

Statement of Robert Vinson Brannum  
Before the Committee on Government Operations and the Environment  
26 July 2010

The Nomination of Togo D. West, Jr.  
Member, D.C. Board of Elections and Ethics

Good afternoon Madam Chair, I am pleased to endorse the Honorable Togo D. West to serve as a member of the D.C. Board of Elections and Ethics. Mr. West's reputation is unsullied by charges of political cronyism and corruption. He is highly respected and is held in high esteem for his character. He is the right man, for the right job, at the right time.

However, because of new DC election laws and the controversies surrounding certain candidates, Mr. West faces a burden towards a successful and flawless District primary election.

The nominee may wish and want to stand above the politics of the upcoming primary election; however, he cannot be blind and indifferent to the real world. Mr. West must not overlook the perception out in the public there is an effort afoot to steal this election. Mr. West cannot claim he did not know the Voting Rights office of the Department of Justice is looking to monitoring his first District election, why, because I just told him.

Regrettably, over the past three and one-half years, principles of public trust and confidence in good government have been overshadowed by the concept so long as one gets what he or she wants and when they want it, fairness and due process are not important and do not matter. To them the ends does justify the means.

Elections are important and so too is the process by which they are achieved. If it is unacceptable for elections to be stolen by someone seeking the office of President, it is equally unacceptable for someone seeking the office of Mayor. It is easy to commit yourself to honor the cherished principle of freedom, to value democracy, and to respect fairness and due process

to protect your friends. However, it is an example of individual courage to cherish the principle of freedom, to value democracy, and to respect fairness and due process for people with whom you disagree. Free elections are loud expressions of a free people, not tools to silence debate and civic engagement.

Although Mr. West, to the public may be unknown, he does have a deep reservoir of good will and a highly respected national reputation. The nominee's reported personal friendships and professional affiliations close to Mayor Adrian Fenty do not automatically create a conflict of interest to bar his confirmation. However, they do establish the basis for this Council to ask the nominee questions about those affiliations and his plans to manage an election in less than two months.

Madam Chair, the people of the District have lost trust in the leadership of Mayor Adrian Fenty and confidence in the integrity of some of his close senior officials. On the shoulders of Mr. West, the people place their faith for an honest election. On the strength of Mr. West's integrity, the people place their hopes for an unpolluted election. On the weight of Mr. West's word, the people expect to go to bed on September 14 and wake up to an election unstained by dark shadows of deception.

Should this Council confirm Mr. West's nomination, he and his lone fellow member must remember their faith and allegiance is to the people, not to the man who nominated them.