



Life In Brief

Current Title: Mayor

Work History:

- Mayor of the District of Columbia, 2015 - present
- Member of the Council of DC, 2007 - 2015

Quick Summary

Native Washingtonian who aims to strike a balance between improving long-struggling areas of the city and fostering a thriving environment for recent middle-class arrivals. Notably vocal on DC statehood and achieving full legislative representation

- Won the mayoral primary in 2014 after her predecessor Vincent Gray's campaign finance scandal hindered his bid for reelection
- Mentored by and carries forward the pro-development, education reform agenda of former mayor Adrian Fenty
- Prioritizes addressing pressing issues within the city, such as the dearth of affordable housing and the prevalence of gun violence, mainly through city-funded initiatives
- Aims to provide opportunities to struggling District natives, while also being receptive to the development that come with a rapidly gentrifying city; this is reflected by her ties to local real estate developers
- Vocal proponent of DC becoming the 51st state; believes residents' payment of federal taxes without a voting representative in Congress is akin to second class citizenship

Approach and Motivations

Bowser aims to ensure that every Washingtonian has a fair shot at success like she had. Balances differing constituencies by framing improved development as beneficial for all residents

- Views urban development as a means to improve the quality of life for everybody, not just wealthy recent arrivals
- Provides education and employment opportunities to residents at risk of being adversely impacted by gentrification
- Her father's involvement in the Advisory Neighborhood Commission instilled desire for community improvement at a young age

Policy Position and Areas of Focus

Bowser's top policy areas of focus are DC statehood, addressing urban violence, affordable housing, and quality education

DC Statehood: A vocal advocate for DC residents receiving full representation

- Backed the 2016 statehood referendum
- Testified before Congress to advocate for DC statehood in 2019

Addressing Violence: Aims to lower rates of urban violence through policing measures and community engagement

- Allocated \$2 million to the Cure the Streets program, which uses a public-health approach to break the cycles of urban violence
- Launched crime prevention initiatives to redirect police resources to specific high-crime areas
- Offers cash rewards to incentivize residents to report individuals who have illegal guns



- Launched a program to fund the purchase of security cameras for use on private properties

Affordable Housing: *Advocates addressing the city's current affordable housing crisis*

- Closed down the dilapidated mega shelter at the old DC General Hospital, and replaced it with several high-quality shelters around the District; sparking public discussion about costs
- Doubled the District's annual investment in affordable housing to \$100 million per year
- Proposed building 12,000 new affordable housing units by 2025 to try to reverse unequal distribution from past unfair housing policies

Education: *Supports quality public education*

- Launched the Quality Improvement Network to improve access to early childhood education
- Expanded Early Head Start services to over 600 children since 2015
- Launched an initiative to provide funding to address racial and gender test score disparities

Core Communities

Bowser is closely tied to other figures in the District's political community, as well as DC-based real estate developers

Fenty Alumni: *Has strong relationships with former DC Mayor Adrian Fenty's network*

- Friends with Fenty and considers him a mentor
- Prominent lawyer Bill Lightfoot served as chair for both of her campaigns; he had previously served two terms on the DC Council and worked on both of Fenty's campaigns
- Campaign treasurer Benjamin Soto also served as treasurer for Fenty's campaign

Local Politicos: *Has forged relationships with other prominent members of the DC political community throughout her career*

- Collaborates with Rep. Eleanor Holmes Norton (D-DC) on issues such as DC statehood
- Bowser's Ward 4 successor, Brandon Todd, previously worked in her Council office and on her first mayoral campaign
- Courtney Snowden, former deputy mayor for greater economic opportunity, previously worked for lobbying firm The Raben Group

Developers and Real Estate Management: *Has ties to real estate developers as a means to achieve her development and housing goals*

- Political backings include contributions from real estate developers such as Douglas Jemal, Scottie Irving, and Suman Sorg; in 2016, their companies had planned on receiving payment to lease land for homeless shelters
- Campaign treasurer Benjamin Soto is president of Paramount Development LLC
- Real estate developer Buwa Binitie contributed \$10,000 to a pro-Bowser PAC and accompanied Bowser on a 2015 trip to China
- Nominated real estate developer David Franco to the DC zoning commission in 2015; he was not confirmed by the Council

Relevant Financial Information

Large portion of contributions from labor unions and DC area-based real estate companies

Biggest Industry Donors (2006-2020)

- Public Sector Unions: \$420,000
- Lawyers & Lobbyists: \$240,000
- Real Estate: \$200,000
- General Trade Unions: \$58,000



- Construction Services: \$44,000

Biggest Corporate Donors (2006-2020)

- Laborers International Union of North America (Washington, DC): \$6,000
- Firemen & Oilers Local 32BJ (Ashland, KY): \$6,000
- Blue Skye Construction (Washington, DC): \$4,750
- Four Points LLC (Washington, DC): \$4,500
- Edgewood Management Corporation (Gaithersburg, MD): \$4,000

Biggest Individual Donors (2006-2020)

- Franklin L. Haney, CEO, Franklin Haney Company: \$5,000
- John M. Brophy, US Chamber of Commerce: \$4,000
- Bennie Williams, Retired: \$4,000
- Jonathan Zeitler, Owner, Cricket Media: \$3,500
- Emmy Michelle Haney, Homemaker: \$3,500

Political Donations

- Has given \$6,595 in the past ten years
- Her largest contribution was \$2,800 to her own 2014 mayoral campaign
- Contributed primarily to DC-based elections; federal contributions include Pres. Obama’s 2012 campaign, Bill Euille’s 2014 Congressional campaign (VA), and Hillary Clinton and Kamala Harris’ 2016 campaigns

Miscellaneous

- Received generous funding from a controversial PAC comprised of her political allies for several months in 2014, until the PAC shut down following public criticism

Publications, Media and Speaking

Has frequent speaking engagements to DC-based organizations; is very active on Twitter

Publications: Penned a 2018 op-ed critical of Sen. Marco Rubio’s gun policy

- “Marco Rubio Believes in Gun Control Measures – but Not for Washington, DC. Why the Hypocrisy, Senator?” *Miami Herald*, March 8, 2018

Media: Occasionally appears on national outlets to discuss DC issues; active on social media

- Preferred Outlets: National outlets such as MSNBC, C-SPAN, CNN
- Favorite Subjects: DC statehood, gun control; as of March 2020, the COVID-19 pandemic
- Social Media Habits: Writes her own tweets on her personal Twitter account; her official account is run by her team

Speaking: Frequently speaks publicly, particularly to DC-based organizations

- Favorite Subjects: Improving education, DC statehood, fiscal policy, affordable housing
- Preferred Audience: DC-based organizations
- Examples: Discussed DC’s cannabis industry at the WeDC Futures Forum in 2019; spoke about DC statehood at Fortune’s 2019 Most Powerful Women Summit; spoke about the state of public education to the DC Ed Fund in 2018; discussed fiscal policy and affordable housing at the Economic Club of Washington, DC in 2015

Congressional Testimony: Testified before Congress in 2019 to advocate for DC statehood

- Testified before House Committee on Oversight and Reform about admitting DC as the 51st state, September 19, 2019



- Highlighted the unfairness of DC residents' lack of Congressional representation, and suggested that arguments against DC statehood were thinly veiled arguments against adding Democratic senators

- Some of the developers involved had also contributed to FreshPAC, a PAC created by Bowser's allies that raised \$300,000 before shutting down several months after creation
- Close ties to developers fueled criticism that Bowser was prioritizing their needs over the needs of struggling Washingtonians; this occurred shortly before an election where gentrification would be a pertinent topic, and development and gentrification go hand-in-hand
- Her campaign committee was ordered to pay \$13,000 in fines in 2017

Family and Personal Background

A DC native, Bowser grew up in a large Catholic family and performed well in school

- Grew up in northeast Washington, DC
- Fifth generation Washingtonian
- Is the youngest of six children
- Her father was an elected member of the Advisory Neighborhood Commission, and Bowser grew up going to meetings and passing out flyers
- Lifelong Catholic attended Elizabeth Seton High School, an all-girls Catholic high school in Bladensburg, MD
- Received a college scholarship for academic achievement
- Envisioned herself as a potential agency administrator, but never as a politician or mayor
- Adopted a baby girl in 2019 as a single mother

Homeless shelter controversy

- Bowser proposed a plan in 2015 to close DC's overcrowded mega-shelter and replace it with several smaller shelters spread across the city
- This plan sparked controversy because three of the five corporations involved were tied to Bowser's political supporters
- Further criticism was aimed at the cost of the project, with a monthly average cost of \$4,500 per apartment unit
- In 2016, the DC City Council reconfigured the original plan to ensure all sites were on city-owned land, rather than leased to developers
- As of Spring 2020, five of the seven shelters are open; the final two are under construction

Criticisms and Controversies

Notable controversies during her mayoral tenure include campaign finance concerns and possible conflicts of interest regarding homeless shelter construction

Campaign finance concerns

- In 2017, it was discovered that Bowser's campaign committee kept over \$11,000 in contributions over the legal limit from various developers and contractors