

Statement of Nate Bennett-Fleming for D.C. Statehood Representative

Why I am seeking the support of the Gertrude Stein Democratic Club.

My position calls for me to be a leader in the fight for freedom, justice, and equality. I view LGBT rights to be at the current foreground in the movement for freedom and to end discrimination. I also view D.C. Statehood to be part of the unfinished business of the civil rights movement. As such, I believe that our movements are tied together in an inescapable network of mutuality. What impacts one cause for justice, impacts the other, for injustice anywhere is a threat to justice everywhere. Because I am on the side of freedom and justice, I must fight when any one is subjected to discrimination and inequality. That is why I believe it is so important to support and build alliances with the LGBT Community. We are natural partners, because we are fighting common problems.

Issues such as HIV/AIDS, discrimination, hate crimes, economic injustice impact the LGBT community perhaps as much as any demographic group in this city and in our country. Other disenfranchised groups that I am a member of and support, such as minority communities and the disenfranchised citizens of Washington D.C. must partner with the LGBT community on the issues of common concern. In this effort, our movements will be strengthened through unity. For the LGBT community, this effort will show many that we have more in common with each other than what is separate.

I will be an advocate for the disenfranchised in my position, for I view it as a crucial part of the job description. I believe that I am the most forceful, energetic, effective, and qualified advocate in the race for U.S. Representative. I believe that I should win the Stein Endorsement because I can bring our movements together to build the strength of both.

I am the best qualified candidate to protect marriage equality in Congress.

I have political organizing experience from serving as Deputy National Director of Faith Outreach for Kerry-Edwards 2004, Regional Field Director for Ben Cardin for U.S. Senate 2006, and from working for Congresswoman Eleanor H. Norton.

I have direct experience in Congressional relations, advocacy, and lobbying. Lobbying Congress for D.C. is the primary role of the Statehood Representative. I was a summer associate for the largest and most effective lobbying firm in Washington D.C, Patton Boggs LLP. Here I learned from some of the top lobbyists in the world, including Thomas Boggs, who is innovated the lobbying industry and widely regarded as the top lobbyist in the country. For the job of advocating for D.C.'s residents to Congress, I could have not received any better training.

Additionally, I've had experience advocating to Congress as a summer associate with Alston Bird LLP. Here I learned how to advocate Congress from Senator Tom Daschle and Senator Bob Dole. Alton Bird is unique in that it had the services of both a former Democratic Senate Majority Leader (Daschle) and a former Republican Senate Majority Leader (Dole). Here I had the benefit of attending legislative strategy sessions with two masters of Congressional procedure.

One of my supporters is Professor David King at the Harvard Kennedy School. While at the Kennedy School, I took a Congressional simulation and procedure course with him. Professor King is the Director of the New Members of Congress project at Harvard, which is the orientation program for all new members of Congress. He has given me advice on legislative strategy for this issue and is excited about crafting a winning, aggressive strategy to achieve statehood for Washington D.C.

Furthermore, I have a legal background, having attended University of California Berkeley School of Law. This background, which none of the other candidates have, is essential for effectively advocating legislatively and in the judicial system for D.C. Statehood. I am best suited to defend the constitutionality of any measure that provides greater self determination for D.C. residents.

I've learned that any successful lobbying effort is dependent on two things. Those are the advocate's relationships and the advocate's knowledge of the rules. I will build and sustain the relationships and I have developed an understanding of Congressional rules and procedure, which can often be onerous.

I understand that we must be more aggressive in our outreach to Congress. I will develop a national movement of supporters in the states, primarily by organizing college students, the faith community, and other progressive communities. Because I have a national network to engage in order to build new supporters for D.C. Statehood, we will have constituents in various congressional districts and states that we can mobilize to support and align with our efforts here in Washington D.C.

Biography

Born in a single family household in Southeast D.C., from a young age Nate witnessed the vast political and economic inequities faced by many in Washington D.C. Through a scholarship provided by Hannah Hawkins, founder and director of Anacostia's Children of Mine Center, he was able to graduate from St. Andrews Episcopal School in Potomac, Md.

In 2007, Nate graduated cum laude with a BA in political science from Morehouse College, in Atlanta, GA, where he was an Oprah Winfrey Scholar and an African Presidential Fellow. Nathan was the Executive Director of the Morehouse College Student Government Association, Vice President of the Atlanta University Center Council of Students, and Vice President of the Psi Chapter of Omega Psi Phi Fraternity, Inc.

Nate will receive a law degree from the University of California, Berkeley School of Law (Boalt Hall) where he is an editor of the Berkeley Journal of African-American Law and Policy. In addition, Nate was awarded a full tuition Public Service Fellowship to complete a Master of Public Policy degree at Harvard University's John F. Kennedy School of Government, where he was an editor of the Harvard Journal of African-American Policy.

Nathan's work in public service was launched in 2001, when Nathan was a staff assistant and intern in Congresswoman Eleanor Holmes Norton's office. After learning from Congresswoman Norton, Nathan has worked on several national, state, and local campaigns including the Ben Cardin for U.S. Senate campaign, where he was a regional field coordinator and the John Kerry for President campaign, where he was the deputy national director of African-American Religious Outreach.

In 2009, Nathan worked on crafting a comprehensive strategy to achieve statehood and congressional representation with the D.C. Council's Special Committee on Statehood and Self Determination, chaired by Councilmember Michael A. Brown. In addition, Nathan has gained legislative and legal experience as a summer attorney at two Washington D.C. law firms. Nathan also has finance experience gained as a summer analyst at the Wall Street investment banking powerhouse, Goldman, Sachs & Co. The variety and depth of Nathan's professional experiences leaves him as the best qualified candidate to advocate for self-determination and to represent D.C.'s residents as a liaison to the United States House of Representatives.

Questionnaire

What will you do to help ensure that the marriage rights secured for DC's LGBT Community remain intact?

In my role as Statehood Representative, I will effectively conduct a sustained lobbying effort with Congress. I will include the Stein Democrats and the broader LGBT community in Congressional visits and grassroots advocacy efforts to create the relationships and political environment to prevent interference with our laws. I have relationships with the staff of the chairman of the committee with oversight over District affairs. I have built these relationships with his staffs and with Congressman Towns in preparation for advocacy once elected as D.C. Statehood Representative.

As a member of the legal community, I will be an advocate for LGBT rights. In this instance, I feel that making sure that protecting marriage equality legally depends on our ability to reduce Congressional influence and preventing a referendum on marriage equality. Any attempt to discriminate through use of the referendum process is a violation of the DC. Human Rights Act. This is clear, as such I am willing to organize, write editorials, attend forums, and write legal briefs/papers to counter any attempts to discriminate through use of the ballot box.

We must remember that interference with District affairs can increase based on changing national political conditions. It is very important for the Stein Democrats to focus on the movement for statehood and self determination, so that the laws that are made by us residents of the Washington D.C. will remain intact, free from any interference.

As an activist, I plan to build a coalition of progressive groups and organizations in Washington D.C. Our organizations are commonly focused on fighting for freedom, justice, and equality. We must continue to find ways to work together, for we can all benefit from the additional resources and strength that would follow. By uniting the Stein Democrats with other organizations in the city, we will strengthen the movement for LGBT justice here in Washington D.C.

As a citizen, I will continue to be an ally and supporter of the LGBT community. In my life, I have had a variety of experience and opportunities, so I am used to bringing diverse groups of people together. I am a person that unites people so that they find that they have more in common with each

other than what is different from them. I can help make headways in building community partnerships in the African-American community.

Would you be supportive of the Mayor's Office of LGBT Affairs having grant making authority and an increased budget to provide grants to 501c3 organizations in the District providing services to the LGBT community?

As Statehood Representative, I plan to increase the platform of the position by focusing on having better relationships with other D.C. elected officials. Having these relationships are crucial for building consensus around a winning plan to achieve statehood. This will allow me to be an advocate for the cause of freedom, justice and equality in D.C. As such, I will be an advocate with the District Government or the causes of justices such as providing services to the LGBT community.

As a shadow legislator, what can and/or will you do to support increased funding or assist in securing additional funding for LGBT social service organizations such as the DC Center, the Mautner Project, SMYAL, Metro Teen AIDS, and Transgender Health Empowerment?

Because of restrictions on our ability to tax federal property, international organizations, and other non-profits, Washington D.C. loses over 2 billion dollars in taxable income. Achieving statehood would remove such restrictions and increase our budget by at least 20 percent. This would provide for more resources to invest in quality social service programs for the LGBT community and other communities who depend on such investments.

Because of our lack of Statehood, our budget has a structural deficit, which means that our government does not bring in enough revenue to sustain a basic level of city services. This is why D.C. must resort to various alternative ways of raising money such as high parking tickets, speed cameras tickets, bag taxes, and increasing fees for licenses etc. I will support efforts to gain more economic autonomy, so that we can increase our traditional tax base, which will help bring stability to our economy and budget.

I will highlight the economic consequences that follow from our denial of self determination and will bring attention to the economic benefits of Statehood. This message is likely to show more people why this movement is directly related to their lives.

Given that the GLLU is one of the only LGBT related units in the country, will you support and advocate for the Metropolitan Police Department to increase the current staffing, as well as support the hiring of a full time sergeant who understands the LGBT community and LGBT policing?

The issue of public safety is also directly related to the movement for Statehood and Self-Determination. The MPD spends a vast amount of resources, both financially and in terms of manpower, in serving the federal government. This includes protection for diplomats and public officials, manpower at special events, and general homeland security duties. However, the MPD nor the citizens of D.C. are adequately reimbursed by the Federal government for such resources.

I will advocate for greater reimbursements to the MPD budget and for use of funds to support local, community policing. The GLLU represents an innovative model for community, specialized policing that deserves as much investment that is needed to do the work of protecting a community that is often a target of crime

Do you have any self identified LGBT staff or campaign volunteers, and if so, how many? How racially and ethnically diverse is your office?

Yes, I have severally self identified LGBT campaign volunteers. In fact, I find it difficult to count, because of the diversity of the team we put together. We have at least seven campaign volunteers and team members who identify as LGBT. In my campaign organization and group of support, we have African-American, Caucasians, Asian and Pacific Islanders, Latinos, people who identify as LGBT, and people of Middle Eastern descent. Because of my experiences and educational background, I have had the privilege of having a very diverse group of friends to activate for my campaign and for the movement for Statehood.

In the past, what LGBT related events, activities, or organizations have you participated in or been a member of or are currently a member of?

In high school, I volunteered with SMYAL and performed in a theatrical production that dealt with victims of HIV/AIDS in South Africa. In college, I organized as Vice President of my fraternity, a forum on homophobia. I attended Morehouse College, an same sex college that has experienced is diverse in terms of sexual orientation. We had recently had some incidents of homophobia, particularly an extremely violent assault on a young man in a dorm bathroom. By organizing the forum with my fraternity, we partnered with the LGBT community to get the message out the campus at large. As allies, we helped to foster a more supportive and empathetic community or our college campus.

At Morehouse, I was Executive Director of the Student Government Association. I joined Safe Space in efforts to build a coalition that reflected all of the interests of the student body. We helped to develop, build, and support Safe Space as an organization on the campus of Morehouse College. Our support helped make the organization to be accepted “mainstream” on my college campus.

At UC Berkeley, I’ve worked closely with the LGBT caucus as a member of the Coalition of Diversity. It is from this experience, where a small, tight knit progressive community was able to flourish through community, collaboration, and coalition, that I have developed my philosophy on building coalitions between progressive communities. It is my hope to build a similar coalition within the progressive communities of Washington D.C.

I am currently a member of the Stein Club and have done field interviews with the HRC to strategize on building consensus for marriage equality East of the River. In terms of events, I’ve attended Black Pride, fundraisers for LGBT elected officials, celebrations for the victory of marriage equality and the GLAA Anniversary Reception. I am also a member of Covenant Baptist Church, which is pastored by Rev. Dennis and Christine Wiley, who is one of the leaders of Clergy United for Marriage Equality. This church is known to be socially progressive and have a very diverse congregation in terms of sexual orientation. The Stein and LGBT community has embraced me with open arms and I am excited about strengthening our relationship after I am elected Statehood Representative.

Hate Crimes

I believe that injustice anywhere is a threat to justice everywhere. This is why I feel that is extremely important to be an advocate for those who are victims of discrimination. Increasingly, especially over the past year, violence in the LGBT community has risen. It seems as if transgenders are disproportionately impacted at an alarming rate. I will use my platform to bring an official voice to the need to address this problem. I will be a voice for the voiceless, and I believe that victims of LGBT hate crime are truly some of the most disenfranchised people in our city. I will be a champion for the disenfranchised, as such I will be a champion for my transgendered brothers and sisters who are being victimized by hate crimes at an alarming rate. This is an issue where we can build coalition support with others who are in the human rights community.

Health/HIV/AIDS

As shadow representative, I will fight to make sure that there is no congressional interference that determines how D.C. spends federal government resources. As many know, for years there were restrictions on our ability to use funds for needle transfer programs, which led to increased prevalence of HIV/AIDS in our city. Furthermore, I will press for budget autonomy which will give our local leaders more ability to spend resources to fight HIV/AIDS.

In addition, it is important to recognize that the Federal government provides for a sizeable percentage of our Medicaid payment. Medicaid is the health program for individuals with low incomes and resource, which includes a large number of community that have HIV/AIDS. We must temporarily push for increases in this investment in health by the federal government. But we must remain steadfast in our push for statehood, so that our government can bring in the revenue to make the needed investments in health to prevent and treat HIV/AIDS. I believe that HIV/AIDS is an issue that many different communities can find common ground. As with many of the issues impacting the LGBT community, this issue has to do with self perseverance and the ability to live a productive life. We must use this issue to build allies in the African-American community and other communities that are disproportionately impacted by HIV/AIDS.

As an elected official, what can and/or will you do to support after school activities and initiatives that specifically include the needs of LGBT youth?

Youth engagement will be a main focus of my term as Statehood Representative. I will be fighting for a variety of youth causes, for I plan to train and engage D.C.'s youth in social justice. Making sure that LGBT youth have environments and activities in which they can feel comfortable and where their talents can be development is certainly a cause I will advocate. I also plan to include LGBT youth in my efforts to build a youth movement for D.C. Statehood and Self Determination.