

MCMC District 6 Candidate Questionnaire

2024 Primary Election Cycle

The Montgomery County Muslim Council (MCMC) invites you to answer this candidate questionnaire and return it to us by Wednesday, April 23, 2024. By completing this form, you consent to your responses being made public.

Candidate Name: **Ashwani Jain**

Submitted By: **Ashwani Jain** Date: **4/18/24**

1. Policy and Budget Priorities:

What are the top five policy and budget priorities you will pursue if elected to represent District 6?

- 1. Establish a living minimum wage of \$26/hr:** Since the federal minimum wage was first established in 1938, it has failed to adequately match inflation and cost of living, meaning that minimum wage workers today have less buying power than minimum wage workers of just 20 years ago. I see no reason why today's minimum wage workers deserve less than those of decades past. Opponents of this proposal are surprised to find that this equates to an annual wage of \$55,000 per year, a fair salary for an American working full time. Additionally, many critics have asserted that paying Americans what they deserve will "crash the economy" or "raise costs", a notion that I wholeheartedly reject. Establishing a minimum wage in the 1930s, enforcing child labor laws, and paying women equal wages were all proposals that were supposedly going to increase inflation and crash the economy but didn't. History has shown us that when people are paid what they deserve, opponents claim that the economy will crash or costs will go up, yet economic growth is actually supported by enabling people to more fully participate in the economy.
- 2. Decrease the influence of money in campaigning and politics:** As a future legislator I support the Bipartisan Ban on Congressional Stock Ownership Act introduced by Representatives Jayapal (D) and Rosendale (R) that would ban Congressional Representatives and their spouses from owning individual stocks while in office. I believe that this will keep legislators impartial by removing potential financial gain from influencing their decisions. Additionally, as a Candidate, I have refused all donations from corporations, special interests, and PACs of any kind, only hosted free events, and have run a 100% volunteer driven campaign which keeps me accountable to actual voters, not big donors.

- 3. Make public college free and cancel student debt:** I see my proposals to both make public college free, while forgiving student debt, as connected issues because in order for us to have a workforce that both educated and fully participating in our economy, we need for people to both be able to go to school and pay for it. Our current system of setting exorbitant costs to attend college, and expecting teenagers and young adults to take on crippling debt to pay for it, is unsustainable and will have long-term consequences. We are seeing some of the consequences of this system now as fully employed workers decades out of college are still struggling just to keep up with interest payments on their predatory student loans. These same people aren't fully participating in the economy as they aren't spending money on goods or raising kids while so much of their income is going into paying off interest. It is also increasing barriers to higher education as costs rise, attending college becomes beyond the means for more and more Americans meaning that the richest are benefiting from the current system, not the most intelligent or qualified. I believe that by both canceling student debt, and making public college free we will break the debt-cycle and increase the education and diversity of our workforce, allow educated individuals to fully participate in the economy, and increase tax revenues.

- 4. Establish Medicare for All:** Under our current privatized system, healthcare is getting more expensive while quality and access diminish. It is time that we demand the same level of care as the rest of the world's developed democracies. Our current system is not one to be proud of and is certainly not one that is sustainable. Adopting Medicare for All will actually decrease the amount of money spent on healthcare in the United States as the government will be able to regulate reasonable costs for prescriptions, procedures, and services thus saving money for the federal budget and paying for itself as a program.

- 5. Enforce a ceasefire in Palestine and condition foreign military aid:** I am absolutely heartbroken by the violence occurring in Israel and Palestine, but I do want to be clear that while our ally Israel absolutely has a right to defend itself from terrorism; they also have a responsibility to uphold humanitarian rights and laws; just like any other nation. In light of the sheer scale of the humanitarian crisis in Israel and Palestine, I have established myself as the only candidate in this Congressional race to have both published a platform calling for a ceasefire in Palestine and spoken openly about this issue at Candidate forums/debates since last November. I am also calling for all military aid going abroad to be conditioned on allies upholding humanitarian and international law.

2. Understanding of Muslim Community Issues:

Can you provide specific actions or initiatives that demonstrate your understanding of the issues important to the Muslim community in District 6?

- 1. Religious Site Permitting:** I support federal protections for minority religious groups in seeking permits for establishing/constructing new places of worship. While permitting of this nature is usually handled at the local level, I believe that federal protection will help reduce discrimination in how permits are distributed to religious groups and allow for greater diversity of religious sites in our communities. Specifically, there is history in this District of mosques and muslim cemeteries facing uphill permitting battles that have not been faced by groups seeking to establish new churches.
- 2. Religiously affiliated head coverings:** I oppose any legislative efforts at any level of government designed to specifically target, outlaw, or denounce the public wear of religiously affiliated head coverings. Freedom of expression is a sacred right in this country and if a man or woman chooses to express themselves or their religious devotion through the wear of a religiously affiliated head covering that right should not be infringed.
- 3. Federal holidays:** I support diversity and inclusion in the designation of federal religious holidays. Specifically, I support efforts to recognize Eid as a federal holiday. I applaud Frederick County Public School's Board of Education who recently approved including both Eid holidays on the school system calendar of recognized holidays.

3. Combatting Anti-Muslim Hate:

What specific measures do you propose to combat anti-Muslim hate, and to end ethnic and religious profiling in our society and institutions?

- 1. Education:** I believe that the root of hatred is ignorance. With that principle in mind, I support systems of education that teach culturally relevant history that reflects the history, accomplishments, and beliefs of our nation's diverse population. Specifically, I support comprehensive world history that includes the contributions of the Middle East and North Africa in the fields of science, literature, and politics, as well as classes such as World Religions that increase awareness of the many faiths that are practiced in the United States.
- 2. Protection against hate crimes:** I support federal protections for practitioners of every faith. Specifically, I want to invest in reducing red tape in the process of reporting hate crimes, train teachers to deal with acts of hate that occur in the classroom, and invest in the capacity of federal agencies to investigate and respond to allegations of hate crimes.
- 3. Investments in mental health access:** My policy platform includes my support for Medicare For All, a program that would increase access to mental health counseling and resources for all Americans. Access to this type of care is incredibly important for communities that are subjected to the significant stressors of hate, discrimination, and profiling. While Muslim Americans are almost twice as likely as other religious groups to consider or attempt suicide, I think that this care will be particularly beneficial to this community and ultimately save lives.
- 4. Security funding:** I support federal funds and grants being made available to invest in the physical security of religious sites and places of worship especially for groups that are actively facing threats or discrimination. Specifically, these funds could be used to purchase security cameras, reinforced doors/windows, and advanced fire suppression systems.

4. Immigration & Refugee Resettlement:

What reforms do you support to address the country's current immigration needs and challenges; how would you approach the refugee resettlement process in the United States?

- 1. Prioritize creating an efficient and effective pathway to citizenship for those who qualify and expedite work permits for those who do not:** This will decrease wait times for immigrants seeking to legally become citizens and decrease the rates of people trying to illegally cross the border. Similarly to an efficient path to citizenship, this would decrease illegal crossings as it would allow workers (especially seasonal workers) to travel into the United States legally, do their work, and leave at the end of their visas rather than missing a whole season of work because the permitting process takes so long.
- 2. End the use of private prisons to house non-violent immigrants:** I am opposed to the use of private prisons entirely, including their use to house immigrants.
- 3. End the 287g program:** Through this program, state and local law enforcement officers collaborate with ICE and are allowed to enforce federal immigration laws (such as interrogating non-citizens and executing ICE warrants). These enhanced powers are costly for localities and have frequently targeted people of color who often have little or no criminal history and are not criminal suspects. Such targeted enforcement has also damaged relationships between police and local communities.
- 4. Greater freedom of choice for resettled refugees:** Too often refugees are swept along in the resettlement system with little room for input about where they will end up, regardless of where communities like theirs may be located or who they already know living in the United States. I believe that by allowing for greater input from refugees about where they are placed will allow for them to better integrate in the economy, society, and resources of the United States.
- 5. Expand The Refugee Cash Assistance (RCA) Program:** This program provides temporary assistance to individuals who are not eligible for other welfare assistance as they transition into life in the United States.

5. U.S. policy towards Israel-Palestine Conflict:

What is your stance on U.S. policy towards the Israel-Palestine conflict:

1. Do you support an immediate and permanent ceasefire in Gaza?

Yes. I was the first candidate in this race to call for a ceasefire last year and have published numerous public statements on this issue. Additionally, I have talked about this issue at every candidate forum, at every campaign event, and even in my television advertisements.

2. Do you support conditioning/halting U.S. aid to Israel due to Israel's war crimes in Gaza?

Every dollar of American taxpayer money sent abroad for military purposes needs to be conditioned on the recipient upholding humanitarian laws and norms. This is true for Ukraine who I support in their war against Russian colonization in Europe, it is true for South Korea who I fully support standing strong in the face of the existential threat that is North Korea, and it is absolutely true for Israel.

3. How can the U.S. help achieve the creation of an independent Palestinian state in the next two years?

I strongly support the eventual establishment of an independent state of Palestine. Statehood will allow for Palestine to more fully participate in the global economy, systems of justice like the International Court of Justice (ICJ), and organizations like the United Nations (UN). It will also allow for greater international investment in the region and for expedited reconstruction of Gaza post-war. This can only be accomplished through a cessation of conflict in the region and an international guarantee of security that will allow for fair democratic elections in Gaza. While I cannot promise that a ceasefire, democratic elections, and international recognition of statehood will all occur in the next two years, I am able to promise the voters of Maryland's 6th Congressional District that this is the outcome that I will fight for in Congress.

6. Foreign Policy and Human Rights Promotion:

How would you promote a foreign policy that promotes freedom and human rights, particularly in regions where violations are prevalent?

- 1. Condition military aid on the recipient upholding human rights:** I believe that every dollar of taxpayer money leaving this country should be invested in the pursuit of security, freedom, and human rights. To that end, I believe that all military aid going abroad should be conditioned upon the recipient upholding human rights, laws, and norms. Additionally, I would like to see a prioritization of defensive military aid over offensive military aid where applicable. I am much more comfortable sending missile defense systems abroad than incendiary artillery shells.
- 2. Continue to invest in international organizations that promote human rights:** There has been an alarming trend in recent years of American politicians talking about leaving or defunding organizations that promote peace either through mutual defense or international investment. I am a strong supporter of mutually beneficial military alliances that deter military conflict as well as civilian organizations like the United Nations Human Rights Council, the World Bank, and the International Court of Justice that invest in long-term stabilization and peacemaking efforts. Participation in these international organizations promote freedom, security, and human rights in the long term and these relationships should be maintained.
- 3. Use non-violent means to enact international change:** I am a fundamentally anti-war candidate. I believe that the use of military force should be preserved as a means of final resort to combat immediate and inevitable threats of force against our citizens as necessary. I support non-military means of international influence like tariffs, trade, international courts, and financial investment where applicable in lieu of direct military force.

7. Promotion of Positive Muslim Contributions:

In what ways do you intend to promote and highlight the wealth of positive contributions made by Muslims in the United States?

1. **Advisory Council:** Upon being elected to represent Maryland's 6th Congressional District in the House of Representatives, I will immediately establish a Congressional Religious Leader Advisory Council which will include representatives from Western Maryland's religious Community. I can absolutely guarantee that this Congressional Advisory Council will have seats dedicated to muslim leaders in our community who will assist me in highlighting and promoting the positive contributions of Muslims in the United States.
2. **Education:** As stated in response to an earlier question: I believe that the root of hatred is ignorance. With that principle in mind, I support systems of education that teach culturally relevant history that reflects the history, accomplishments, and beliefs of our nation's diverse population. Specifically, I support comprehensive world history that includes the contributions of the Middle East and North Africa in the fields of science, literature, and politics, as well as classes such as World Religions that increase awareness of the many faiths that are practiced in the United States.

8. Housing Crisis:

How do you propose to address the housing crisis and lack of affordable housing across the country, to include District 6?

My views on the housing crisis are informed by my service in the Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD) where we worked to increase access to housing, keep costs down, and decrease homelessness. As one of the only candidates in this race to have published a housing platform, a few of my top priorities include:

- 1. Creating a new neighborhood homes tax credit:** Creating a new Neighborhood Homes Tax Credit will directly support the construction or renovation of single-family homes in low-income communities. The tax credit would cover the gap between the cost of construction/renovations and the sale price. The tax credit would be available to low- or middle-income homeowners. It will spur investment and economic activity in communities that have long suffered from disinvestment.
- 2. Expanding the low-income housing tax credit:** As the nation's largest affordable housing development program, the Low-Income Housing Tax Credit (LIHTC) provides federal tax credits to state housing agencies to support construction and maintenance of affordable housing units. These units are usually reserved for households with incomes at or below 60% of the local median income with rents no higher than 30% of that maximum income level. By expanding these tax credits, we can help more working families, veterans, and seniors afford their homes.
- 3. Federally funding and encouraging "smart growth" and mixed-use development:** This includes ensuring that new housing is built closer to areas of transit, and that we are encouraging more multi-family housing and high-rise development, not just single-family homes.
- 4. Enacting "just cause" protections:** While a landlord can rightfully evict a tenant if they knowingly break their lease agreement, it should be common sense to require that landlord to first provide that tenant an opportunity to resolve the issue. And if that doesn't work, the landlord should be required to provide advanced notice to the tenant if pursuing eviction.

9. Gun Violence:

Tens of thousands of Americans die each year by firearms, while mass shooting events are becoming all too common. What policies would you pursue to reduce gun violence?

I believe that effective firearm policy balances maintaining the constitutional rights and protections of legal gun owners, while aggressively combatting the devastating rise of mass shootings and gun violence committed in our country. To more specifically answer your questions though:

1. **Every gun that is used for a crime was once manufactured legally:** I would like to see increased accountability for manufacturers and sellers that are complicit in a weapon falling into the wrong hands. This could include both manufacturers selling to unlicensed sellers and sellers not complying with background checks. To clarify, if a legal manufacturer or seller improperly transfers/sells a weapon to a criminal and that weapon is used in a crime, they should also face liability. Additionally, I agree with the bipartisan call to make carrying an illegally obtained firearm (stolen, black market, 3d printed) a felony offense rather than a misdemeanor to more aggressively deter illegal firearm possession without punishing legal gun owners.
2. **I support universal background checks:** Effectively screening the criminal history and mental health of gun purchasers helps to reduce mass shootings, crime, and the often-unaddressed firearm suicide rate. These background checks should be paid for at the weapon purchaser's expense and background checks should be enshrined through legislation at the federal level.
3. **With each school shooting that I see committed with ArmaLite Rifle-15 (AR-15) style weapons, I have been increasingly convinced that this type of firearm (often referred to as "assault weapons") should be banned:** I do want to be clear that any measure to ban weapons needs to be paired exceptions for certain owners to have their antique or historically significant weapons "grandfathered in" as well as establishing a government buy-back program to reimburse legal gun owners for the full market of their weapons so that financial burden isn't unfairly placed on them if their weapon becomes ineligible for personal ownership.

10. Unique Qualifications:

What unique qualifications do you possess that distinguish you from the other candidates in this race?

A staggering 17 Democratic Candidates have filed to compete for this Congressional seat. While Mia Mason has since removed herself from the ballot and endorsed my candidacy, bringing the total down to 16, this is still a massive field of candidates. With that in mind, I hope to stand out from the crowd and earn the consideration of voters for a few reasons:

1. As Candidates, we are seeking to represent Western Maryland in the United States Congress which is a federal position, and I have the most diverse career of demonstrated federal experience in this race. This experience includes two offices in President Obama's White House, as well as two federal agencies - the Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD) and the Department of Health and Human Services (HHS). These professional experiences leave me well equipped to navigate the red tape of federal bureaucracy, advocate for Western Maryland to federal agencies, and bring federal resources back to our District.
2. I have the most detailed policy agenda in this race published on my website. This means that I can be held accountable by voters because I am being transparent in telling them what issues and policies I will fight for once in office across a range of issues including labor rights, women's rights, veterans' affairs, and more.
3. I spend 90% of my time canvassing and meeting voters at their homes not just to talk about my policies but to ask how I can be helpful as a Candidate and to learn about the issues they are facing. Additionally, 100% of my Campaign events are free and no constituent will ever have to pay to meet or speak with me.
4. I have refused all money from corporations, special interests, and Political Action Committees (PACs). What this means is that I am entirely owned by voters, not purchased by special interests, big donors, or PACs.
5. Unlike a full half of Candidates in this race, I actually live in the 6th District and am personally impacted by the decisions made that impact my community.