



## **NEW COLUMBIA STATEHOOD COMMISSION MEETING**

April 21, 2016 at 3:30pm

John A. Wilson Building, 1350 Pennsylvania Avenue, room G9

### **Members of the Commission**

- Mayor Muriel Bowser
  - DC Council Chairman Phil Mendelson
  - Senator Paul Strauss
  - Senator Michael D. Brown
  - Representative Franklin Garcia
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- Mayor Bowser opened the meeting at 3:39 pm and outlined the agenda for the New Columbia Statehood Commission meeting. Agenda items were as follows:
    - Present DC Statehood Organizational Plan
    - Review of DC Statehood Organizational Structure
    - Review advisory referendum timeline
    - Discussion of funding for the New Columbia Statehood Commission in the FY2017 budget.
  - Council Chairman Phil Mendelson stated in his opening remarks that the DC Council passed legislation to establish the New Columbia Statehood Commission in 2014 to address the resources that the DC government was putting into the statehood movement including the statehood grant administered by the Office of the Secretary. The idea behind the Commission is that it would help DC achieve statehood and allow for greater coordination between the Executive, the Legislative Branch, and the three elected officials representing the residents of DC. The Commission is required to meet twice per year.
  - Senator Strauss stated that this is one of the most exciting and ambitious plans for DC statehood in a long-time. Much has changed in the last thirty years since Washington, DC last voted for statehood and a lot hasn't (residents still don't have right to vote). Senator Strauss stated that he hopes to see more resources for the New Columbia Statehood Commission to help carry out their work on statehood. Just this week, Presidential candidate, Governor John Kasich, told the Washington Post Editorial Board that he objected to statehood for Washington, DC because it would add too many Democrats to the U.S. House of Representatives and Senate.
  - Senator Michael D. Brown encouraged everyone to keep an open mind about the plan and what it attempts to accomplish. There has been a lack of momentum in DC for statehood. The plan announced today has the potential to give a great amount of momentum to reach the goal of statehood. This is exactly what Tennessee did. They told Congress that they were tired of waiting for

them to bestow statehood. Senator Brown shared that 71% of registered voters support DC statehood. Washington, DC just had victories in the courts for budget autonomy and Davis-Bacon. People are starting to recognize that we don't have the same rights that other Americans, and that is wrong.

- Mayor Bowser stressed that the plan being considered today is a recommendation that she is bringing to the New Columbia Statehood Commission and will need to be endorsed by Washingtonians. We need a vote in the House and two Senators to represent us. The only way to get there is to become the 51<sup>st</sup> state. Mayor Bowser said that she would like to meet more often as the strategy for the advisory referendum is carried out. MMB acknowledged that we in Washington, DC do not have the same rights as people in other states and this is an opportunity to put together a package to confer DC statehood and present it to leaders on Capitol Hill.
- Senator Brown asked why it was necessary to draft a new constitution since we have a constitution and a vote on it occurred in past. Mayor Bowser responded that that it was passed in 1982 and is 30 years old. Many new people are now living in the District of Columbia and even if they did live in the District, they may not have participated in the discussion. Putting this question on the ballot now is different from voting representation efforts that took place in 2008. Back then, we did not have a clear strategy that was carried out. Now we have a strategy and the Commission plans to send a statehood package to the new President and Congress in January 2017. The constitution should be contemporary.
- Senator Strauss responded that our government has changed significantly since 1982 and 1987 when the District drafted previous constitutions. Home rule government was only a few years old at that time. The Constitution we drafted had a very different form of government than what we have now. We have proven our ability to govern ourselves with a unicameral form of government. The biggest problem with the previous version of a DC constitution is that it does not bear similarity to the institutions that govern today. We need a seamless transition. We have many new residents and there are many who need to be re-engaged. He said that groups of people in Nevada, Hawaii, and Iowa have all taken up the cause of DC statehood and that we need to re-engage the country.
- Mayor Bowser described the timeline for the advisory referendum. She outlined that there are two ways to admit states to the Union—one path is for Congress to pass enabling legislation first and then carry out a referendum and the approval of a constitution. The other path follows the “Tennessee Plan” which switches the order whereby DC residents will vote on the boundaries of the new state, ratify the constitution, and commit to a representative form of government first and then ask Congress to pass enabling legislation.
- The use of technology has allowed for reaching out to more people and the ability to distribute information has become easier. Social media's growth gives residents a platform to voice their stance on statehood and voting rights representation.
- Mayor Bowser asked the Commission to vote to put an advisory referendum on the ballot on November 8, 2016, draft a constitution, hold a constitutional convention, and then seek congressional approval. All the commission members unanimously agreed to these actions.
- Mayor Bowser moved to the next item on the agenda which was organizational structure. She outlined eight working groups that would be needed. The working groups would be as follows:
  1. All 8 Wards Working Group
  2. Advocacy
  3. Maps and Boundaries Working Group

4. Rules Working Group
  5. All Americans for DC Statehood Working Group
  6. Communications Working Group
  7. Cleveland/Philadelphia Convention Working Group
- Chairman Mendelson questioned the need for a Rules Working Group and for a Maps and Boundaries Working Group. He stated that he thought that experts on maps and boundaries could make decisions about those issues rather than a working group. He also stated that the Legal Advisory Committee could answer the questions that the Rules Working Group was going to address. After some discussion, a decision was made to incorporate the Rules and Boundaries Working Groups into the Statehood Commission. It was also decided that the Legal Advisory committee would advise on Rules and Boundaries. All the commission members unanimously agreed to the new organizational structure.
  - Mayor Bowser moved to the topic of the referendum timeline. The New Columbia Statehood Commission is planning a kickoff for the advisory referendum on May 5, 2016. In the following weeks, the working groups will convene public roundtable discussions and make recommendations to the Commission by June 9. Mayor Bowser shared that the goal will be to send legislation to the Council by July. The Commission members unanimously agreed on the timeline.
  - Mayor Bowser moved to the last item on the agenda: funding for the New Columbia Statehood Commission in the FY2017 Budget. She outlined that there is funding in the budget for the Commission. Chairman Mendelson stated that a careful look at budget needs to be considered, particularly given all the work that the shadow congressional delegation will be doing on the advisory referendum effort. Senators Brown and Strauss vocalized concerns that the budget did not account for a 50 state outreach program.
  - Mayor Bowser adjourned the meeting at 4:25 pm and closed by stating that upcoming meetings for the Commission will be scheduled and shared the new website: [statehood.dc.gov](http://statehood.dc.gov) and hashtag: #DCstatehood.