

**COUNCIL OF THE DISTRICT OF COLUMBIA  
COMMITTEE OF THE WHOLE  
COMMITTEE REPORT**

1350 Pennsylvania Avenue, NW, Washington, DC 20004

DRAFT

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**TO:** All Councilmembers

**FROM:** Chairman Phil Mendelson  
Committee of the Whole

**DATE:** December 19, 2017

**SUBJECT:** Report on Bill 22-539, the “Boris Nemtsov Plaza Designation Act of 2017”

The Committee of the Whole, to which Bill 22-539, the “Boris Nemtsov Plaza Designation Act of 2017” was referred, reports favorably thereon, with amendments, and recommends approval by the Council.

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**I. BACKGROUND AND NEED**

On October 31, 2017, Bill 22-539, the “Boris Nemtsov Plaza Designation Act of 2017” was introduced by Councilmember Cheh and Chairman Phil Mendelson to symbolically designate the 2600 block of Wisconsin Avenue, N.W. between Davis Street, N.W., and Edmunds Street, N.W. in Ward 3, as Boris Nemtsov Plaza. The designation would honor the memory and contributions of Mr. Boris Nemtsov, a Russian political leader and dissident whose assassination garnered international attention in February 2015. The Embassy of the Russian Federation, located at 2650 Wisconsin Avenue, N.W., fronts the proposed unit block designation. Typically, a symbolic naming is for ceremonial purposes and shall be in addition to and subordinate to any name that is an official name.

### ***Background and Need***

Boris Nemtsov was a physicist, a statesman, and a prominent leader in the effort to realize democratic, anti-corruption principles in the Russian government.<sup>1</sup> Mr. Nemtsov's career flourished in the 1990s when Russia began experimenting with democracy; he was elected to Russia's first freely elected Parliament and to the governorship of the Nizhny Novgorod region where he led post-Soviet market reforms.<sup>2</sup> He later went on to serve as deputy prime minister to President Boris Yelstin and continued to challenge corruption.<sup>3</sup> "[Mr.] Nemtsov in many ways personified the hopes for democracy in Russia."<sup>4</sup> "When Mr. Putin rose to power and began dismantling the country's fragile new institutions, Nemtsov became a determined opponent."<sup>5</sup> Nemtsov publicized abuses by officials, led protests and marches against election fraud, and campaigned successfully around the world, including the United States, for international accountability in the form of sanctions on human rights abusers.<sup>6</sup> As a result of Mr. Nemtsov's advocacy, the United States Congress passed the 2012 Magnitsky Act that barred Russian officials suspected of human rights abuses.<sup>7</sup>

On February 27, 2015, days after leading a protest against Russia's war with the Ukraine, Mr. Nemtsov was assassinated on the Bolshoi Moskvoretsky Bridge in Moscow, two-hundred yards from the Kremlin wall. "There is little doubt that his murder was motivated by his political beliefs, his popularity, and his frequent, open criticism of the Russian government."<sup>8</sup> To this day, the Kremlin has never identified or held responsible those who ordered Nemtsov's murder. Instead, the Russian government is determined to eradicate Mr. Nemtsov's memory.<sup>9</sup> Rain or shine, a small group of volunteers continues to create and guard makeshift memorials made of

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<sup>1</sup> B22-539, *Boris Nemtsov Plaza Designation Act of 2017: Public Hearing before the Council of the District of Columbia Committee of the Whole*, Dec. 6, 2017 (opening statement of Councilmember Cheh).

<sup>2</sup> *Rename the block in front of the Russian Embassy*, WASH. POST (NOV, 30, 2017) available at [https://www.washingtonpost.com/opinions/global-opinions/rename-the-block-in-front-of-the-russian-embassy/2017/11/30/b9b432f0-d5ff-11e7-b62d-d9345ced896d\\_story.html?utm\\_term=.821003e2baa5](https://www.washingtonpost.com/opinions/global-opinions/rename-the-block-in-front-of-the-russian-embassy/2017/11/30/b9b432f0-d5ff-11e7-b62d-d9345ced896d_story.html?utm_term=.821003e2baa5); B22-539, *Boris Nemtsov Plaza Designation Act of 2017: Public Hearing before the Council of the District of Columbia Committee of the Whole*, Dec. 6, 2017 (written testimony of Vladimir V. Kara-Murza, Chairman, Boris Nemtsov Foundation for Freedom).

<sup>3</sup> *Id.*

<sup>4</sup> *Id.*

<sup>5</sup> *Rename the block in front of the Russian Embassy*, WASH. POST (NOV, 30, 2017) available at [https://www.washingtonpost.com/opinions/global-opinions/rename-the-block-in-front-of-the-russian-embassy/2017/11/30/b9b432f0-d5ff-11e7-b62d-d9345ced896d\\_story.html?utm\\_term=.821003e2baa5](https://www.washingtonpost.com/opinions/global-opinions/rename-the-block-in-front-of-the-russian-embassy/2017/11/30/b9b432f0-d5ff-11e7-b62d-d9345ced896d_story.html?utm_term=.821003e2baa5).

<sup>6</sup> B22-539, *Boris Nemtsov Plaza Designation Act of 2017: Public Hearing before the Council of the District of Columbia Committee of the Whole*, Dec. 6, 2017 (written testimony of Vladimir V. Kara-Murza, Chairman, Boris Nemtsov Foundation for Freedom).

<sup>7</sup> Alex Horton, *The Magnitsky Act, explained*, WASH. POST (Jul. 14, 2017) available at [https://www.washingtonpost.com/news/the-fix/wp/2017/07/14/the-magnitsky-act-explained/?utm\\_term=.cdbc1468f4](https://www.washingtonpost.com/news/the-fix/wp/2017/07/14/the-magnitsky-act-explained/?utm_term=.cdbc1468f4).

<sup>8</sup> B22-539, *Boris Nemtsov Plaza Designation Act of 2017: Public Hearing before the Council of the District of Columbia Committee of the Whole*, Dec. 6, 2017 (opening statement of Councilmember Cheh).

<sup>9</sup> Vladimir V. Kara-Murza, *How to make sure the Kremlin remembers Boris Nemtsov*, WASH. POST (Mar. 15, 2017) available at [https://www.washingtonpost.com/opinions/how-to-make-sure-the-kremlin-remembers-boris-nemtsov/2017/03/15/407b817a-080c-11e7-93dc-00f9bdd74ed1\\_story.html?utm\\_term=.e06b609d6ade](https://www.washingtonpost.com/opinions/how-to-make-sure-the-kremlin-remembers-boris-nemtsov/2017/03/15/407b817a-080c-11e7-93dc-00f9bdd74ed1_story.html?utm_term=.e06b609d6ade).

flowers, portraits, and candles in honor of Mr. Nemtsov on the Bolshoi Moskvoretsky Bridge.<sup>10</sup> Many people now even refer to the bridge as “Nemtsov Bridge.”<sup>11</sup> However, municipal workers, with help from the police, regularly dismantle these memorials.<sup>12</sup> Petitions for a plaque to honor Mr. Nemtsov in Moscow are repeatedly rejected and plaques created in his honor are destroyed. “While his popular memory lives on, official commemoration of Nemtsov will have to wait for a change of government.”<sup>13</sup>

However, this is not the case in the United States. On February 27, 2017, two years after Mr. Nemtsov’s assassination, Senator Marco Rubio (R-FL) introduced legislation to designate the block in front of the Russian Embassy as “Boris Nemtsov Plaza.”<sup>14</sup> On the designation, Senator Rubio stated, “The creation of ‘Boris Nemtsov Plaza’ would permanently remind Putin’s regime and the Russian people that these dissidents’ voices live on, and that defenders of liberty will not be silenced.”<sup>15</sup> As a result of collaboration between the Senate, Delegate Eleanor Holmes Norton (D-DC), Councilmember Cheh, and Chairman Mendelson, the Senate found it most appropriate to defer the designation to District procedures, as Wisconsin Avenue, N.W. is a District-owned street.

By designating the block in front of the Russian Embassy after Boris Nemtsov, the District is creating a memorial in Mr. Nemtsov’s honor that cannot so easily be dismantled. Further, the designation serves as an opportunity for the Council, the representative body of our nation’s dynamic and inclusive capitol city, to reaffirm support for democracy and to send a message of solidarity to those fighting for democracy around the world.

Notably, this would not be the first time a designation in honor of an individual of international significance has taken place in this District. In 1987, the block in front of the then-Soviet Embassy on 16<sup>th</sup> Street, N.W. was designated as “Andrei Sakhorav Plaza,” in honor of the Soviet human rights activist who had been placed under internal exile.<sup>16</sup>

### ***Legal Background***

The Street and Alley Closing and Acquisition Procedures Act of 1982, effective March 10, 1983 (D.C. Law 4-201; D.C. Official Code § 9-204.01 *et seq.*) (“Act”) establishes procedures for

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<sup>10</sup>B22-539, *Boris Nemtsov Plaza Designation Act of 2017: Public Hearing before the Council of the District of Columbia Committee of the Whole*, Dec. 6, 2017 (written testimony of Zhanna Nemtsova, Founder, Boris Nemtsov Foundation for Freedom).

<sup>11</sup> *Id.*

<sup>12</sup> Vladimir V. Kara-Murza, *How to make sure the Kremlin remembers Boris Nemtsov*, WASH. POST (Mar. 15, 2017) available at [https://www.washingtonpost.com/opinions/how-to-make-sure-the-kremlin-remembers-boris-nemtsov/2017/03/15/407b817a-080c-11e7-93dc-00f9bdd74ed1\\_story.html?utm\\_term=.e06b609d6ade](https://www.washingtonpost.com/opinions/how-to-make-sure-the-kremlin-remembers-boris-nemtsov/2017/03/15/407b817a-080c-11e7-93dc-00f9bdd74ed1_story.html?utm_term=.e06b609d6ade).

<sup>13</sup> *Id.*

<sup>14</sup> United States. Cong. Senate. 115th Cong. S. 459 available at <https://www.congress.gov/bill/115th-congress/senate-bill/459/cosponsors>. The bill was cosponsored by Senator John McCain (R-AZ), Senator Ron Johnson (R-WI), Senator Christopher Coons (D-DE), and several others. *Id.*

<sup>15</sup> Rafael Saakov, *US Bill Would Honor Murdered Russian Dissident at Moscow’s Embassy*, VOA NEWS (Feb. 28, 2017) available at <https://www.voanews.com/a/us-bill-would-honor-murdered-russian-dissident-moscows-embassy/3744134.html>.

<sup>16</sup> Miranda Green, *Bill would name DC street outside Russian Embassy for slain Putin dissident*, CNN NEWS (Nov. 28, 2017) available at <http://www.cnn.com/2017/11/28/politics/russian-embassy-new-street-name/index.html>

closing streets and alleys, opening new streets and alleys, naming public spaces, and other procedures related to streets and alleys. The Act authorizes the Council to symbolically or officially designate or change the name of any public space in the District of Columbia, including streets and alleys.<sup>17</sup> In October 2016, the Act was amended to create a clear distinction between official and symbolic street and alley namings and to establish distinct processes and requirements for each type of naming.<sup>18</sup>

An “official name” refers to the legal designation of an alley or a street for mailing address and other purposes,<sup>19</sup> whereas a “symbolic name” for a street or alley shall be in addition to and subordinate to any name that is an official name.<sup>20</sup> An official name of an alley shall contain the suffix “Alley” or “Court.”<sup>21</sup> A symbolic name of a street or alley shall contain only the suffix “Way” or “Plaza.”<sup>22</sup> As established by Bill 22-539, “Boris Nemtsov Plaza” is a symbolic street designation for the 2600 block of Wisconsin Avenue, N.W. between Davis Street, N.W., and Edmunds Street, N.W. in Ward 3.

The Act also establishes a notice requirement for symbolic designations. Pursuant to D.C. Official Code § 9-204.23(b), the ANC in which the symbolic designation is located must be put on notice of the public hearing regarding the proposed naming.<sup>23</sup> On November 13, 2017, ANC 3B and ANC 3C were put on notice of the public hearing. Both ANCs were put on notice, as the 2600 block of Wisconsin Avenue, N.W. serves as the boundary line between the two ANCs. Lastly, prior to consideration of a designation by the Council, the Mayor shall provide to the Council a surveyor’s plat of the alley or street and adjacent properties.<sup>24</sup>

After the symbolic street or alley designation legislation becomes law and all conditions required by the Council and the Act have been satisfied, the District Department of Transportation (“DDOT”) shall install signage indicating the symbolic name of the alley or street, or portion thereof. Additionally, the Surveyor of the District of Columbia shall record a copy of such act and the Surveyor’s plat in the Office of the Surveyor.<sup>25</sup>

Symbolically designating the 2600 block of Wisconsin Avenue, N.W. between Davis Street, N.W., and Edmunds Street, N.W. in Ward 3, as Boris Nemtsov Plaza would allow, for the first time, Mr. Nemtsov’s legacy to be commemorated. The designation will not only memorialize Mr. Nemtsov and his global contributions, but also celebrate the ideals of democracy that our country holds dear – ideals that people have died for and continue to fight for around the world. Thus, the Committee of the Whole recommends the approval of Bill 22-539, the “Boris Nemtsov Plaza Designation Act of 2017.”

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<sup>17</sup> See D.C. Official Code § 9-204.01 *et seq.*

<sup>18</sup> See D.C. Law 21-0161, effective from Oct. 8, 2016, Published in the *DC Register* Vol 63 and Page 12933.

<sup>19</sup> D.C. Official Code § 9-201.01(5A).

<sup>20</sup> D.C. Official Code § 9-204.03a(a).

<sup>21</sup> D.C. Official Code § 9-204.03(c).

<sup>22</sup> D.C. Official Code § 9-204.03a(c).

<sup>23</sup> Notably, D.C. Official Code § 9-204.23(b) does not specify a time requirement as to when an ANC must be put on notice of a public hearing regarding a symbolic designation.

<sup>24</sup> See D.C. Official Code § 9-204.21(g).

<sup>25</sup> D.C. Official Code § 9-204.24(c).

## II. LEGISLATIVE CHRONOLOGY

October 31, 2017 Bill 22-539, the “Boris Nemtsov Plaza Designation Act of 2017” is introduced by Councilmember Cheh and Chairman Mendelson.

November 7, 2017 Bill 22-539 is referred to the Committee of the Whole.

November 10, 2017 Notice of Intent to Act on Bill 22-539 is published in the *DC Register*.

November 17, 2017 Notice of Public Hearing on Bill 22-539 is published in the *DC Register*.

December 6, 2017 A Public Hearing is held on Bill 22-539 by the Committee of the Whole.

December 19, 2017 The Committee of the Whole marks up Bill 22-539.

## III. POSITION OF THE EXECUTIVE

Todd McIntyre, Chief of Staff, District Department of Transportation, testified on behalf of the Executive in support of the street designation. His testimony is summarized below.

## IV. COMMENTS OF ADVISORY NEIGHBORHOOD COMMISSIONS

No Advisory Neighborhood Commission provided commentary on Bill 22-539.

## V. SUMMARY OF TESTIMONY

The Committee of the Whole held a public hearing on Bill 22-539 on Wednesday, December 6, 2017. The testimony summarized below is from that hearing. Copies of written testimony are attached to this report.

**Councilmember Cheh**, made an opening statement in support of the “Boris Nemtsov Plaza” designation. Councilmember Cheh expressed the need to memorialize Mr. Nemtsov’s memory and emphasized that the Russian government will not be able to dismantle such a memorialization on American soil in the District of Columbia. She stated that “[w]e maintain and celebrate the principles of democratic governments, and we should take this opportunity to show solidarity with those around the world who make the extraordinary effort – under adverse circumstances, including risking and losing their lives – to try to bring democracy to their people.”

**Vladimir V. Kara-Murza, Chairman, Boris Nemtsov Foundation for Freedom**, testified in favor of the “Boris Nemtsov Plaza” designation. Mr. Kara-Murza summarized Mr. Nemtsov’s contributions and tireless efforts to advance democracy in Russia and abroad. He stated, “[Nemtsov] taught me, with his own example, that you must stand up for your principles, however difficult, inconvenient, or dangerous; and that politics can – and should – be honest.”

Mr. Kara-Murza emphasized that while efforts to commemorate Nemtsov in Russia are sabotaged by the authorities, this street designation in the United States will pay tribute to Nemtsov's legacy and serve as a message and reminder "[t]o Russian democrats – that our fight is not ignored or forgotten" and "[t]o Americans – that Russia is not only about Putin's autocracy, and that there are honorable Russians, like Boris Nemtsov, who are standing up for dignity and justice." In response to critics' opinion that such a naming would be initiated to provoke the Russian government, Mr. Kara-Murza explained that the designation is not about animosity or revenge, rather it is about preserving something bigger than Mr. Nemtsov, and that is the democratic ideals and principles that Mr. Nemtsov fought for and emulated.

**Zhanna Nemtsova, Founder, Boris Nemtsov Foundation for Freedom**, testified in favor of the "Boris Nemtsov Plaza" designation and expressed her gratitude to the Council. Ms. Nemtsova emphasized the struggles to commemorate her father and his political legacy in Russia, including the regular dismantlement of makeshift memorials on the Bolshoi Moskvrestsky Bridge in Moscow. She described her father as "an open-minded patriot of Russia, who was willing to reform the country; an optimist and a fearless achiever." As a politician of global significance, Ms. Nemtsova stated that there is a need to commemorate him and acknowledged that while it cannot be done in Russia due to "unprecedented resistance," we have a chance to do it here.

**Tanja Nyberg, Executive Director, Magnitsky Act Initiative**, testified in favor of the "Boris Nemtsov Plaza" designation. She described Mr. Nemtsov's support of the Magnitsky Act as a true Russian patriot and a compassionate human being. Ms. Nyberg testified that the designation would mean a lot to the Russian community in the District.

**Schlomo Boltz, Policy and Advocacy Officer, Syrian-American Council (SAC)**, testified in favor of the "Boris Nemtsov Plaza" designation. Mr. Boltz described the designation as a fitting memorial to Mr. Nemtsov, a leading dissident, whose heroism and memory Russian authorities are intent to erase. He also stated that "Nemtsov's memory speaks to the democratic values we hold dear in this country and that thousands of Syrians and Ukrainians have died for in recent years. These are values that current Russian President Vladimir Putin wants us to forget."

**Karine Orlova, Writer, The American Interest Magazine & DC Correspondent, Echo of Moscow Radio Station**, testified in favor of the "Boris Nemtsov Plaza" designation. Ms. Orlova summarized Mr. Nemtsov's political impact and described him as "a man who fought for human rights and justice and who was murdered most probably exactly for that reason." She stated that the designation is not about revenge, nor provocation, rather "I simply believe that to give the name of Boris Nemtsov, the man of rare decency, and grace, and morality, to a plaza in DC would be the right thing to do."

**Jeremy Bigwood, Public Witness**, testified against the "Boris Nemtsov Plaza" designation. Mr. Bigwood stated that there can be no doubt that Mr. Nemtsov's death was a tragic loss for Russia, but argued that doing so would be basing "official policy on shaky conspiracy theories."

**Todd McIntyre, Chief of Staff, District Department of Transportation**, testified that the Executive supports Bill 22-539. He stated that DDOT will install signage indicating the designation and stands ready to assist the Council and all other stakeholders with any ceremonial unveiling activities that may materialize.

The Committee received a letter from Anatoly Belogorsk in support of the “Boris Nemtsov Plaza” designation. A copy of the letter is attached to this report. The Committee also received a statement from Sergey Radchenko, Professor of International Relations at Cardiff University, UK and Zi Jiang, Distinguished Professor at East China Normal University against the designation, opining that a designation in Mr. Nemtsov’s honor in the United States is not the appropriate venue to do so. A copy of the statement is attached to this report.

## VI. IMPACT ON EXISTING LAW

Bill 22-539 has no impact on existing law. D.C. Official Code § 9-204.01<sup>26</sup> authorizes the Council to name any public space. D.C. Official Code § 9-204.03(a) authorizes the Council to designate a symbolic name for an alley “that shall be in addition to and subordinate to any name that is an official name.”<sup>27</sup> Bill 22-539 symbolically designates the 2600 block of Wisconsin Avenue, N.W. between Davis Street, N.W., and Edmunds Street, N.W. in Ward 3, as “Boris Nemtsov Plaza.” Additionally, “a symbolic name of a street or alley shall contain only the suffix Way or Plaza,” such as the name proposed by Bill 22-539.<sup>28</sup>

Lastly, the Act provides that, with limited exception, no public space shall be named in honor of any living person or in honor of any person who has been deceased less than two years.<sup>29</sup> Mr. Nemtsov passed away on February 27, 2015, nearly three years ago.

## VII. FISCAL IMPACT

Funds are sufficient in the fiscal year 2018 through fiscal year 2021 budget and financial plan to implement the provisions of the proposed legislation. Because the cost to the District Department of Transportation (DDOT) is an estimated \$60 per official sign for fabrication and \$110 for installation, the cost of Bill 22-539 can be absorbed, as noted in the Fiscal Impact Statement (attached).

## VIII. SECTION-BY-SECTION ANALYSIS

Section 1 States the short title of Bill 22-539.

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<sup>26</sup> Street and Alley Closing and Acquisition Procedures Act of 1982, effective March 10, 1983 (D.C. Law 4-201).

<sup>27</sup> D.C. Code § 9-204.03(a).

<sup>28</sup> D.C. Code § 9-204.03(c).

<sup>29</sup> See D.C. Code § 9-204.05.

- Section 2                      Symbolically designates the 2600 block of Wisconsin Avenue, N.W. between Davis Street, N.W., and Edmunds Street, N.W. in Ward 3, as “Boris Nemtsov Plaza.”
- Section 3                      Directs the Council to transmit a copy of this act to the Mayor, the District Department of Transportation, and the Office of the Surveyor.
- Section 4                      Adopts the Fiscal Impact Statement.
- Section 5                      Establishes the effective date by stating the standard 30-day congressional review language.

## **IX.              COMMITTEE ACTION**

## **X.              ATTACHMENTS**

1.      Bill 22-539 as introduced
2.      Written Testimony
3.      Fiscal Impact Statement for Bill 22-539
4.      Legal Sufficiency Determination for Bill 22-539
5.      Committee Print for Bill 22-539



**COUNCIL OF THE DISTRICT OF COLUMBIA**  
**1350 Pennsylvania Avenue, N.W.**  
**Washington D.C. 20004**

Memorandum

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To : Members of the Council

From :   
Nyasha Smith, Secretary to the Council

Date : October 31, 2017

Subject : Referral of Proposed Legislation

Notice is given that the attached proposed legislation was introduced in the Office of the Secretary on Tuesday, October 31, 2017. Copies are available in Room 10, the Legislative Services Division.

TITLE: "Boris Nemtsov Plaza Designation Act of 2017", B22-0539

INTRODUCED BY: Councilmember Cheh and Chairman Mendelson

The Chairman is referring this legislation to the Committee of the Whole.

Attachment

cc: General Counsel  
Budget Director  
Legislative Services

1   
2 Chairman Phil Mendelson

  
Councilmember Mary Cheh

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4  
5 A BILL  
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10  
11 IN THE COUNCIL OF THE DISTRICT OF COLUMBIA  
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15 To symbolically designate the unit block of Wisconsin Avenue, N.W., between Davis Street,  
16 N.W., and Edmunds Street, N.W., in Ward 3, as Boris Nemtsov Plaza.  
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18 BE IT ENACTED BY THE COUNCIL OF THE DISTRICT OF COLUMBIA, That this  
19 act may be cited as the "Boris Nemtsov Plaza Designation Act of 2017".

20 Sec. 2. Pursuant to sections 401, 403a, and 423 of the Street and Alley Closing and  
21 Acquisition Procedures Act of 1982, effective March 10, 1983 (D.C. Law 4-201; D.C. Official  
22 Code §§ 9-204.01, 9-204.03, and 9-204.21) ("Act"), the Council symbolically designates the unit  
23 block of Wisconsin Avenue, N.W., between Davis Street, N.W., and Edmunds Street, N.W., in  
24 Ward 3, as "Boris Nemtsov Plaza".

25 Sec. 3. Transmittal.

26 The Council shall transmit a copy of this act, upon its effective date, to the Mayor, the  
27 District Department of Transportation, and the Office of the Surveyor.

28 Sec. 4. Fiscal impact statement.

29 The Council adopts the fiscal impact statement in the committee report as the fiscal  
30 impact statement required by section 4a of the General Legislative Procedures Act of 1975,  
31 approved October 16, 2006 (120 Stat. 2038; D.C. Official Code § 1-301.47a).

32 Sec. 5. Effective date.

33           This act shall take effect following approval by the Mayor (or in the event of veto by the  
34 Mayor, action by the Council to override the veto), a 30-day period of congressional review as  
35 provided in section 602(c)(1) of the District of Columbia Home Rule Act, approved December  
36 24, 1973 (87 Stat. 813; D.C. Official Code §1-206.02(c)(1)), and publication in the District of  
37 Columbia Register.

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COMMITTEE ON  
**TRANSPORTATION & THE ENVIRONMENT**

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MARY M. CHEH, CHAIR

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COW PUBLIC HEARING ON  
**B22-539, BORIS NEMTSOV PLAZA DESIGNATION ACT OF 2017**

Thank you, Mr. Chairman, for joining me in introducing B22-539, the Boris Nemtsov Plaza Designation Act of 2017. Boris Nemtsov was a physicist, a statesman, and a prominent leader in the effort to realize democratic, anti-corruption principles in the Russian government. Mr. Nemtsov was also an outspoken critic of Russian involvement in foreign wars and the systematic dismantling of Russia's fragile democratic institutions –views which made him an enemy and target of anti-democratic and authoritarian forces.

On February 27<sup>th</sup>, 2015, days after leading a protest against Russia's war with the Ukraine, Mr. Nemtsov was assassinated while crossing a bridge near the Kremlin in Moscow. There is little doubt that his murder was motivated by his political beliefs, his popularity, and his frequent, open criticism of the Russian government. In the years since, Mr. Nemtsov's supporters and family have tried to memorialize his memory at the spot where he was felled by gunfire, but authorities continue to swiftly remove all physical traces of his memory and the movement. But the Russian government will not be able to do that here, on American soil, in the District of Columbia.

Although the District operates in a similar fashion to any other state, we occupy a special place, we are the nation's capital. We maintain

and celebrate the principles of democratic governments, and we should take this opportunity to show solidarity with those around the world who make the extraordinary effort –under adverse circumstances, including risking and losing their lives– to try to bring democracy to their people. This would not be the first instance of District streets being renamed in honor of a Russian activist, but, unlike the renaming of a section of 16th Street to the Andrei Sakharov Plaza by an act of Congress, this time around we are leading the effort.

Inevitably, some will speculate that the decision to rename this stretch of Wisconsin Avenue after Mr. Nemtsov was a reaction to Russian interference in our national elections. It was not, but it is wholly appropriate that it comes at a time when the full extent of Russian interference in our democratic national elections is under investigation. The District renames this stretch of road to honor Mr. Nemtsov's efforts and memorialize his sacrifice in the hope of a democratically-elected government. In doing so, we send support to those around the world who show courage, tenacity, and risk their freedom and, in some instances, their lives for principles of democracy.

We won't forget them –and attempts to wipe away Boris Nemtsov's sacrifice will not succeed. Thank you, Mr. Chairman, for holding this hearing and joining me in this effort.

Council of the District of Columbia  
Committee of the Whole  
Public Hearing on Bill 22-539, the “Boris Nemtsov Plaza Designation Act of 2017”  
December 6, 2017, 3:30pm

**Prepared Testimony by Vladimir V. Kara-Murza**  
Chairman, Boris Nemtsov Foundation for Freedom

Chairman Mendelson, Members of the Council, thank you for holding this important hearing and for the opportunity to testify before you.

On September 28, 1994, on his visit to Washington D.C., Russian President Boris Yeltsin hosted President Clinton for a reception and dinner to mark the official opening of the new Russian Embassy on Wisconsin Avenue N.W. As the evening went underway, the Russian leader introduced members of his delegation, including a 34-year-old regional governor by the name of Boris Nemtsov. “Keep an eye on this young man,” Yeltsin said to Clinton. “One day, he will be president of Russia.”

A member of Russia’s first freely elected Parliament; governor of the Nizhny Novgorod Region, which he transformed from a post-Soviet industrial backwater into a powerhouse of market reforms; deputy prime minister who challenged the corrupt influence of the “oligarchs”, Nemtsov in many ways personified the hopes for democracy in Russia. When Vladimir Putin came to power and began to change Russia from the imperfect democracy of his predecessor to the perfect autocracy it is today, many chose to accept the new rules. Not Boris Nemtsov. From the early years of Putin’s regime, he emerged as a leading voice in opposition to its authoritarianism, aggressiveness, and corruption. He publicized abuses by officials; led protest marches against election fraud and against the war in Ukraine; campaigned successfully around the world—including here in the U.S.—for international accountability in the form of targeted sanctions on human rights abusers. Against all odds, he won election to a regional legislature, and was preparing a return to Parliament. He was considering a challenge against Putin in 2018.

All this time, he was smeared by state media as a “traitor”; physically attacked by pro-Kremlin gangs; repeatedly arrested and jailed for peaceful demonstrations. But he did not relent. He was silenced the only way he could be: by an assassin’s bullet. Boris Nemtsov was killed on February 27, 2015 on Bolshoi Moskvoretsky Bridge, two-hundred yards from the Kremlin wall. An officer of the Russian Interior Ministry was convicted of pulling the trigger. No organizers or masterminds were identified or prosecuted.

It was the greatest honor of my life to work with Boris Nemtsov for fifteen years. He taught me, with his own example, that you must stand up for your principles, however difficult, inconvenient, or dangerous; and that politics can—and should—be honest.

Every year in February, around the date of his assassination, thousands of people walk through the streets of Moscow in a march of remembrance. Every day, more than two and



half years on, Russians continue to bring flowers and light candles on the bridge where he was killed in what has become an unofficial memorial.

The official story is very different. The Russian authorities are fighting Boris Nemtsov even after his death. They are now fighting his memory. The Moscow city government has rejected all public initiatives for a commemoration. We have streets in Moscow named after the Venezuelan dictator Hugo Chávez and the Chechen strongman Akhmad Kadyrov, who once called on his followers to “kill as many Russians as possible”—but the Russian opposition leader is off-limits. In Moscow and Yaroslavl, the signs installed by the residents on the apartment blocs where Nemtsov lived have been taken down. In Nizhny Novgorod, the decision by the city council to put up a plaque on his house remains unimplemented. Several times a month, always in the middle of the night, the Moscow municipal services pillage the memorial on the bridge; grown men in uniforms stealing flowers under the cover of darkness.

It appears that we are not allowed to honor a Russian statesman in Russia. We are deeply grateful to citizens and elected representatives in free countries who are stepping in to do what we cannot. Earlier this year, a bipartisan group of U.S. Senators led by Sen. Marco Rubio (R-FL) and Sen. Christopher Coons (D-DE) proposed to give Boris Nemtsov’s name to a plaza in front of the Russian Embassy in Washington; the embassy he once helped to unveil. The idea was supported by Del. Eleanor Holmes Norton (D-D.C.), whom I had the honor of meeting a few weeks ago. I want to thank Members of the D.C. Council for taking the lead with this initiative. I want to thank Chairman Phil Mendelson and Councilmember Mary Cheh for introducing Bill 22-539, the “Boris Nemtsov Plaza designation Act of 2017.”

I am here today to strongly support passage of this Bill. I cannot begin to tell you how much it means. It is a tribute to a man who lived his life—and gave his life—for the freedom of his country. It is also a message and a reminder. To Russian democrats—that our fight is not ignored or forgotten. To Americans—that Russia is not only about Putin’s autocracy, and that there are honorable Russians, like Boris Nemtsov, who are standing up for dignity and justice.

I have no doubt that there will come a day when the Russian state is proud to have its embassy in Washington standing on Boris Nemtsov Plaza.

December 6, 2017

Council of the District of Columbia

Public Hearing on Bill 22-539, the "Boris Nemtsov Plaza Designation Act of 2017"

### **Prepared Testimony by Zhanna Nemtsova**

Chairman Mendelson, Members of the Council, thank you for the opportunity to testify here today and for your support of the initiative to designate the block in front of the Russian Embassy as Boris Nemtsov Plaza.

I speak today on behalf of my family, but also on behalf of all those who struggle to commemorate my father and his political legacy in Russia.

For more than 1,000 days now—whether it is cold, hot, snowy or rainy—a small group of volunteers has guarded a makeshift memorial made of flowers, portraits and candles for my father, Boris Nemtsov, on Bolshoi Moskvoretsky Bridge, on the spot where he was killed. Many people now refer to this bridge as Nemtsov Bridge. They even created a symbol, which I brought with me today.

However, the Moscow Bridges Maintenance Authority and the pro-Kremlin nationalist movement SERB—presumably on the orders of high-ranking Russian officials—have dismantled the memorial more than 70 times. Small plaques commemorating my father that were placed on two apartment buildings—in the city of Yaroslavl, where he served in the regional parliament, and in Moscow—were also dismantled. Both of these initiatives were not ours, but of the people who live in these buildings. In Nizhny Novgorod, where my father was governor, the city authorities, in the end, did not dare to place a plaque.

The current Russian political regime wants to eradicate the memory of my father, since it believes—correctly—that symbols are important and can potentially facilitate and inspire change. This explains the nervous reaction from the Russian Foreign Ministry when they first heard of the Washington D.C. initiative.

Symbols are important. In today's Russia, where politics is dominated by isolationism and an archaic mindset, the symbols of openness, a global-thinking democratic approach, and market reforms are much needed. My father was an open-minded patriot of Russia, who was willing to reform the country; an optimist and a fearless achiever. I think that my father is a politician of global significance, and that we need to commemorate him. For now, we cannot do it in Russia because of unprecedented resistance, but we have a chance to do it here. And here, it will be difficult to dismantle.

I would like to take this opportunity to thank all the volunteers who look after the makeshift memorial in Moscow, and all courageous people who support the movement to commemorate my father.

I express my profound gratitude to Members of the D.C. Council, and I express hope that you will vote to support this initiative.



Tanja Nyberg  
Magnitsky Act Initiative, Executive Director  
[tanja.nyberg@magnitskyact.org](mailto:tanja.nyberg@magnitskyact.org)  
757-254-9963

Testimony for the Hearing Wednesday, 12/6/2017, 3:30pm, Room 500  
*B22-539, Boris Nemtsov Plaza Designation Act of 2017*

Dear Honorable Council Members,

Thank you for giving me the opportunity. My name is Tanja Nyberg. This is a great privilege for me to run my Business in the District of Columbia and to participate in political events in this city.

Our organization, Magnitsky Act Initiative supported and continue to do so regarding the passing and implementation of the Global Magnitsky Act, a legislation which aims to prosecute individuals around the Globe who violated International Law protecting Human Rights The law is named after Sergei Magnitsky, a Russian lawyer and auditor, who discovered linked to Kremlin tax fraud scheme. Sergei was beaten to death in a Moscow's prison November 16<sup>th</sup> 2009.

We also are interested in other projects, one of them – clarifying the fates of Americans who were killed or enslaved in the Union of Soviet Socialistic Republic.

It is huge help for us that District of Columbia such diverse and vibrant Community, so that we are able to keep contact with different communities- Ukrainian, Syrian, Georgian and many others.

Today I would like to remind you that Boris was a passionate supporter of the Magnitsky Act. He supported this legislation as a true Russian patriot, a compassionate human being and a politician who was able to overlook the possible developments of the world politics.

But I want to draw your attention to other very important question. Beginning December 2011, we regularly initiate protests in the front of either the Russian Embassy or the Residence of Russian Ambassador. Although our protests always were peaceful, the employees of the Embassy each time called the police or U.S.

Secret Service, picturing us as violent and dangerous. Summer 2015 we were repeatedly harassed by a particular employee of the Embassy so that we had to call the police. To avoid further confrontations, we moved our protest to the 16<sup>th</sup> Street NW.

The people of MPD and USSS always were very understanding and supportive. But November 14<sup>th</sup> this year we could feel some changes in this attitude. We were protesting outside of the National Cathedral, where so called "Concert for Unity" organized by the Russian Embassy took place. The conductor and the soloist of the concert are Russian musicians who openly support the Russian aggression in Syria and Ukraine. The authorities were properly informed about the protest. But our American-Ukrainian friend was arrested while reaching leaflets to people attending the concert, the police attempted to confiscate our sound equipment. We concerned that Russian influence will in the future be an obstacle for us to exercise our First Amendment Right.

The Boris Nemtsov Plaza will mean a lot for us. It will be the sign that people of Washington DC are with us and support us and Putin is not so powerful as he thinks.

Thank you!



Committee of the Whole  
B22-539, Boris Nemtsov Plaza Designation Act of 2017  
December 6, 2017

Thank you, Chairman Mendelson.

My name is Shlomo Bolts I am with the Syrian American Council. Founded in 2005, Syrian American Council is the largest grassroots organization of Syrian Americans advocating for a democratic Syria. We have over 15 chapters across the country and we are based in Washington, DC. We have formed a freedom coalition alongside our counterparts from the Ukrainian American, Bosnian American, and Baltic American communities as well as American supporters of the Russian dissident movement.

The Syrian American Council **supports** passage of B22 – 539, the “Boris Nemtsov Plaza Designation Act of 2017,” by the DC Council. Renaming the street outside the Russian Embassy after Mr. Nemtsov would serve as a fitting memorial to this leading dissident, whose heroism and memory Russian authorities are intent to erase. Nemtsov's memory speaks to the democratic values we hold dear in this country and that thousands of Syrians and Ukrainians have died for in recent years. These are values that current Russian President Vladimir Putin wants us to forget.

One of Nemtsov's final acts before his death was to lead peace protests, inside Russia, against Putin's anti-democratic intervention in Ukraine. Concerning these protests, he wrote:

It would take an enemy of both Russia and Ukraine to make enemies out of two peoples with centuries of common history....current events indicate that the most nightmarish, the most bloody scenario of fratricidal war is already developing. This is not our war, this is not your war, this is not the war of 20-year old paratroopers sent out there. This is Vladimir Putin's war.

I have no doubt that, had he lived to see Vladimir Putin's even bloodier intervention in Syria, Nemtsov would have expressed a similar view. “This is not our war. This is Vladimir Putin's war.”

Russian forces are estimated to have killed over 6000 civilians since entering Syria to support the Assad regime in 2015. While Putin claims his intervention was against ISIS, the Institute for the Study of War records that most Russian airstrikes take place outside ISIS-held areas. Further, the Syrian Observatory for Human Rights notes that under a third of deaths from Russian airstrikes have come from ISIS, while the clear plurality were civilians. Russia was the main force behind the slaughter in Aleppo last year, when the carnage was so intense that rescue workers couldn't count the dead.

This is the defining memory of Russia's intervention in Syria. Yet Putin is again engaging in information warfare and trying to rewrite history. Last month, he went on a victory tour with the dictator Bashar al-Assad to claim that they had succeeded in “defeating terrorism.” Even though his warplanes bombed an IDP camp just last week to massacre over 50 civilians, his public propaganda proclaims that fighting has stopped and the world should support his fabricated peace talks.

Members of the DC Council, by passing B22 - 539, you can show that the voices of Syrians suffering under Russian bombing and siege are still heard over the blizzard of Putin's information warfare.

*The Syrian American Council is a multi-ethnic, multi-confessional, non-partisan organization that includes members from all segments of Syrian society. It is an organization devoted to community organizing, awareness-raising, youth empowerment, media outreach, advocacy, and support for Syrians seeking to build a free and democratic Syria.*



**Testimony for a public hearing before the Committee of the  
Whole on Bill 22-539, the "Boris Nemtsov Plaza Designation Act of 2017"**

December 6, 2017

Submitted by:

Karine Orlova,

825 10th St NW, apt.589

Washington, DC 20001

202 823 73 84

karine.orlova@gmail.com

Good afternoon, ladies and gents, my name is Karine Orlova, and I'm a journalist who fled Russia soon after Boris Nemtsov's murder in 2015 and since then I've been working and living in DC.

I am here today because Republican Senator Bob Corker has recently blocked a bill to rename the square the Russian Embassy is located as «Boris Nemtsov Plaza». I don't know what made the Senator do so but the chief editor of Echo of Moscow radio station (the one I work for) says Corker did so because State Secretary Tillerson wanted the bill to be blocked. And he wanted so because Russian Foreign Minister Lavrov asked him to do so.

But here we are, in DC, where 96% of the citizens voted for the city to be a place where we cheer the spectacular gay-pride each year, where people of different sexuality, sex, race and nationality are welcome and are respected.

DC is the city where a million of women, and men, and their children, came to Independence Avenue to protect human rights. Mayor Bowser was there, I was there. First and foremost as a woman and a human being but also as a journalist.

I say «we» because for the past two and half years DC has become home to me. And here I am, to be listened and to be heard: the square before The Russian Embassy should have the name of Boris Nemtsov, the man of exceptional dignity and honor. A man who fought for people since early 90s when he started his political career, a man who fought for the ordinary people, who fought for human rights and justice and who was murdered most probably exactly for that reason - because it was Boris Nemtsov thanks to whom US Congress passed the Magnitsky Act, a list of sanctions against corrupted Russian officials responsible for the death of a lawyer in a Russian prison.

Boris was murdered in plain view of the Kremlin's security service, in a high-security area, 400 feet away from the Kremlin, the office of Russia's President. The sponsors of the murder, those who ordered it, have not been found, and I believe, intentionally. And I despise the Russian government for that.

But today's hearing is not about revenge. In fact, if Vladimir Putin's government is innocent, and democratic and all about human rights, it should strive to have Boris' name memorialized. Instead, the Russian Government fights the initiative home and abroad, and it has repeatedly destroyed an improvised memorial on the bridge in Moscow, where Boris was assassinated. So this is not about revenge, nor is it about provocation. I simply believe that to give the name of Boris Nemtsov, the man of rare decency, and grace, and morality, to a plaza in DC would be the right thing to do.

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Jeremy Bigwood

*Historical researcher & Photojournalist*

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Washington, DC 20010  
(202) 361-5000  
[jeremybigwood@gmail.com](mailto:jeremybigwood@gmail.com)

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To the City Council:

B22-0539 is a very bad idea. As introduced, this bill designates the unit block of Wisconsin Avenue, N.W., between Davis and Edmunds Streets, S.E. (sic), as "Boris Nemtsov" Plaza. This "plaza" would be right across from the Russian Embassy. The ostensible reason for doing this would be to blame the Russian government for the death of Boris Nemtsov.

Nemtsov was a charismatic and outspoken politician. He was the co-founder of the Russian political organization "Union of Right Forces" which became "The Republican Party of Russia – People's Freedom Party." He was assassinated near the Kremlin in Moscow almost three years ago. And not unlike some American political assassinations, there are questions and conspiracy theories about whether the government itself was involved.

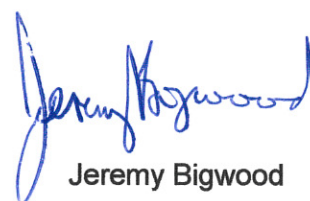
There can be no doubt that the assassination was a tragic loss for Russia. Russian Prime Minister Medvedev called Nemtsov one of the "most talented politicians... a bright personality, a principled man," and President Putin called his death a "a vile and cynical murder."

I would like to emphasize that there is no hard evidence that the Russian government was responsible for Nemtsov's assassination – and certainly not the Russian Embassy here in Washington. Absent such hard evidence, the District of Columbia should not get trigger happy – designating new plazas based upon conspiracy theories.

Such designations might be acceptable - if, for instance - the city had renamed the area around the Saudi Embassy "911 Plaza" or perhaps the area around Burmese Embassy "Rohinga Square." In both of those cases, thousands of people were killed, and we do have hard evidence about those responsible. Even worse, in the first case, I should remind you that it was American citizens who were targeted and killed by the Wahhabist attack – including many from this area. But I note, that there was no City Council response.

It would be the height of hypocrisy to go ahead with this plan. Let's not base our official policy on shaky conspiracy theories. Please vote no on B22-0539.

Sincerely,



Jeremy Bigwood

**GOVERNMENT OF THE DISTRICT OF COLUMBIA**  
*District Department of Transportation*



Public Hearing on  
Bill 22-539, the “Boris Nemtsov Plaza Designation Act of 2017”

Testimony of  
Todd McIntyre

Chief of Staff  
Office of the Director  
District Department of Transportation

Before the

Committee of the Whole

Council of the District of Columbia

Wednesday, December 6, 2017  
3:30 p.m.

Hearing Room 500  
John A. Wilson Building  
1350 Pennsylvania Avenue, NW  
Washington, D.C. 20004





Good afternoon, Chairman Mendelson, members of the Council, staff, and District residents. My name is Todd McIntyre, Chief of Staff at the District Department of Transportation, commonly referred to as DDOT. I am here today to present testimony on behalf of Mayor Muriel Bowser and DDOT Acting Director Jeff Marootian regarding Bill 22-539, the “Boris Nemtsov Plaza Designation Act of 2017.”

The stated purpose of Bill 22-539 is to symbolically designate the 2600 block of Wisconsin Avenue N.W. between Davis Street N.W. and Edmunds Street N.W. in Ward 3 as Boris Nemtsov Plaza. As per the requirements of DC Act 21-489, Section 421(g), I have attached to this testimony a copy of the surveyor’s plat showing the 2600 block of Wisconsin Avenue N.W.

In fiscal terms, the cost of each installed sign for this designation is approximately \$170 (\$60 for sign fabrication and \$110 for sign installation). DDOT is able to absorb the costs of these signs within its current budget, and does not foresee any operational impact this designation would have on the District’s transportation network. Since this is a symbolic designation, the mailing addresses in the proposed plaza would stay the same and would require no action by addressees to ensure continuity of services.

Therefore, the Administration has no objection to this symbolic designation and DDOT stands ready to assist the Council and all other stakeholders with any

ceremonial unveiling activities that may materialize as a result of this Bill being passed.

This concludes my testimony. Thank you for allowing me the opportunity to testify before you today. I am available to answer any questions that you may have.



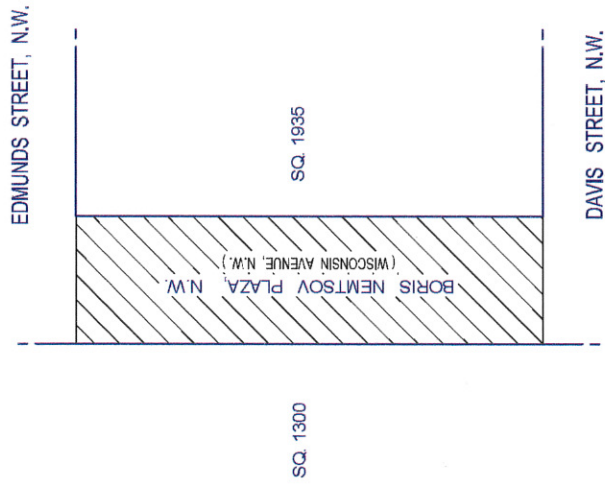
SYMBOLIC NAMING OF A PUBLIC STREET  
2600 BLOCK OF WISCONSIN AVENUE, N.W.

PURSUANT TO D.C. LAW \_\_\_\_\_, EFFECTIVE \_\_\_\_\_,  
THE STREET SHOWN THUS \_\_\_\_\_  
AS "BORIS NEMTSOV PLAZA".

OFFICE OF THE SURVEYOR, D.C.  
\_\_\_\_\_, 2017

I CERTIFY THAT THIS PLAT IS CORRECT AND IS RECORDED.

\_\_\_\_\_  
SURVEYOR, D.C.



SURVEYOR'S OFFICE, D.C.	
Made for _____	_____
Drawn by: A. S. _____	Checked by: _____
Record and computations by: _____	B. MYERS
Reviewed at _____	_____
Reviewed in Room _____	Page _____
Scale: 1 inch = 40 feet	File No. 1511111

2017 STREET NAMING SR-17-0005-BORIS NEMTSOV PLAZA (WISCONSIN AVENUE N.E.)

## Hawthorne, Sydney (Council)

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**From:** Anatoly Sack <anatolysack@gmail.com>  
**Sent:** Monday, December 11, 2017 8:34 AM  
**To:** Mendelson, Phil (COUNCIL)  
**Cc:** Committee of the Whole (Council)  
**Subject:** Renaming plaza after Boris Nemtsov

Dear Chairman Mendelson:

I have been living in USA for 26 years. When I had left the former Soviet Union, Boris Nemtsov was in the beginning of his colorful and impressive political career. I was in the beginning of mine in the newly adopted country. Nevertheless, I was witnessing Boris from across the ocean and was impressed how this young and extraordinary fellow inserted himself into highly charged, intense and unconventional political battles during 1990-s in Russia. Then his wheel of fortune had made a full circle and in the era of Putin's presidency he became his harsh critic and - as one of the leaders of opposition - he was trashed by official Kremlin, became a pariah and pushed onto sidewalks of Russian politics. Finally, the bullets of his government sponsored assassins had found the target on February 27, 2015.....

Chairman, when you and your council members will be deliberated about naming the plaza next to the Russian embassy after Boris Nemtsov, please remember the life story of another extraordinary man - Andrei Sakharov. Fellows who had renamed one of the landmarks of our capital after him are not ashamed at all and should be proud what they did almost 40 years ago.

I believe that you and incoming generations will be proud too of your decision!

Sincerely,

Anatoly Belogorsky

1507 Sheridan Ct, Wheeling, IL 60090

Fifty years ago, during the Chinese Cultural Revolution, a group of fragile-looking girls from the No. 2 Beijing Secondary School converged on Yangwei Road leading to the Soviet Embassy. They tore down the old street signs renaming it Anti-Revisionist Road. After that, for days on end, school-age children filed on past, waving red banners, shouting anti-Soviet slogans, and trashing the street with posters with calls for revolutionary justice. In February 1967 the Red Guards attempted to storm the Embassy and lynch the diplomats. Fortunately, the attack was called off after Chinese Premier Zhou Enlai pleaded with the ring leader, a ponytailed teenage girl.

I was reminded of that drama when I read of the initiative, led by the D.C. Council Chairman Phil Mendelson (D) and Ward 3 member Mary M. Cheh (D), to rename the intersection near the Russian Embassy in Washington as “Boris Nemtsov Plaza” after the Russian opposition activist, assassinated in Moscow in February 2015. The initiative is a resurrection of a hair-brained effort spearheaded by Sen. Marco Rubio (R) to name and shame the Putin regime for Nemtsov’s murder. That earlier effort was thankfully defeated by Sen. Bob Corker (R) but bad ideas die hard.

True, D.C.’s legislators have not taken the hammer in their hands to rectify a perceived injustice but the juvenile prank of changing street names to embarrass foreign countries puts Mendelson and Cheh, like Rubio before them, in about the same league as the banner-waving teenage girls from the No. 2 Beijing Secondary School.

Honouring Russian dissidents is not in itself problematic. The ideals behind the proposal are admirable. Nemtsov, whom I knew and respected, was a passionate advocate of democratic reform. And yes, there should be a Boris Nemtsov Plaza. Just not in Washington. Just imagine if the Russians decided to rename the street next to the U.S. Embassy in Moscow as the “Black Lives Matter Street.” Not that they should not try: bad ideas are often contagious.

Nemtsov’s story is a properly Russian story. He challenged an increasingly authoritarian regime, and paid the ultimate price. His death galvanized the opposition, and, a thousand days on, his spirit lives on. He has become a symbol of dissent. As is often the case, Nemtsov means more to Russia today than he did when he was alive. Mendelson and Cheh do a considerable disservice to Nemtsov by involving him, despite himself, in their political posturing. The ongoing effort to rename the street tarnishes Nemtsov’s name back in Russia, making him look less like a defender of liberty and more like a tool of “Western propaganda.” The apologists for the regime will waste no time advertising Nemtsov’s supposed American connections to discredit not just Nemtsov but the rest of the Russian opposition as agents of foreign influence.

For the Russians are an interesting bunch. Left to their own devices, they are more than capable of opposing injustice and defending liberty. But the moment someone like Mendelson and Cheh, or Rubio and McCain, come along and say “hello, friends, we are with you,” you will have an instinctive and angry reaction. Lecturing the

Russians about the blessings of liberty cannot be interpreted as anything other than a deliberate effort to humiliate.

Humiliate whom – the regime? No. Humiliate the country, because the Embassy does not just represent the regime. It represents the country.

Humiliation was a feature of the Chinese Cultural Revolution. Girls from the No. 2 Beijing Secondary School only appeared fragile. They – and their peers, boys and girls, across the country – unleashed an orgy of violence against their teachers, officials, and ultimately against each other. Chinese “revisionists” were beaten, forced to wear dunce caps, and smeared in faeces. Foreign diplomats were also singled out for abuse. In the end, these teenagers knew nothing of the Soviet Union. Soviet “revisionism” was instrumentalized as a weapon of domestic political struggles, much as today Russia is instrumentalized in America’s domestic politics. But the consequences for Sino-Soviet relations were negative and long-lasting. Later on, the Chinese thought better of it and restored the street’s original name.

The latest initiative should, and will probably fail, much like its predecessor in the U.S. Senate. Mendelson, Cheh and the others stand to benefit from advertising their names as defenders of freedom. Ironically, this initiative, now passionately endorsed by *The Washington Post*, comes at a time when liberty is under attack in America itself. But instead of bravely facing up to these domestic realities as Nemtsov would have done, the legislators are taking their struggle to Russia’s faraway shores, where liberty, true, is in short supply. But the D.C. Council’s involvement won’t change that. It won’t, as Mendelson claims, send a loud message to Putin about American “values.” The only message it will send is that of the intellectual arrogance of some U.S. politicians who, not for the first time, want to be seen telling the Russian people, like so many disobedient children, who, among their own, are worthy of respect and admiration.

Sergey Radchenko is Professor of International Relations at Cardiff University, UK, Zi Jiang Distinguished Professor at East China Normal University, Shanghai, and Global Fellow at the Woodrow Wilson International Center for Scholars, Washington D.C.

1 **December 19, 2017**  
2 **Committee of the Whole**  
3 **Committee Print DRAFT**  
4  
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6

7 A BILL  
8

9  
10 22-539  
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12  
13 IN THE COUNCIL OF THE DISTRICT OF COLUMBIA  
14

15 \_\_\_\_\_  
16  
17 To symbolically designate the 2600 block of Wisconsin Avenue, N.W., between David Street,  
18 N.W., and Edmunds Street, N.W., in Ward 3, as Boris Nemtsov Plaza.  
19

20 BE IT ENACTED BY THE COUNCIL OF THE DISTRICT OF COLUMBIA, That this  
21 act may be cited as the “Boris Nemtsov Plaza Designation Act of 2017”.

22 Sec. 2. Pursuant to sections 401, 403a, and 423 of the Street and Alley Closing and  
23 Acquisition Procedures Act of 1982, effective March 10, 1983 (D.C. Law 4-201; D.C. Official  
24 Code §§ 9-204.01, 9-204.03, and 9-204.21) (“Act”), the Council symbolically designates the  
25 2600 block of Wisconsin Avenue, N.W., between David Street, N.W., and Edmunds Street,  
26 N.W., in Ward 3, as “Boris Nemtsov Plaza”.

27 Sec. 3. Transmittal.

28 The Council shall transmit a copy of this act, upon its effective date, to the Mayor, the  
29 District Department of Transportation, and the Office of the Surveyor.

30 Sec. 4. Fiscal impact statement.

31 The Council adopts the fiscal impact statement in the committee report as the fiscal  
32 impact statement required by section 4a of the General Legislative Procedures Act of 1975,  
33 approved October 16, 2006 (120 Stat. 2038; D.C. Official Code § 1-301.47a).

34           Sec. 5. Effective date.

35           This act shall take effect following approval by the Mayor (or in the event of veto by the  
36 Mayor, action by the Council to override the veto), a 30-day period of congressional review as  
37 provided in section 602(c)(1) of the District of Columbia Home Rule Act, approved December  
38 24, 1973 (87 Stat. 813; D.C. Official Code §1-206.02(c)(1)), and publication in the District of  
39 Columbia Register.