

**Testimony by Howard White Before DC Tax Revision Commission
on June 24, 2013**

Good Evening! I am Howard White. I have been a resident of DC since 1959 with a few years away to serve in the Army. I have been living in Shepherd Park since 1969. My wife and I raised our two children there. We moved to Shepherd because it was one of the few truly integrated neighborhoods anywhere in the country.

It is the diversity of the city that was the basis for choosing DC, rather than one of the suburbs, as a home. Developing a fair and efficient tax system will help DC retain its diversity and make it a place where people will be proud and happy to live.

It is important to look at taxes as a legitimate cost of living a civilized and comfortable life. We all need certain services such as police and fire protection, trash pick up and removal, streets to drive on, etc. But taxes are also a part of having a fair and just city. This, as my tradition teaches is of value for the affluent who contribute to it, as well as those who receive benefits.

I was shocked to find that under the current tax system, someone at my comfortable, but not affluent, income level is likely to pay a lower percentage of their income in city taxes than people who have much lower incomes and a higher percentage than those who have higher incomes. This is just plain wrong. Interestingly, a poll taken when the City Council was discussing adding another bracket to our income taxes showed that most of those who would pay at the higher rate were willing to pay the higher rate¹.

How can we make the system both more ethical and more rational. First, we can lower the combined tax rate (sales, income and property) for lower income residents. Second we could raise that rate for high income residents.

Some specific suggestions might include: a sales tax credit for low income families, lowering the income tax rate for bottom brackets, and property tax credits for low income renters who pay indirectly through their rent.

In general, taxes are a valid cost for living in this lively and exciting city, not an unfair taking of our money. They are also a way of helping those in need of and deserving of assistance. I hope you will fully consider the issues I have raised in your efforts to improve our tax system.

¹ <http://www.dcfpi.org/dc-residents-support-taxes-to-preserve-services-read-the-hart-research-poll-and-memo>