

**Statement of
Togo D. West, Jr.
before
The Committee on Government Operations and Environment
Council of the District of Columbia
July 26, 2010**

Madame Chair and Members of the Committee:

This is an important time in the life of our City. Good people, who care deeply about our City – and about its citizens – are preparing to stand for election. An anxious citizenry awaits its opportunity to participate in the essential act of a democracy. A crucial primary looms in a little more than a month and a half; the definitive general election will follow not long after. We have much to do in the intervening time to assure a successful voting experience for our citizens. I am prepared, willing, and would be privileged to enlist in that effort. That is the substance of my testimony today.

I. Introduction

My name is Togo Dennis West, Jr. Although born and reared through high school in Winston-Salem, North Carolina, I am the third generation in my family to make Washington my home, having spent the summers of my childhood in the home in which my father and his brothers grew up with my grandparents at 1320 27th Street, SE. Thereafter, I moved initially to the District in 1960. My father and his brothers attended the old Dunbar High School; and he attended and graduated from Howard University a generation before his only child did so. My wife of 44 years and law school classmate, Gail Berry West, as well as our daughters Tiffany Berry West Smink and Hilary Carter West are members of the Bar of the District of Columbia.

All of us, with great pride and affection, look forward to this opportunity for me to contribute once again to the city and community of Washington, DC.

II. Personal Background

Madame Chair, and Members of the Committee, I am the only child of public school teachers; my mother was a music teacher in the elementary schools of Winston-Salem, and my father was a mathematics teacher, football coach, vice principal, and eventually principal of the high school from which I graduated. My mother was a graduate of Hampton Institute, now Hampton University, with a Masters Degree from Columbia University; my father graduated from Howard University, with his Masters from Clark University in Worcester, Massachusetts. Like parents everywhere, my mother and father wished the best for me and expressed that desire by focusing all their energies on my development as a student, community participant, and young adult. My mother, ever the musician hoped for a musician to emerge in my development; my father, ever the mathematician, hoped for an engineer. Thus, upon my graduation from my high school, I received an award as the best musician in my class and headed off to Howard University to obtain my degree in electrical engineering.

Today, I am neither. My career has been that of a lawyer, from time to time government employee, and on occasion a corporate executive.

Upon graduation from Howard University in 1965, I was commissioned as a second lieutenant in the United States Army, but my entry onto active duty was delayed so that I could attend law school at Howard University, from which I graduated in 1968, having met and

married my classmate, Gail Berry West. After serving a term as a law clerk to a United States District Judge in the Southern District of New York, we, by then a family of three with the addition of our first daughter, returned to Washington, DC where, having reported for active duty as a captain, I was assigned for the four years of my active duty to two offices in the Pentagon, the first, the Office of the Judge Advocate General of the Army and, after six months, to the Office of the Assistant Secretary of the Army for Manpower and Reserve Affairs.

Those latter two experiences – my service as a federal law clerk in New York City, and my four years of active duty for the United States Army in the Pentagon -- have marked my career and formed it ever since. The twin themes of my public and professional life have been service to my country through my performance of duty in various governmental bodies, and service to my community as a practitioner, participant in local government activities, professional organizations and community service, and above all, as a citizen whose family is deeply rooted in the District of Columbia because of generations past and present.

III. Today's Challenge

The District of Columbia Board of Elections and Ethics, established under Section 3 of the District of Columbia Election Act, authorizes the Board to administer and enforce the District of Columbia Election Act and the District of Columbia Campaign Finance Reform and Conflict of Interest Act. As the independent agency of the District government responsible for the administration of elections, ballot access and voter registration, the Board's mission is to enfranchise eligible residents, conduct elections, and ensure the integrity of the electoral process.

Of all the functions of government essential to operations of the democratic process, enhancing, enabling and encouraging voter participation is one of the most crucial.

Improving the processes of government has been the hallmark of my career. Although I believe that my service as Cabinet Officer and Secretary of a military department has provided significant experience in leadership, execution and establishment of programs, priorities and sound practices, my service in the federal government does not alone constitute the experience I think most pertinent to the assignment we now contemplate. Rather, it is the time I have spent in service to the District of Columbia and her citizens that is especially relevant.

As part of the business community during my time in the practice of law, I served actively with the Greater Washington Board of Trade. In the 1980s, I was head of the Legislative Bureau, Secretary to the Board of Trade and the Chair of its Task Force on Home Rule. During that same period, and in the early 1990s, I participated as a member of the Commission on Budget and Financial Priorities of the District of Columbia (the Rivlin Commission) and as a member, vice chairman, and later chairman of the District of Columbia Committee on Public Education (COPE).

For a number of years, I chaired the District of Columbia Law Revision Commission, to which I was twice appointed by the Council of the District of Columbia.

During that same period, as a member of the District of Columbia Bar, I served as member of the Board of Directors of the DC Law Students in Court Program, the District of

Columbia Bar Committee on Ethics, and the Bar's Special Committee on Model Rules of Professional Conduct. I was also a member of the District of Columbia Court of Appeals Committee on Admissions.

Through these committees and commissions virtually every problem of special concern to the citizens of the District of Columbia was raised, examined and debated. Solutions were sought, proposed, and then espoused for adoption. At a time when financing for the District of Columbia's overburdened and under-resourced budget was a severe challenge, the deliberations and recommendations of the Rivlin Commission were especially pertinent.

My concern for the health and well-being of our City has never abated since those times. Upon my return from public service in 2000, I renewed my activities and engagement with the Greater Washington Board of Trade, eventually serving as Chair-elect, Chair and, member of the Senior Council. Because of intervening federal demands in the last four years, that activity has been less extensive than I would have preferred.

In brief, I offer this Committee and the Council of the District of Columbia this assurance: should I be confirmed, the experience that I have recounted here and reflected in my answers to your questions will be fully and faithfully offered to the City in my fulfillment of the duties as a member of the Board of Elections and Ethics.

IV. The Way Ahead

I have had the opportunity, in the brief time since my nomination, to read the After Action Report for the 2008 General Election prepared by the Special Committee on April 21, 2009. That work was a particularly useful effort and noted a number of concerns. I have also had the opportunity to read the Omnibus Election Reform Amendment Act of 2009, a major and significant step forward in ensuring access to the ballot and efficient operation of our election system. And, I have read with great interest the Report by the Board of Elections and Ethics to the Committee on March 31, 2010 concerning preparations for September 2010 primary elections.

The unwavering attention by the Committee and the Council to the challenge of improving and sustaining our election year operations augers well for the District of Columbia. We have, obviously, much yet to do and should you concur, I look forward to participating in that effort.

My wife and I are grateful to my long-time friend, law school classmate and the former Mayor of the District of Columbia, Sharon Pratt – and extraordinary public servant -- for her attendance and support of me here today. We are particularly grateful to Mayor Fenty for his leadership and demonstration of confidence in nominating me to this important Board. As citizens of the District of Columbia, my family and I are indebted to each of you, the members of this Committee and the Council for your public service, and I look forward to answering your questions.