



**Metropolitan
Washington**

**Council AFL-CIO
Committee on Political
Education (COPE)**

**2020 District of Columbia
Primary Election
Candidate Questionnaire**

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GENERAL INFORMATION:

Name: Kishan Putta Ward: 2

Address: 3831 T St NW

City / County: DC Zip: 20007

Phone: 202-320-0058 Email: kishanfordc@gmail.com

Candidate for: DC Council Ward 2

Campaign Committee Name and Address: Kishan For DC 2020

Campaign Website: kishanfordc.com

Campaign Manager: April Avant

Campaign Treasurer: Robert Schreiber

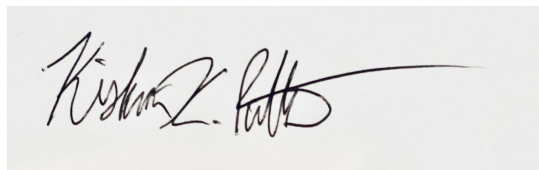
Does your campaign accept PAC contributions? Yes/No - NO

Previously elected / appointed office: **ANC 2E01, ANC 2B04, DC Commission on Asian American and Pacific Islander Affairs (CAPIA)**

Office: Term:

- **ANC 2E01, Elected 2018,**
- **ANC 2B04, 2013-2015**
- **CAPIA, Since 2016**

Have you ever received labor's endorsement? Yes/No If Yes, When?



SIGNATURE: _____

DATE: 3/3/20 _____

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Overview:

As the voice of working people across the United States, the Washington Metropolitan Council (MWC), is the heart of the American labor movement.

By uniting labor unions from across the region and mobilizing the local community, the MWC plays a critical role in local, state, and national issues.

The Council's affiliated unions represent over 150,000 area union members across the labor spectrum, from service and hospitality industries, retail sales, and communications to transportation, manufacturing, construction and building trades, and, of course, the public sector at all levels, including DC government.

Our priorities include:

- Creating family-sustaining jobs for all
- Investing in education, infrastructure, healthcare, and transportation
- Improving the lives of workers through education, quality job training, career advancement and livable wages with good benefits
- Ensuring fair, progressive tax policies
- Making high quality, affordable healthcare available to everyone
- Holding corporations and government accountable to ensure that taxpayer dollars serve the public good; and
- Ensuring that workers universal right to organize and to bargain collectively for wages, hours, and conditions of work are maintained and enforced.

CORNERSTONE ISSUES OF LABOR

ALL WORKING PEOPLE SHOULD HAVE THE RIGHT TO:

- **A Good Job with Fair Wages**
- **Quality Health Care**
- **A Safe Job**
- **Paid Time Off and Flexible, Predictable Scheduling**
- **Freedom from Discrimination**
- **Retire with Dignity**
- **Fully-Funded Public Education**
- **Freedom to Join Together**
- **A Voice in Democracy**

Better Wages and Benefits

When people negotiate through collective bargaining, they gain better wages and benefits. Decent raises, predictable schedules, and family-friendly policies do not just happen without working people coming together and advocating for better workplaces.

Workplace Safety

The labor movement has led the charge to protect working people from workplace injury, illness, and death. Working with allies, labor has won strong protections against hazards and stronger rights for workers. Through organizing and collective bargaining, unions have gained robust protections and a real voice in safety and health at the workplace.

Pay equity

In 2016, women in unions made 23 percent higher wages than those not in a union. Moreover, unions have narrowed the gender wage gap to just 6 percent (compared to 16 percent for non-union). In addition, unions are also more likely to have various types of paid leave to balance work and family.¹

¹ Economic Policy Institute “Unions help narrow the gender wage gap,” Gould, McNicholas April 3, 2017

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Building Power for Working People

Union members work together to negotiate and enforce a contract with management that guarantees things like decent raises, affordable health care, safer workplaces, job security, and a stable schedule.

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PLEASE BRIEFLY EXPLAIN WHY YOU SEEK LABOR'S ENDORSEMENT:

Both of my parents were career-long union members and, growing up, I experienced and noticed the value of their excellent health care coverage and other wonderful benefits. Whenever I was sick, they were able to take time off to care for me. Now that I am a parent, I think about that and want the same security and benefits for all families. I would be honored to have your support.

COLLECTIVE BARGAINING

Collective bargaining is the process in which working people, through unions, negotiate contracts with their employers to determine the terms of employment, including pay, benefits, hours, leave, job health and safety policies, ways to balance work and family, and more. Collective bargaining is the heart and soul of the Labor Movement. Collective bargaining is a way to solve workplace problems, and is also the best means for raising wages in America. Indeed, through collective bargaining, working people in unions have higher wages, better benefits and safer workplaces.

Do you support for the District of Columbia (please respond Yes or No):

- Yes The rights of public and private sector workers to organize and have union representation.
- Yes The right to freely exercise workplace rights free from harassment, intimidation and/or delays.
- Yes The right to bargain collectively with a legal obligation on both sides to negotiate in good faith.
- Yes The right to resolve differences in a fair, impartial and timely manner, including a timely resolution to binding arbitration.

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Additional Comments or clarification:

Collective bargaining is the cornerstone of any workforce. Protecting the basic rights of an employee offers the opportunity to do a lot of good for the workers of DC. Unfortunately, the DC government has abandoned the labor movement; specifically their public school teachers, nurses, and transit workers. DC Council needs to be an advocate for all union workers, be they employed by the government or facing unreasonable negotiations in the private sector, such as the current situation facing the [United Food and Commercial Workers Local 400 group](#). The people that work in our grocery stores, in our public transit, in every facet of our economy deserve to have living wages and benefits. As a member of the DC Council, I will work hard to ensure collective bargaining is powerful, available, and fair.

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RIGHT TO WORK

“Right to Work” laws prohibit workers from negotiating a “union shop” or “union security” clause in their contracts. Such a clause obligates those in the bargaining unit to pay their fair share of the collective bargaining representation costs. By wiping out that protection, “Right to Work” legislation, actually weakens the rights of working people and dismantles unions. Would you commit to:

Opposing legislation to bring “Right to Work” in DC?

Yes

No

Other (explain below)

Additional Comments or clarification:

The notion of a "right to work" erodes the very fabric of our economic force. Opening the doors for non-union members to benefit from the hard-fought victories of the union movement, without paying the costs that these services incur, creates an imbalance. Without speaking with a unified voice the labor force is vulnerable to division. Right to work laws also have been found to have negative effects on economic growth and result in lower wages and lower rates of employment.

UNION DUES AND JANUS V. AFSCME DECISION

In 2018, the Supreme Court issued what is probably its single most consequential ruling in *Janus v. AFSCME*. The ruling was a devastating blow against public-sector unions barring them from applying “agency fees” to the public employees for whom they negotiate pay increases and benefits if those employees decline to join the union as full members. Would you commit to:

Working with labor to find a legal remedy to allowing unions to collect a service fee from nonmembers for the cost of union representation as long as there are protections for those who object on religious grounds.

Yes

No

Other (explain below)

Additional Comments or clarification:

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The public sector workforce is perhaps the most vulnerable of all because of their relationship with policy makers, tax dollars, and work that directly benefits the general population. It is necessary to overturn cases like Janus to protect the workforce, which in turn protects the public. Without a mediator or labor group to advocate for worker's rights, they are left to fight for change without the resources or experience to do so effectively. The dichotomy between public dollars and public labor is fraught with challenges already. Adding another, like *Janus V. AFSCME*, only harms the public more. That is why I will be an outspoken advocate for labor on the DC Council from Ward 2.

HEALTHCARE WORKERS & ACCESS

Universal Health Services Inc. (UHS) hospital (background):

Mayor Muriel Bowser's administration has been negotiating with UHS to be the operator of the new hospital in Ward 8. The deal with UHS is expected to be announced to the public early this year.

Community groups, labor groups, and residents of Wards 7 and 8 have serious concerns about UHS as a bad actor because the company puts profits over patients.

- George Washington University Hospital has just sued UHS because ["Instead of investing" in GWU's mission, "UHS has paid itself" with "outsized dividends from artificially inflated, excess profits."](#)²
- UHS was found to violate labor law by the National Labor Relations Board in 2019. The Court found they attempted to illegally bust the union at George Washington University Hospital.
- A \$127 million judgment was levied against UHS by the Department of Justice after being sued for defrauding Medicare and Medicaid services.
- UHS understaffs its facilities across multiple states, putting patients and workers at risk.
- UHS refuses to create an independent committee to protect rights and health of patients and workers. This secrecy threatens patients' health and workers' jobs.
- UHS does not have plans to build a level-1 trauma center nor a high-risk obstetrics unit or neonatal intensive care unit (NICU), despite great need East of the River.

² GWU sues corporate hospital partner, leaving fate of Southeast project uncertain, Washington Post, Peter Jamison, Dec. 10, 2019

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- UHS and Mayor Bowser's office will not give any guarantees that staff from UMC will have jobs at the new hospital. The deal has no plan for these devoted caregivers, some of whom have worked at the hospital and lived in the community for decades.

Community and labor groups have been left out of this process and the deal has been secretive and rushed, thus leading to a lack of critical services and labor protections. This lack of services and protections will affect the whole city. The labor community believes that DC residents deserve a world-class hospital East of the River. Will you support efforts to:

Yes Require the new hospital to hire the workers from UMC in their current position with their current benefits and union representation.

Yes Guarantee neutrality for workers at the new medical facility to organize.

Yes Ensure high level quality of services needed for the Ward 7 and 8 communities including high-risk obstetrics and a minimum Level 2 trauma unit.

Additional Comments or clarification:

I have serious doubts about UHS based on its track record.

For the last 6 years I worked on health care access for DC residents through DC Healthlink and oversaw our community-based outreach and enrollment partnerships.

I support the building of a hospital east of the river as that area has largely been left wanting in terms of the quality of healthcare they receive compared to the more affluent NW areas. A [2018 study by Virginia Commonwealth University for the Metropolitan Washington Council of Governments](#) found that residents in a census tract near where the hospital would be built can be expected to live about 67 years, compared to 86 years in the city's Georgetown area. Additionally, as UMC is slated to close in 2023, they have already divested from their obstetrics practice which will worsen what is already a large gap for mothers and childcare in the more disadvantaged neighborhoods of Wards 7 and 8.

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EDUCATION:

Affiliates of the MWC represent teachers, bus drivers and other school related personnel in DCPS. Despite an increase in Mayor Bowser’s education budget for FY2020, 20 public schools, including 17 schools in Wards 7 and 8, saw significant budget cuts for the current school year.

Overall funding for DCPS has not kept up with rising costs, leading to cuts in many schools. Additionally, the Labor Movement believes that regardless of where a student attends school, they are entitled to the same rights as a student, including transparency and adherence to local laws. To serve the best interest of education in the District, will you commit to:

Yes Providing schools that receive a net flow of students throughout the school year additional resources.

Yes Working with teachers through their union to implement methods to close the opportunity gap of schools in lower-income communities.

Yes Working with the community and labor union representatives to address gun violence and student safety including enforcing trauma informed practices and screening.

Yes Supporting the right of all public sector unions and DCPS to collectively bargain on teacher evaluation standards and procedures?

Yes Ensuring that all Local Education Agencies (LEA) are subject to FOIA, Open Meetings and transparency laws.

Would you support ending Mayoral control of schools and educational policies and placing them in the purview of an elected School Board?

Yes

No

Other (explain below)

I believe in strong oversight. In fact, I’ve testified at over 25 agency performance oversight hearings. On my ANC Commission, I am the lead Commissioner on Education issues. I was appointed by the Chancellor to serve on the DCPS Parents Cabinet - and I advocated with parents citywide to get over

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18,000 new tech devices funded - and they are arriving this week -- so that kids whose families can't afford a computer can still prepare for the jobs of the future.

Under mayoral control, there has been limited oversight of and accountability for the school system, especially the charter sector, as the executive branch's incentive is to portray schools in the best light possible. The only independent body focused on education has very little decision-making power over the system, and that is also problematic.

I have spoken with many parents, teachers, and education advocates about this problem and I believe we must re-examine the current system. We should consider whether it would be beneficial to restore some oversight responsibility to the State Board of Education. As councilmember, I will aim to serve on the Education Committee and will support examining how to update the Public Education Reform Amendment Act (PERAA) of 2007. I will make it a priority to reach out to and work closely with the WTU on any such changes or efforts.

Additional Comments or clarification:

As Councilmember, I will ensure that we request that LEAs develop and publish plans for supporting teachers and then hold LEAs responsible for implementing these plans through oversight. These plans could include mentoring and other support for first-year teachers, reflect best practices from other school districts, and ideally would be developed with input from teachers. By asking OSSE or another entity to regularly collect and publish data on teacher turnover, the Council can help ensure transparency.

ACCOUNTABILITY/ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT:

Entertainment

Accidents in the event/entertainment industry are far too common. Thankfully you would have to go back in time over 20 years to the last fatal accident in Washington DC when a lighting supervisor working for upstaging fell 90 feet from the catwalk of the DC Armory and died the night before a Marilyn Manson concert, but it has happened, and without regulation it could happen again. Look at what happened to the deputy Mayor this past March, a speaker falling on a person attending a rally should never happen. Unfortunately, accidents like that go un-reported far too often. This is a public safety issue that needs to be taken seriously.

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Would you be willing to support DC legislation that would amend [Title 47, Chapter 18 of the District of Columbia Official Code](#) to ensure:

- 1) that a person or party responsible for the staging and operation of a special event in the District holds a basic business license and an Entertainment endorsement to such license and
- 2) to establish a safety qualification program for technicians employed in the staging of special events by requiring that at least one member of the staging crew hold a rigger's certification issued by the Entertainment Technician Certification Program, and that all persons employed in such operations complete a minimum safety training course (OSHA-10) prior to working on the event?

Yes

No

Additional Comments or clarification:

At events where the safety of hundreds or thousands of people could be at risk from faulty equipment or poor planning, all necessary precautions should be taken in order to prevent incidents. By requiring employees involved in stage operations to undergo OSHA-10, workers will receive training in hazard recognition and avoidance as well as employer responsibilities, which can make a significant impact in preventing incidents. As with operating heavy machinery in construction or as a metro bus operator, employees engaged in staging special events should have minimum safety training, so I believe that OSHA-10 should be required training for employees whose responsibilities, if not done properly, can harm the public in any way.

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Wage Theft

While wage theft is pervasive and highly damaging, there is some good news: the problem is not unassailable. To be most effective, anti-wage theft laws must be meaningfully and effectively enforced, and must be accompanied by other legal provisions that empower victims to speak up against their abuse, such as strong anti-retaliation laws.

Will you work with community groups, city administration and other advocates to support proven programs that combat wage theft??

Yes **No**

Will you commit to supporting an increase in funding in the departments and programs that work to ensure that workers are paid correctly, including the Department of Employee Services (DOES), as well as securing funding for community members who are third party enforcers, and a robust public awareness and accountability program?

Yes **No**

Additional Comments or clarification:

Serving on the Commission on APIA Affairs, I worked with DOES to ensure that low income immigrants felt free to report wage-theft and would be protected against it.

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Transportation: (Please provide your response on a separate sheet). ATU Q's!!

Transit Worker Assaults

There are dozens of incidents where bus and train operators, as well as station managers, have been spat on, slapped, tased, stabbed, and even doused with urine. Transit worker assaults are not only a danger to the workers, but also to the riding public, who are also placed in harm's way when these incidents occur.

Following the urine-dousing incident on a Metro bus operator in 2018, unions began calling on the respective legislatures of District of Columbia, Maryland and Virginia to increase the penalties for transit assaults. Will you work to ensure the District of Columbia raises the penalty of assaults on transit employees?

Yes **No**

Transit operators have an important job. They are responsible for dozens of lives and are trained to protect them. Those who endanger operators endanger many others and we need very high penalties - penalties that are posted publicly - to help prevent attacks on operators. We must do everything in our power to protect our city's public employees.

Privatization

Will you support efforts by transit workers in preventing privatization of future services at WMATA?

Yes **No**

Likewise, will you support efforts to prevent privatization of future services by the District government at the DC Streetcar and DC Circulator?

Yes **No**

Uber and Lyft represent one of the largest threats to public transit in the country. Do you support laws, similar to AB5 in California or New York City's 2019 Rideshare Law, to clarify the rights of rideshare workers?

Yes **No**

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Additional Comments or clarification:

While our economy is changing, the core values of consumer safety and workers' welfare must never be abandoned. In the fields where workers are responsible for the safety of others, such as transportation such as in the ride sharing industry, I believe workers should have employee protections and be treated as employees.

Privatization of public services is a slippery slope that too many governments are falling into. DC should prioritize unionized labor. Private contractors should not be the de facto choice. Lack of competition for bids ensures two detrimental results. First, lack of competition creates a monopoly-like environment for providing essential services, leaving the city beholden to private interests. Second, protections and oversight become far less effective because there is no alternative choice of service. If and when DC private contractors are selected to provide government services, I would conduct persistent oversight thus ensuring labor and public safety are protected.

As our neighbors in Montgomery County, MD have done, I would implement Project Labor Agreements to private contracts and procurement operations. Ensuring that labor, public servants, and companies are in agreement on the costs, timeline, and accountability from the start will yield far better overall results than that of the current status quo. As a council member, I would fight for PLAs to become a regular aspect of any procurement process.

Freight Crew Size Legislation

The District of Columbia is a major gateway for north/south and east/west freight railroad traffic. By 2040, freight railroad traffic is projected to triple from 15 to 48 daily freight trains.

Today, the average freight train is 1.5 – 2 miles long and three (3) stories tall. The size, length, and commodities, including hazardous material transported by these freight trains, pose significant public safety risks for the communities adjacent to the rail corridors.

Currently, freight trains in the United States are operated with a minimum of two crew members: locomotive engineer and conductor. The coordinated efforts of the crew ensure the safe movement of the freight train. In the event of an accident or incident, the crew the coordinates immediate assistance and provide critical information to fire and emergency responders.

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The freight railroad industry based on new technology and operating paradigm are seeking to reduce the crew size to just the locomotive engineer.

A reduction of the crew to only a locomotive engineer would create a major public safety risk for the District of Columbia. Locomotive engineers and conductors each have different specific responsibilities they perform to ensure the safe movement of a freight train.

More importantly, the major functions for safely moving a freight train can't be performed by a single crew member.

Single-man railroad operations have been proven unsafe and directly contribute to several horrific accidents, including the 2013 disaster in Lac Megantic, Quebec - Canada.

Seven (7) states: California, Illinois, Colorado, Nevada, Wisconsin, Arizona, and West Virginia, have enacted legislation requiring a minimum two-persons crew on all freight railroad trains.

QUESTION:

To protect the communities adjacent to our rail corridors, would you support legislation requiring a minimum two-person crew on all freight rail trains operated in the District of Columbia?

Yes NO OTHER

Additional Comments or clarification:

In response to the Federal Railroad Administration's proposal to withdraw the two person rule, legislation is necessary to protect the safety of freight rail workers and the communities close to railroad tracks . Innovation and new technology is important to improving efficiency but we should never risk safety in exchange for cost-saving measures. We must learn from the mistakes of others and prevent future disasters from occurring.

Rail Safety Inspections and Oversight

In 2016, D.C. Law 21-254 authorized the creation of the Emergency Response and Rail Safety Division (ERRSD) within the Department of Energy and Environment. ERRSD is the State Rail Safety Office responsible for monitoring and overseeing all railroad activity in the District of Columbia. ERRSD is

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comprised of an Associate Director and Rail Safety Inspectors trained in specific railroad disciplines. Unfortunately, ERRSD has been underfunded each fiscal year since it's creation.

QUESTION 1.

Would you support full funding for ERRSD in the FY 2021 and future budgets?

Yes NO OTHER

QUESTION 2.

Would you support an amendment to D.C. Law 21-254: "Rail Safety and Security Amendment Act" authorizing the District of Columbia to assess penalties and fines for safety and security violations on the railroads operating in the District of Columbia.

Yes NO OTHER

Additional Comments or clarification:

I certify that the responses in this questionnaire are mine and reflect my political positions for consideration by the MWC.



SIGNATURE: _____
DATE: _____ 3/3/2020 _____

Candidate (Please Print Legibly): Kishan Putta

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Thank you.