enact a dedicated public safety revenue stream (SB 77), which would have established 1 mill dedicated to public safety salaries, subject to a referendum. I continue to support such an approach, and was disappointed that the other two elected officials running for Mayor in fact opposed it. I also introduced legislation to help Atlanta's police officers, firefighters, and teachers who choose to live in the City of Atlanta, as I believe that having dedicated public safety personnel as residents will strengthen our neighborhoods and communities, as well as reducing commute times and stress for our officers. I would continue to fight for such programs if elected, and would be open to other suggestions for how to encourage (although not require) such residency.

Second, with regard to city finances, the City must restore sound fiscal policy. City Hall's troubles are certainly worsened by the economy, but they also follow some unsound prior choices. Addressing the City's financial woes must start with solving its pension crisis. As a result of irresponsible decisions by the City Council over the past eight years, the City's pension obligations have ballooned to unsustainable levels. One of every five dollars in the general fund must now be allocated to our pensions. No city, or indeed any organization, can operate on sound financial footing when such a significant portion of its revenue is dedicated towards deferred benefits rather than current service delivery. Our pension funding shortfall is the single largest contributor to Atlanta's fiscal crisis, forcing layoffs, furloughs of public safety officers and cuts to vital services. During the 2009 legislative session we took the first step towards rescuing the City's pension funds. I was the Senate sponsor of HB 371, which will allow the City to invest pension funds in a more diverse group of asset classes – a strategy historically proven to improve performance. Going forward, I would assemble a team of experts in pension fund governance to develop reforms to be implemented during the first year of my term. I would also work with other mayors to lobby Washington to modify some of the onerous requirements that have been recently imposed. My relationships at the federal and state level make me uniquely qualified to pursue relief and assistance from those levels of government.

Finally, with regard to economic development, the City needs to take an active role to ensure that we both maintain and preserve the economic development we have worked so hard to realize. There are a number of once-in-a-generation opportunities that currently face us – the Beltline and Ft. McPherson are two of the most exciting redevelopment projects that Atlanta has faced in decades. We have an opportunity to work with the federal government to develop high-speed rail lines throughout the Southeast, further cementing Atlanta’s regional hub and leadership status in the vital logistics and transportation industries. The nexus of Georgia Tech, Emory, and the CDC give us an incredible base for leading in bio-technology research and development. Atlanta is blessed with many such assets and opportunities, and as Mayor I would actively partner with the private and non-profit sectors to leverage those assets and opportunities into growth and wealth for Atlanta in the 21st Century.

2. Describe briefly your qualifications for holding this office. *(Please answer in the space below, but you may also attach a resume or other description to provide us with additional detail.)*

I have spent the last eleven years serving Atlanta in the Georgia Legislature, serving four years in the House, and seven years in the Senate. During this time, I have gained an intimate and detailed understanding of the problems facing not just Atlanta residents, but residents of the entire state. I know which issues are important, and I know how to solve them. Whether it's dealing with Atlanta's sewer overhaul, or tackling the City's pension crisis, an important part of solving Atlanta's problems will be working with both the state and federal governments. I am uniquely qualified to represent Atlanta's interests on the state level and in Washington. During my time in the legislature, I forged important relationships with key individuals on both sides of the aisle, and introduced and pushed through a variety of bills that have improved the quality of life of Atlanta's citizens. Among the legislation that I pushed through was a bill to allow sales taxes to fund the sewer repair, so that people visiting and commuting to the City helped shoulder the costs of the sewer improvements, thereby reducing City residents' share of the costs by forty percent. I also sponsored successful legislation to increase the homestead exemption for all Atlanta homeowners and freeze property taxes for low income seniors.

I am a practicing attorney, and a partner at Holland & Knight, an international law firm with more than 1,000 lawyers. I serve on the Board of Directors for Howard University, my alma mater, and

as a member of the Executive, Financial, Audit, and Legal Committees, I help oversee an annual operating budget in excess of \$850 million. I serve on the board of a local bank, the Midtown Alliance, the National Black Arts Festival, the Metro Atlanta Arts Fund, and several other community and professional organizations.

3. What events or experiences caused you to decide to run for this office?

Quite simply, I was raised by parents who instilled the importance of giving back – of paying ‘civic rent.’ I believe that I can contribute to making the world a better place in public office – I was a student trustee at Howard, and organized an effort amongst the student body to fund scholarships for our classmates. To date that program has raised well over \$10 million solely from current students, and I am very proud to have been its founder. During my service in the State House and Senate, I have learned the importance of responsible leadership, and believe that my track record of results is unmatched among the current candidates for Mayor. While we all want Atlanta to succeed, I believe that we need tested and proven leadership now, which is why I am asking for your vote and support.

4. Please identify up to five organizations or individuals who are actively supporting your candidacy.

An overwhelming majority of the City of Atlanta/Fulton delegation of the Georgia General Assembly has endorsed my candidacy. The delegation is composed of individuals without whom I could not have accomplished so much of what we were able to accomplish during my time in the legislature, and I am very proud to have the support of so many of my colleagues – in many ways they know us best. The bipartisan support I have received from my colleagues speaks to the kind of public servant I have been, and that I will continue to be. They will also be instrumental in passing legislation that will benefit the City if I am fortunate enough to be elected Mayor. No person in political office, no matter which office, can accomplish very much by themselves, and I am proud to have a proven record as a team-builder who delivers results.

I also have over 1300 donors to my campaign, and am humbled by the breadth of support I have received from all sectors in Atlanta, including people like Scott Taylor – the President of Carter USA, Herman Russell – the retired chairman of H.J. Russell & Co., Ambassador Andrew Young – former US Ambassador to the United Nations and Mayor of Atlanta, and Elaine Alexander – prominent civil leader and women’s rights advocate. Finally, I am extremely gratified that the Atlanta North Georgia Labor Council AFL-CIO recently decided to support my candidacy for Mayor.

- 1) Scott Taylor – the President of Carter USA
 - 2) Herman Russell – the retired chairman of H.J. Russell & Co.
 - 3) Ambassador Andrew Young – former US Ambassador to the United Nations and Mayor of Atlanta
 - 4) Atlanta North Georgia Labor Council AFL-CIO
 - 5) Elaine Alexander – prominent civil leader and women’s rights advocate
5. The city government faces a \$50 million budget shortfall this fiscal year. How would you close the budget gap?

The City Council recently approved a 3 mill tax increase, which will address most of the current shortfalls in the City's budget. I believe that we could have bridged the crucial portions of the budget gap, i.e., the public safety furloughs, with a 1 mill increase, and I urge the Council to show fiscal discipline and prudence as we begin the process of rebuilding the City finances and repairing the damage to our sense of community. The real problem with the City's budget is the bad habits the City got into when the economy was better – the pension crisis I discussed above is the most glaring example. I believe there are ways we can improve the City's budget without simply increasing taxes. For example, I propose eliminating jobs for positions within City Hall for which there are currently job

openings (aside from line officers in the police and fire departments). I would require the City Council to vote to re-create those positions once the economy improves.

There are areas where the City simply fails to adequately collect revenue, or where improved efficiency can yield substantial income for the City. We currently do a poor job of timely collection of outstanding fines and fees, and run a large accounts receivable balance that can and should be trimmed aggressively. Finally, making the City's finances transparent and strengthening ethics will also improve the City's finances. In order to eliminate wasteful spending, I will create a search engine similar to Google to allow you to track city spending, contracts and loans. Under my watch, all Atlantans will have the opportunity to know exactly how their hard-earned tax dollars are being spent. I will also establish regular performance audits of every city department, and make the results from those audits available online, as well as progress reports in fixing any bad spending habits. These audits will be performed regularly so that you will know what we're doing to maximize the efficient use of your tax dollars.

6. Since 2004, the city's official goal has been to have 2,000 police officers. The Police Department is now at 1,615 officers. Do you support the goal? If so, how would you pay for the additional officers given the city's budget problems?

I absolutely support that goal, but do not believe it goes far enough. Atlanta currently has a police force that is too small and under-funded to adequately protect our City of more than 500,000 citizens. By comparison, Atlanta currently has a police force smaller than New Orleans, a city that is significantly smaller. We must begin by taking care of the officers we have and then move forward by growing our force. I plan to add another 750 sworn officers to the force – not merely authorized positions, but actual men and women in uniform. Importantly, the non-partisan Atlanta Police Foundation has recently released a report calling for the addition of more than 700 officers in the next few years. While serving in the General Assembly, I introduced legislation to allow voters, through local referendum, to establish a special fund dedicated solely to funding public safety officers' salaries. This special fund would not be commingled in any way with the City's general fund. From day one, funding public safety has been a central component of my campaign platform. Whether it means improving efficiencies in other departments or allowing residents to vote to increase taxes for public safety (or more likely both), as Mayor, I will ensure that the necessary funding reaches our police department.

7. Mayor Franklin has used tax-allocation districts and tax abatements to support redevelopment projects. What would you have the city government do to support desirable redevelopment projects in the years ahead?

We have seen that desirable redevelopment and economic development are a function of several factors. In order to realize desirable redevelopment, neighborhoods must be safe and clean, and there must be sufficient transportation infrastructure to support it. In addition to creating the necessary preconditions for redevelopment, there are many things the City can do to encourage desirable projects. I have long been a supporter of tax-allocation districts (TADs) and tax abatement to spur development, and I co-sponsored legislation that amended the Constitution to authorize the use of school taxes for TAD funding after the Georgia Supreme Court declared it unconstitutional, effectively doubling available funds. I have worked with the Metro Chamber of Commerce and other entities including the Atlanta Convention & Visitors Bureau on several other development issues, including reforming tax incentive standards to permit use of state incentives in under-developed census tracts in Atlanta and enhancing state funding for Atlanta's core industrial opportunities, namely logistics and bio-technology.

There are enormous benefits to redevelopment—it restores blighted neighborhoods and increases City revenue by improving property values—and that is why I believe the Mayor should take an active role in encouraging desirable development. To sustain political support, we must also address serious concerns associated with redevelopment, including gentrification-induced increases in property taxes and ensuring an adequate supply of affordable housing. Accordingly, I passed legislation to freeze property taxes for low-income seniors to prevent them from being driven from their neighborhoods by rising assessments, and would work with our partners to ensure that the tremendous development potential of the Beltline is harnessed to benefit all of Atlanta's residents, including the poor and working families.

8. Traffic congestion is a major problem in Atlanta. If you could implement only one initiative, enhancement or management change to reduce congestion in Atlanta in the next four years, what would it be? Note: This should be something within the city government's ability to implement.

There is no silver bullet for Atlanta's traffic, and it cannot be fixed in four years alone. However, it is an issue that must be addressed quickly, because it has a significant impact on our quality of life, and is an important factor businesses consider when deciding whether to relocate to Atlanta. I worked extensively with the Metro Atlanta Chamber of Commerce and others over the past few years in the efforts to pass a T-SPLOST to fund regional transportation projects, and in fact served as the co-sponsor for last year's initiative.

Improving traffic flow by coordinating our street lights and expansion of bike lanes to increase the desirability of bicycles are only a few things among many the Mayor can do to improve traffic congestion. I will designate a single individual to coordinate traffic relief efforts in the City working with regional and state authorities, and that person will serve as part of my Cabinet. However, the Beltline is our single most important opportunity. The biggest obstacle to the Beltline is getting it funded soon enough for it to have maximum impact – the current timeframe for build-out is simply too long. I co-sponsored legislation that restored the funding mechanism for the Beltline by amending the Constitution to authorize the use of school taxes in TAD funding, effectively doubling available funds. The improved connectivity the Beltline offers, especially when linked with existing MARTA infrastructure, will reduce the number of cars on Atlanta's surface streets in its most populous neighborhoods. Most importantly, the Beltline is critical to transforming the City's view of itself, and as a small step towards improving the quality of life in the City as a whole. When people experience the Beltline, they will be hungry for even more access to greenspace and public transportation. Unfortunately, the current law does not allow the use of TAD financing to fund the operation of the transportation component of the Beltline. Among other approaches, I will seek private partners to speed development of the transportation component, because I believe that once it is in place, development will follow rapidly. I also believe that it is crucial for some of the densely occupied corridors (e.g., Midtown/Virginia-Highlands) that we provide the new transportation option prior to bringing thousands of new housing units online, lest we unwittingly worsen our surface street congestion in the short term.

9. In your opinion, what are the three greatest infrastructure problems facing Atlanta over the next four years? Please rank them in terms of importance and urgency.

Our three greatest current infrastructure issues are: a) metro Atlanta traffic; b) continued development of Atlanta Hartsfield-Jackson International Airport; and c) finishing the reconstruction of Atlanta's water and sewer system.

Because I have already discussed, albeit briefly, my plans for fixing traffic in the City, I would like to focus on the problems and opportunities facing Hartsfield-Jackson International Airport and the water and sewer system. With respect to the airport, I believe that there are opportunities for enormous economic development if we can convert the airport into a twenty-four hour operation by enhancing Hartsfield-Jackson's mission as an international cargo hub. Because of its proximity to rail and the Savannah ports, expansion of cargo business will make Atlanta highly competitive with Dallas and Miami, and create opportunities for international business with Latin America, Mexico, Asia and Europe, as well as create countless jobs in the City of Atlanta—not just maintenance and warehouse jobs, but jobs for entrepreneurs and small business owners.

Furthermore, we need to ensure that the construction of the Jackson International Terminal goes forward on schedule and on budget. Its construction ensures that Atlanta will continue to be home to the world's busiest airport and the enormous benefits that distinction carries, and is vital to the ongoing restructuring of some of Atlanta's leading corporate citizens.

Finally, with regard to water and sewers, it was not so long ago that the federal government threatened to place our water system in receivership. The overhauling of the sewer and water system was not a politically savvy thing to do, but it was absolutely critical. Providing clean water to our citizens is as essential as keeping them safe. We must be sure that the price our citizens pay for water is fair, which is why as a state Senator, I worked to pass a sales tax increase to ensure that visitors and commuters to the City of Atlanta—who benefit from the City's water system but who do not pay

property taxes or water bills—would help shoulder the costs of those improvements by implementing a penny sales tax. As a result, our water rates are forty percent lower than they would otherwise have been.

The job of the next Mayor is to ensure that water rates do not increase by ensuring timely completion of the sewer improvements and keeping those improvements on budget. I am the right person to ensure that both of those essential goals are met.

- 1) metro Atlanta traffic
- 2) continued development of Atlanta Hartsfield-Jackson International Airport
- 3) finishing the reconstruction of Atlanta's water and sewer system