



chairman's update

the NEWSLETTER of
DC Council Chairman Phil Mendelson

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A Renewed Approach to Statehood

The Mayor recently proposed a renewed effort to bring energy and focus to our fight for statehood. The proposal calls for the New Columbia Statehood Commission to draft a state constitution and place the matter of statehood on the November 2016 ballot. This an aggressive schedule which requires a constitution to be written in the next few months and, in order to make the ballot, approved by the Council in July. There's no question that this strategy will be a challenge to meet, but I believe it is one the Commission can meet and is well worth the effort.

While a significant amount of effort went into drafting a previous state constitution, some thirty years later I think it is reasonable that we take a renewed approach and produce a simpler document. A state constitution should establish the basic framework of government and reflect the basic principles, such as human rights, democratic process and the fundamental laws, that we, as a jurisdiction, collectively share.

It's always been my view that the District residents should have all the rights and privileges – the same rights and privileges – as those of the 50 states. The only way for us to achieve this is with statehood. It is about our having equal representation in Congress to be sure, but just as importantly it is about our autonomy over local matters and the ability to make our own local decisions.

I authored the bill that created the New Columbia Statehood Commission, and did so out of the desire to centralize and bring stronger focus to our efforts than we have done in the past. There was some initial uneasiness about whether the Commission would work, but it was my belief that a Commission headed by the Mayor and Council Chairman, as well as our Statehood Delegation, has enabled us to better coordinate our efforts for statehood and voting rights. I believe the renewed push for statehood under this proposal, to be spearheaded by the Commission, illustrates the utility of this body.

Our goal is to have the question of statehood and our governing constitution approved by voters in November, so that a petition for statehood is in-place by January 2017 when the new Congress and the new President take office. We want to welcome them to Washington with our demand for Statehood.

CONSTITUENT SERVICES CORNER

A senior constituent's gas had been disconnected for a week. The constituent was unable to have services reconnected in a timely manner due to financial hardships.

That's when our constituent services team jumped into action.

They contacted the Office of the People's Counsel, along with several local non-profits, the DC Energy Assistance Program, and the constituent's Ward office. Team Mendo was able to negotiate the payment needed, have some fees waived, and requested a suitable payment plan to fit the needs of the senior's fixed income budget. In doing so, our team was able to get the service reconnected in just two days.

If you're having problems with high utility bills or secondary utility service providers, let Chairman Mendelson's team get you connected to the help you need.

**Contact the
Constituent Services Team
At (202) 724-8158**

Minimum Wage and the Cost of Doing Business in the District

The Mayor recently introduced Bill 21-712, the Fair Shot Minimum Wage Act of 2016, which would raise the District's minimum wage for most workers to \$15 an hour by 2020 and increase the tipped minimum wage to \$7.50 an hour by 2022. The bill would preempt a ballot initiative that advocates are working to have included on the November 2016 ballot. However, unlike the bill, the ballot initiative would raise the minimum wage for all workers in the District, eliminating tipping in the District altogether, and potentially decreasing pay for many restaurant workers.

While I want to see wages for District workers increase, increases must occur on a reasonably gradual basis and in concert with surrounding jurisdictions. I have previously worked with leaders in Montgomery and Prince Georges Counties to increase the minimum wage on a regional basis. Montgomery County is currently reviewing a proposal that is similar to the District's, and I intend to work with my counterparts to move forward collaboratively. However, we should consider whether an increased minimum wage impacts our competitiveness with Virginia, which has a minimum wage of only \$7.25.

The proposed increase to the minimum wage also comes as the Council is considering other important legislation that will benefit workers. That includes Bill 21-415, the Universal Paid Leave Act of 2015, and Bill 21-512, the Hours and Scheduling Stability Act of 2015. Each of these measures could benefit workers in a meaningful way, but the Council must weigh the cumulative costs and benefits of these measures, including their impacts on workers and businesses. We need to ensure that there is a balance between wages and benefits for employees, and the cost of doing business in the District.

Upcoming Hearings of the Committee of the Whole

Markup of Fiscal Year 2017 Budget Matters under the purview of the Committee of the Whole

May 5, 2016

4 p.m. in Room 500

Markup and Council Consideration of Fiscal Year 2017 Budget Legislation (B21-665, Bill 21-666, Bill 21-667, Bill 21-668, and Bill 21-669)

May 17, 2016

10 a.m. in Room 500

Legislative Meeting

June 7, 2016

10 a.m. in Room 500

To sign up to testify, or for more information, contact the Committee at (202) 724-8196

