



## D.C. Delegates Push Agenda Despite DNC Snub

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District of Columbia delegates who attended the National Democratic Convention took their fight to the streets of Charlotte, N.C. on Tuesday to deliver a strong message for D.C. Statehood to voters from around the country.

The effort was part of a strategy designed to inform and persuade states to support D.C. Statehood in spite of the Democratic National Committee [DNC] Platform Committee's decision to deny Congresswoman Eleanor Holmes Norton an opportunity to address the national convention this week.

D.C. delegates sported bright red T-shirts and weaved their way through crowds while stopping those who would listen to the saga of the District's ongoing struggle for Statehood. Two huge billboards located in downtown Charlotte near the convention site captured the attention of passersby and motorists to the Statehood issue.

Following a protest rally held on September 4, delegates said they remained hopeful despite their inability to promote their cause in front of other convention delegates. They were pushed to the "free speech" area blocks away from the convention site but even a sudden downpour of rain failed to dash their spirits.

"The official demonstration area moved," said Shadow Representative Michael D. Brown. "Still we gave our little speeches, and [we] did our usual Statehood thing, but I believe we need to be like Fannie Lou Hamer ... and say 'we're sick and tired of being sick and tired.'"

Frustration and disappointment like a laser beamed in on President Obama and the Democratic Party for refusing to support the District's Statehood efforts.

"We all love the Democrats," Brown said. "They stand behind us. But they need to stand in front of us, you know," he said.

"Where I come from, when you're getting beat up, your friends step in and try to help you. Two hundred and eleven years [of fighting for Statehood] is long enough."

Others agree.

"It's very disappointing because she [Norton] has been on the program for a number of years," said D.C. Mayor Vincent Gray. "They will mention budget autonomy and legislative autonomy and

voting rights for Congresswoman Norton, but no one could have done a better job articulating that but her.”

Gray, who joined nearly 100 Democratic mayors at a luncheon sponsored by the U.S. Council of Mayors, said the group has been extremely supportive of Statehood for the District of Columbia. “I’m delighted to be a part of an organization that gets it,” said Gray, 69.

Ben Johnson, former assistant to President Bill Clinton and former deputy chairman of the Democratic Party, called the DNC’s decision “outrageous.”

Johnson, who is a long time District resident, it’s about allegiance and reciprocity.

“What bothers me most is that none of our allies in the Democratic Party are willing to fight for us,” he said. “We’re one of the most loyal constituencies in the Democratic Party and with three electoral votes, it’s just ridiculous that we’re being taken for granted like this. I was just put off that someone would decide to do this especially since we’ve been so loyal.”

But critics of the DNC steered clear of any comments that might suggest they weren’t going to support the party or the president’s re-election.

“We’re not changing the guard but we’re protecting the guard,” said Julianne Malveaux, an economist and political activist. “We have to get out here and vote and we have to be our own advocates. People have to ask themselves, ‘what are you going to get from Romney?’”

But, Malveaux said she believes it’s unwise to summarily dismiss the District.

“It’s shortsighted for the Democratic Party to write off the District of Columbia. I’m glad there is a robust delegation that is continuing to advocate for that.”

Democratic members of the D.C. City Council joined the nearly 55-member D.C. delegation at the convention to fight on behalf of the District. Council members included Michael A. Brown (At-Large), Jack Evans (Ward 2), Yvette Alexander (Ward 7), Vincent Orange (At-Large), Muriel Bowser (Ward 4), and Marion Barry (Ward 8). Shadow Senator Paul Strauss and Michael E. Brown also participated in the Statehood outreach efforts.

D.C. Statehood activist Anise Jenkins said those she spoke with inspired her. “[It’s] heartening to talk to people from all over the country who support us. They know about Delegate Norton and they support her. A lot of people are familiar with our plight; more than I thought.”

Georgetown University professor Michael Eric Dyson commended Norton.

“[She] is a great leader and her voice deserves to be heard and D.C. Statehood needs to be put forth front and center.”

“The refusal to acknowledge [the issue] is not a departure from the norm, but what we’ve got to do is to continue to raise our voices,” he said.