

“Whether it’s Reid or Obama, when given a choice between the District and their own political fortunes, they’ll choose their own political fortunes.”

In February 2011, Zherka and a group of activists stood up at a House subcommittee hearing in protest with red gags in their mouths. A week later, Zherka led a few dozen protesters in a demonstration outside House speaker John Boehner’s Capitol Hill apartment. Zherka accused Boehner of hypocrisy for intruding in DC’s affairs while simultaneously backing Tea Party calls for small government.

Since the start of DC Vote’s Demand Democracy campaign, some 76 people have been arrested—two of them twice.

Zherka believes that for the campaign to succeed, Mayor Gray and other local officials need to take more of a lead. But Gray, council chairman Kwame Brown, and other District officials have been embroiled in scandals that could complicate their case for greater independence.

On The Kojo Nnamdi Show last May, Gray said he saw his arrest as “reigniting” the movement but downplayed the likelihood of a reprise. “What we’ve got to see,” Gray said, “is really a much broader commitment on the part of the 600,000 people who live in this city.”

Critics say Zherka has pursued too narrow a strategy and that his success has sidelined other voting-rights groups. Stand Up! for Democracy in DC, a volunteer group pressing for full statehood, was founded in 1997, a year before DC Vote. Anise Jenkins, its president and cofounder, labeled the Utah compromise a “single vote” strategy because it did nothing about Senate representation or statehood.

Mark Plotkin, the Fox 5 political analyst and former WTOOP commentator, is a fan of neither Zherka nor Norton. “Cairo, Syria—people are willing to lay down lives,” he says. “And here our response is DC Vote? A tepid, timid, timorous, establishment organization that doesn’t want to offend anybody and, worse, is an appendage to Eleanor Holmes Norton.”

When four Occupy DC protesters went on a hunger strike for District voting rights in December, Zherka issued a statement praising their “courage and conviction” but didn’t explicitly endorse the action.

At recent rallies, I heard young Washingtonians express a willingness to “shut the city down,” perhaps by blocking major roadways from Maryland and Virginia.

I asked Zherka whether DC Vote would endorse such tactics. “Virginia and Maryland people are family, friends, neighbors,” he told me. “There’s no reason to inconvenience and punish them.”

Protests, Zherka said, “have to be tightly tied to injustice and the people perpetuating it.” Hence the demonstrations outside the Capitol and White House, which offer not just the iconography of those buildings but the sight of federal police—not city ones—carting away District residents.

The street protests seem to have chastened some in Congress. GOP threats last year to ban the District’s needle-exchange program, undo its gay-marriage law, and permit concealed firearms were all thwarted, sometimes by other Republicans.

In November, Congressman Darrell Issa, the powerful GOP chairman of the House Oversight and Government Reform Committee, drafted a bill to let the District spend its money without congressional approval, a right local officials have long sought. (DC Vote is opposing the Issa measure for now because a provision would bar locally funded abortions. But Issa has signaled he is open to finding a resolution.)

In February, Obama released a 2013 budget request that promised to “work with Con-

gress and the Mayor to pass legislation to amend the D.C. Home Rule Act to provide the District with local budget autonomy.”

But first he has to be reelected. “Right now we have a President who isn’t willing to expend a lot of political capital but will sign anything that we get to him,” Zherka says. If a Republican wins in November, “all of our calculus will change,” with public protests playing an even greater role than they do now.

DC has grown whiter in recent years, with census figures last year showing blacks losing their historic majority. If race had been a subtext of congressional opposition to voting rights, I asked Zherka, shouldn’t those demographic shifts, however cynically, alter the political math?

Zherka told me that they had not. The District remains a place that lets gay people marry, permits medical marijuana, and funds abortion for poor women. The city’s liberal politics is in some ways the movement’s most intractable handicap.

“If DC for some reason became more Republican,” Zherka says, “absolutely there would be a different perspective” in Congress.

Last May 11, a month after Mayor Gray was arrested, DC Vote hosted another rally. It was at Upper Senate Park, a leafy trapezoid across from the Capitol.

As supporters gathered by a table piled with T-shirts and bumper stickers, Zherka, in a gray suit and yellow tie, shook hands with the assurance of a seasoned politician. A woman had brought two young boys, and Zherka patted them on the head. “Ah, look at these protesters,” he said approvingly. When an aide identified an older man in a blazer and penny loafers as “our most loyal online donor,” Zherka unfastened a DC Vote pin from his lapel and pinned it on the donor’s.

After the speeches, the Capitol Police arrested eight activists who had blocked a few lanes of traffic and refused to move.

But soon the crowds and police vans were gone. Zherka was eager to get home to Bethesda. His son had a series of exit interviews at Westland Middle School, from which he was graduating. His daughter, a fifth-grader at Westbrook Elementary, was recovering from a stomach bug. He also wanted to catch up with his wife—a lawyer with the Motion Picture Association of America—about a house they were remodeling in Chevy Chase. (They moved in November.)

Just when it seemed everyone had left, a young man in shorts and a soccer shirt pulled up on a ten-speed. “Are you with this group?” he asked.

“I’m the director,” Zherka said.

The man told him he wanted to get involved but had questions: Why did the city’s website give the impression that the movement was divided, listing not just DC Vote but two other organizations? If the District’s population was half black, why were protesters today mostly white?

After Zherka’s long day, I wasn’t sure how much patience he’d have with a halfhearted supporter who had missed much of the rally for a soccer game on the Mall. But Zherka gave no air of hurry. The movement was less divided than the website suggested, he said, and many African-Americans have turned out at other rallies.

“Come help us organize and help us get out the word—do we have your info?” Zherka said, handing him a card as the sun set behind them. “Shoot me an e-mail. We need a lot of foot soldiers out here.”

MEG VAN NESS

HON. ED PERLMUTTER

OF COLORADO

IN THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

Thursday, June 21, 2012

Mr. PERLMUTTER. Mr. Speaker, I rise today to congratulate and applaud Meg Van Ness for receiving the Living Landmarks Award.

The Living Landmark Award is presented by the Golden Landmarks Association, a non-profit organization which works to preserve historic places and educated people about the wonderful history the Golden area has to offer. Meg has been a champion in preserving and promoting the historical integrity of Golden.

Meg Van Ness has had a passion for archaeology since high school. She attended the University of Missouri and later the University of Northern Arizona where she received her Master’s in Archaeology. In 1990, six years after she moved to Golden, Meg was appointed to the Golden Historic Preservation Board and remained on the board for ten years.

In 2000, Meg joined the Golden Planning Commission and worked with the community to keep Golden special. Meg worked for 16 years as an archaeological consultant, another 16 years with the Colorado Office of Archaeology and Historic Preservation, and is currently the Regional Historic Preservation Officer for the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service. She continues to serve on various outreach programs and committees in Golden.

I am honored to congratulate Meg Van Ness on this well deserved recognition by the Golden Landmarks Association. We all thank her for her advocacy for the Golden community.

HONORING JESSICA THOMPSON

HON. BENNIE G. THOMPSON

OF MISSISSIPPI

IN THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

Thursday, June 21, 2012

Mr. THOMPSON of Mississippi. Mr. Speaker, I rise today to honor a very astute young woman from the Second Congressional District, Ms. Jessica Thompson. She has been bestowed the distinction of Salutatorian for the Class of 2012 of Charleston High School in Charleston, Mississippi.

Jessica is an extremely hard worker, and is devoted to academics. She has maintained a position on the Superintendent and Principal Lists throughout high school. In addition to honoring her academic responsibilities, Jessica has also remained dedicated to her extracurricular activities. She has served as the captain of the cheerleading squad, a member of the science club, the Student Council Treasurer, a member of the Future Christian Athletes organization, a National Honor Society member, and as an usher at St. Paul C.M.E. Church.

Jessica will be attending the University of Southern Mississippi as a Lucky-Day Scholar this fall, and plans to major in Kinesiotherapy. After obtaining a bachelor degree in Kinesiotherapy, she plans to become a physical therapist. Jessica does not take her education for granted, because she knows that an education is essential to her hopes of fulfilling