CHAIRMAN PHIL MENDELSON
COMMITTEE OF THE WHOLE
ANNOUNCES A PUBLIC HEARING
on
Bill 22-539, the Boris Nemtsov Plaza Designation Act of 2017
on
Wednesday, December 6, 2017
3:30 p.m., Council Chambers, John A. Wilson Building
1350 Pennsylvania Avenue, NW
Washington, DC 20004

WITNESS LIST

1. Vladimir Kara-Murza Chairman, The Boris Nemtsov Foundation for Freedom
2. Zhanna Nemtsova Founder, The Boris Nemtsov Foundation for Freedom
3. Tanja Nyberg Executive Director, Magnitsky Initiative
4. Shlomo Bolts Policy and Advocacy Officer, Syrian-American Council (SAC)
5. Karine Orlova Writer, The American Interest Magazine & DC Correspondent, Echo of Moscow Radio Station
6. Jeremy Bigwood Public Witness
7. Todd McIntyre Chief of Staff, District Department of Transportation
Council Chairman Phil Mendelson announces a public hearing before the Committee of the Whole on Bill 22-539, the “Boris Nemtsov Plaza Designation Act of 2017.” The hearing will be held at 3:30 p.m. on Wednesday, December 6, 2017 in Hearing Room 412 of the John A. Wilson Building.

The stated purpose of Bill 22-539 is to symbolically designate the 2600 block of Wisconsin Avenue, N.W. between Davis Street, N.W., and Edmunds Street, N.W. in Ward 3, as Boris Nemtsov Plaza. The designation would honor the memory and contributions of Mr. Boris Nemtsov, a Russian politician and opposition leader whose assassination garnered international attention in February 2015. The Embassy of the Russian Federation, located at 2650 Wisconsin Avenue, N.W., fronts the proposed unit block designation. Typically, a symbolic naming is for ceremonial purposes and shall be in addition to and subordinate to any name that is an official name.

Those who wish to testify are asked to email the Committee of the Whole at cow@dccouncil.us, or to call Sydney Hawthorne at (202) 724-7130, and to provide your name, address, telephone number, organizational affiliation, and title (if any) by close of business December 4, 2017. Persons wishing to testify are encouraged, but not required, to submit 15 copies of written testimony. If submitted by the close of business on December 4, 2017 the testimony will be distributed to Councilmembers before the hearing. Witnesses should limit their testimony to four minutes; less time will be allowed if there are a large number of witnesses. Copies of the legislation can be obtained through the Legislative Services Division of the Secretary of the Council’s office or on http://lims.dccouncil.us.

If you are unable to testify at the hearing, written statements are encouraged and will be made a part of the official record. Written statements should be submitted to the Committee of the Whole, Council of the District of Columbia, Suite 410 of the John A. Wilson Building, 1350 Pennsylvania Avenue, N.W., Washington, D.C. 20004. The record will close at 5:00 p.m. on Monday, December 18, 2017.
Council of the District of Columbia
Committee of the Whole
Public Hearing on Bill 22-539, the “Boris Nemtsov Plaza Designation Act of 2017”
December 6, 2017, 3:30pm

Prepared Testimony by Vladimir V. Kara-Murza
Chairman, Boris Nemtsov Foundation for Freedom

Chairman Mendelson, Members of the Council, thank you for holding this important hearing and for the opportunity to testify before you.

On September 28, 1994, on his visit to Washington D.C., Russian President Boris Yeltsin hosted President Clinton for a reception and dinner to mark the official opening of the new Russian Embassy on Wisconsin Avenue N.W. As the evening went underway, the Russian leader introduced members of his delegation, including a 34-year-old regional governor by the name of Boris Nemtsov. “Keep an eye on this young man,” Yeltsin said to Clinton. “One day, he will be president of Russia.”

A member of Russia’s first freely elected Parliament; governor of the Nizhny Novgorod Region, which he transformed from a post-Soviet industrial backwater into a powerhouse of market reforms; deputy prime minister who challenged the corrupt influence of the “oligarchs”, Nemtsov in many ways personified the hopes for democracy in Russia. When Vladimir Putin came to power and began to change Russia from the imperfect democracy of his predecessor to the perfect autocracy it is today, many chose to accept the new rules. Not Boris Nemtsov. From the early years of Putin’s regime, he emerged as a leading voice in opposition to its authoritarianism, aggressiveness, and corruption. He publicized abuses by officials; led protest marches against election fraud and against the war in Ukraine; campaigned successfully around the world—including here in the U.S.—for international accountability in the form of targeted sanctions on human rights abusers. Against all odds, he won election to a regional legislature, and was preparing a return to Parliament. He was considering a challenge against Putin in 2018.

All this time, he was smeared by state media as a “traitor”; physically attacked by pro-Kremlin gangs; repeatedly arrested and jailed for peaceful demonstrations. But he did not relent. He was silenced the only way he could be: by an assassin’s bullet. Boris Nemtsov was killed on February 27, 2015 on Bolshoi Moskvoretsky Bridge, two-hundred yards from the Kremlin wall. An officer of the Russian Interior Ministry was convicted of pulling the trigger. No organizers or masterminds were identified or prosecuted.

It was the greatest honor of my life to work with Boris Nemtsov for fifteen years. He taught me, with his own example, that you must stand up for your principles, however difficult, inconvenient, or dangerous; and that politics can—and should—be honest.

Every year in February, around the date of his assassination, thousands of people walk through the streets of Moscow in a march of remembrance. Every day, more than two and
half years on, Russians continue to bring flowers and light candles on the bridge where he was killed in what has become an unofficial memorial.

The official story is very different. The Russian authorities are fighting Boris Nemtsov even after his death. They are now fighting his memory. The Moscow city government has rejected all public initiatives for a commemoration. We have streets in Moscow named after the Venezuelan dictator Hugo Chávez and the Chechen strongman Akhmad Kadyrov, who once called on his followers to “kill as many Russians as possible”—but the Russian opposition leader is off-limits. In Moscow and Yaroslavl, the signs installed by the residents on the apartment blocs where Nemtsov lived have been taken down. In Nizhny Novgorod, the decision by the city council to put up a plaque on his house remains unimplemented. Several times a month, always in the middle of the night, the Moscow municipal services pillage the memorial on the bridge; grown men in uniforms stealing flowers under the cover of darkness.

It appears that we are not allowed to honor a Russian statesman in Russia. We are deeply grateful to citizens and elected representatives in free countries who are stepping in to do what we cannot. Earlier this year, a bipartisan group of U.S. Senators led by Sen. Marco Rubio (R-FL) and Sen. Christopher Coons (D-DE) proposed to give Boris Nemtsov’s name to a plaza in front of the Russian Embassy in Washington; the embassy he once helped to unveil. The idea was supported by Del. Eleanor Holmes Norton (D-D.C.), whom I had the honor of meeting a few weeks ago. I want to thank Members of the D.C. Council for taking the lead with this initiative. I want to thank Chairman Phil Mendelson and Councilmember Mary Cheh for introducing Bill 22-539, the “Boris Nemtsov Plaza designation Act of 2017.”

I am here today to strongly support passage of this Bill. I cannot begin to tell you how much it means. It is a tribute to a man who lived his life—and gave his life—for the freedom of his country. It is also a message and a reminder. To Russian democrats—that our fight is not ignored or forgotten. To Americans—that Russia is not only about Putin’s autocracy, and that there are honorable Russians, like Boris Nemtsov, who are standing up for dignity and justice.

I have no doubt that there will come a day when the Russian state is proud to have its embassy in Washington standing on Boris Nemtsov Plaza.
December 6, 2017
Council of the District of Columbia
Public Hearing on Bill 22-539, the “Boris Nemtsov Plaza Designation Act of 2017”

Prepared Testimony by Zhanna Nemtsova

Chairman Mendelson, Members of the Council, thank you for the opportunity to testify here today and for your support of the initiative to designate the block in front of the Russian Embassy as Boris Nemtsov Plaza.

I speak today on behalf of my family, but also on behalf of all those who struggle to commemorate my father and his political legacy in Russia.

For more than 1,000 days now—whether it is cold, hot, snowy or rainy—a small group of volunteers has guarded a makeshift memorial made of flowers, portraits and candles for my father, Boris Nemtsov, on Bolshoi Moskvoretsky Bridge, on the spot where he was killed. Many people now refer to this bridge as Nemtsov Bridge. They even created a symbol, which I brought with me today.

However, the Moscow Bridges Maintenance Authority and the pro-Kremlin nationalist movement SERB—presumably on the orders of high-ranking Russian officials—have dismantled the memorial more than 70 times. Small plaques commemorating my father that were placed on two apartment buildings—in the city of Yaroslavl, where he served in the regional parliament, and in Moscow—were also dismantled. Both of these initiatives were not ours, but of the people who live in these buildings. In Nizhny Novgorod, where my father was governor, the city authorities, in the end, did not dare to place a plaque.

The current Russian political regime wants to eradicate the memory of my father, since it believes—correctly—that symbols are important and can potentially facilitate and inspire change. This explains the nervous reaction from the Russian Foreign Ministry when they first heard of the Washington D.C. initiative.

Symbols are important. In today’s Russia, where politics is dominated by isolationism and an archaic mindset, the symbols of openness, a global-thinking democratic approach, and market reforms are much needed. My father was an open-minded patriot of Russia, who was willing to reform the country; an optimist and a fearless achiever. I think that my father is a politician of global significance, and that we need to commemorate him. For now, we cannot do it in Russia because of unprecedented resistance, but we have a chance to do it here. And here, it will be difficult to dismantle.

I would like to take this opportunity to thank all the volunteers who look after the makeshift memorial in Moscow, and all courageous people who support the movement to commemorate my father.

I express my profound gratitude to Members of the D.C. Council, and I express hope that you will vote to support this initiative.
Dear Honorable Council Members,

Thank you for giving me the opportunity. My name is Tanja Nyberg. This is a great privilege for me to run my Business in the District of Columbia and to participate in political events in this city.

Our organization, Magnitsky Act Initiative supported and continue to do so regarding the passing and implementation of the Global Magnitsky Act, a legislation which aims to prosecute individuals around the Globe who violated International Law protecting Human Rights. The law is named after Sergei Magnitsky, a Russian lawyer and auditor, who discovered linked to Kremlin tax fraud scheme. Sergei was beaten to death in a Moscow’s prison November 16th 2009.

We also are interested in other projects, one of them – clarifying the fates of Americans who were killed or enslaved in the Union of Soviet Socialist Republic.

It is huge help for us that District of Columbia such diverse and vibrant Community, so that we are able to keep contact with different communities- Ukrainian, Syrian, Georgian and many others.

Today I would like to remind you that Boris was a passionate supporter of the Magnitsky Act. He supported this legislation as a true Russian patriot, a compassionate human being and a politician who was able to overlook the possible developments of the world politics.

But I want to draw your attention to other very important question. Beginning December 2011, we regularly initiate protests in the front of either the Russian Embassy or the Residence of Russian Ambassador. Although our protests always were peaceful, the employees of the Embassy each time called the police or U.S.
Secret Service, picturing us as violent and dangerous. Summer 2015 we were repeatedly harassed by a particular employee of the Embassy so that we had to call the police. To avoid further confrontations, we moved our protest to the 16th Street NW.

The people of MPD and USSS always were very understanding and supportive. But November 14th this year we could feel some changes in this attitude. We were protesting outside of the National Cathedral, where so called “Concert for Unity” organized by the Russian Embassy took place. The conductor and the soloist of the concert are Russian musicians who openly support the Russian aggression in Syria and Ukraine. The authorities were properly informed about the protest. But our American-Ukrainian friend was arrested while reaching leaflets to people attending the concert, the police attempted to confiscate our sound equipment. We concerned that Russian influence will in the future be an obstacle for us to exercise our First Amendment Right.

The Boris Nemtsov Plaza will mean a lot for us. It will be the sign that people of Washington DC are with us and support us and Putin is not so powerful as he thinks.

Thank you!
Thank you, Chairman Mendelson.

My name is Shlomo Bolts I am with the Syrian American Council. Founded in 2005, Syrian American Council is the largest grassroots organization of Syrian Americans advocating for a democratic Syria. We have over 15 chapters across the country and we are based in Washington, DC. We have formed a freedom coalition alongside our counterparts from the Ukrainian American, Bosnian American, and Baltic American communities as well as American supporters of the Russian dissident movement.

The Syrian American Council supports passage of B22 – 539, the “Boris Nemtsov Plaza Designation Act of 2017,” by the DC Council. Renaming the street outside the Russian Embassy after Mr. Nemtsov would serve as a fitting memorial to this leading dissident, whose heroism and memory Russian authorities are intent to erase. Nemtsov’s memory speaks to the democratic values we hold dear in this country and that thousands of Syrians and Ukrainians have died for in recent years. These are values that current Russian President Vladimir Putin wants us to forget.

One of Nemtsov's final acts before his death was to lead peace protests, inside Russia, against Putin's anti-democratic intervention in Ukraine. Concerning these protests, he wrote:

“It would take an enemy of both Russia and Ukraine to make enemies out of two peoples with centuries of common history. Current events indicate that the most nightmarish, the most bloody scenario of fratricidal war is already developing. This is not our war, this is not your war, this is not the war of 20-year-old paratroopers sent out there. This is Vladimir Putin’s war.

I have no doubt that, had he lived to see Vladimir Putin's even bloodier intervention in Syria, Nemtsov would have expressed a similar view. “This is not our war. This is Vladimir Putin’s war.”

Russian forces are estimated to have killed over 6000 civilians since entering Syria to support the Assad regime in 2015. While Putin claims his intervention was against ISIS, the Institute for the Study of War records that most Russian airstrikes take place outside ISIS-held areas. Further, the Syrian Observatory for Human Rights notes that under a third of deaths from Russian airstrikes have come from ISIS, while the clear plurality were civilians. Russia was the main force behind the slaughter in Aleppo last year, when the carnage was so intense that rescue workers couldn't count the dead.

This is the defining memory of Russia’s intervention in Syria. Yet Putin is again engaging in information warfare and trying to rewrite history. Last month, he went on a victory tour with the dictator Bashar al-Assad to claim that they had succeeded in “defeating terrorism.” Even though his warplanes bombed an IDP camp just last week to massacre over 50 civilians, his public propaganda proclaims that fighting has stopped and the world should support his fabricated peace talks.

Members of the DC Council, by passing B22 - 539, you can show that the voices of Syrians suffering under Russian bombing and siege are still heard over the blizzard of Putin's information warfare.

The Syrian American Council is is a multi-ethnic, multi-confessional, non-partisan organization that includes members from all segments of Syrian society. It is an organization devoted to community organizing, awareness-raising, youth empowerment, media outreach, advocacy, and support for Syrians seeking to build a free and democratic Syria.
Testimony for a public hearing before the Committee of the Whole on Bill 22-539, the "Boris Nemtsov Plaza Designation Act of 2017

December 6, 2017
Submitted by:
Karine Orlova,
825 10th St NW, apt.589
Washington, DC 20001
202 823 73 84
karine.orlova@gmail.com

Good afternoon, ladies and gents, my name is Karine Orlova, and I’m a journalist who fled Russia soon after Boris Nemtsov’s murder in 2015 and since then I’ve been working and living in DC.

I am here today because Republican Senator Bob Corker has recently blocked a bill to rename the square the Russian Embassy is located at «Boris Nemtsov Plaza». I don’t know what made the Senator do so but the chief editor of Echo of Moscow radio station (the one I work for) says Corker did so because State Secretary Tillerson wanted the bill to be blocked. And he wanted so because Russian Foreign Minister Lavrov asked him to do so.

But here we are, in DC, where 96% of the citizens voted for the city to be a place where we cheer the spectacular gay-pride each year, where people of different sexuality, sex, race and nationality are welcome and are respected.

DC is the city where a million of women, and men, and their children, came to Independence Avenue to protect human rights. Mayor Bowser was there, I was there. First and foremost as a woman and a human being but also as a journalist.

I say «we» because for the past two and half years DC has become home to me. And here I am, to be listened and to be heard: the square before The Russian Embassy should have the name of Boris Nemtsov, the man of exceptional dignity and honor. A man who fought for people since early 90s when he started his political career, a man who fought for the ordinary people, who fought for human rights and justice and who was murdered most probably exactly for that reason - because it was Boris Nemtsov thanks to whom US Congress passed the Magnitsky Act, a list of sanctions against corrupted Russian officials responsible for the death of a lawyer in a Russian prison.

Boris was murdered in plain view of the Kremlin’s security service, in a high-security are, 400 feet away from the Kremlin, the office of Russia's President. The sponsors of the murder, those who ordered it, have not been found, and I believe, intentionally. And I despise the Russian government for that.

But today’s hearing is not about revenge. In fact, if Vladimir Putin’s government is innocent, and democratic and all about human rights, it should strive to have Boris’ name memorialized. Instead, the Russian Government fights the initiative home and abroad, and it has repeatedly destroyed an improvised memorial on the bridge in Moscow, where Boris was assassinated.

So this is not about revenge, nor is it about provocation. I simply believe that to give the name of Boris Nemtsov, the man of rare decency, and grace, and morality, to a plaza in DC would be the right thing to do.
To the City Council:

B22-0539 is a very bad idea. As introduced, this bill designates the unit block of Wisconsin Avenue, N.W., between Davis and Edmunds Streets, S.E. (sic), as “Boris Nemtsov” Plaza. This “plaza” would be right across from the Russian Embassy. The ostensible reason for doing this would be to blame the Russian government for the death of Boris Nemtsov.

Nemtsov was a charismatic and outspoken politician. He was the co-founder of the Russian political organization “Union of Right Forces” which became “The Republican Party of Russia – People’s Freedom Party.” He was assassinated near the Kremlin in Moscow almost three years ago. And not unlike some American political assassinations, there are questions and conspiracy theories about whether the government itself was involved.

There can be no doubt that the assassination was a tragic loss for Russia. Russian Prime Minister Medvedev called Nemtsov one of the “most talented politicians... a bright personality, a principled man,” and President Putin called his death a “a vile and cynical murder.”

I would like to emphasize that there is no hard evidence that the Russian government was responsible for Nemtsov’s assassination – and certainly not the Russian Embassy here in Washington. Absent such hard evidence, the District of Columbia should not get trigger happy – designating new plazas based upon conspiracy theories.

Such designations might be acceptable - if, for instance - the city had renamed the area around the Saudi Embassy “911 Plaza” or perhaps the area around Burmese Embassy “Rohinga Square.” In both of those cases, thousands of people were killed, and we do have hard evidence about those responsible. Even worse, in the first case, I should remind you that it was American citizens who were targeted and killed by the Wahhabi attack – including many from this area. But I note, that there was no City Council response.

It would be the height of hypocrisy to go ahead with this plan. Let’s not base our official policy on shaky conspiracy theories. Please vote no on B22-0539.

Sincerely,

Jeremy Bigwood
Public Hearing on
Bill 22-539, the “Boris Nemtsov Plaza Designation Act of 2017”

Testimony of
Todd McIntyre

Chief of Staff
Office of the Director
District Department of Transportation

Before the
Committee of the Whole

Council of the District of Columbia

Wednesday, December 6, 2017
3:30 p.m.
Hearing Room 500
John A. Wilson Building
1350 Pennsylvania Avenue, NW
Washington, D.C. 20004
Good afternoon, Chairman Mendelson, members of the Council, staff, and District residents. My name is Todd McIntyre, Chief of Staff at the District Department of Transportation, commonly referred to as DDOT. I am here today to present testimony on behalf of Mayor Muriel Bowser and DDOT Acting Director Jeff Marootian regarding Bill 22-539, the “Boris Nemtsov Plaza Designation Act of 2017.”

The stated purpose of Bill 22-539 is to symbolically designate the 2600 block of Wisconsin Avenue N.W. between Davis Street N.W. and Edmunds Street N.W. in Ward 3 as Boris Nemtsov Plaza. As per the requirements of DC Act 21-489, Section 421(g), I have attached to this testimony a copy of the surveyor’s plat showing the 2600 block of Wisconsin Avenue N.W.

In fiscal terms, the cost of each installed sign for this designation is approximately $170 ($60 for sign fabrication and $110 for sign installation). DDOT is able to absorb the costs of these signs within its current budget, and does not foresee any operational impact this designation would have on the District’s transportation network. Since this is a symbolic designation, the mailing addresses in the proposed plaza would stay the same and would require no action by addressees to ensure continuity of services.

Therefore, the Administration has no objection to this symbolic designation and DDOT stands ready to assist the Council and all other stakeholders with any
ceremonial unveiling activities that may materialize as a result of this Bill being passed.

This concludes my testimony. Thank you for allowing me the opportunity to testify before you today. I am available to answer any questions that you may have.
SYMBOLIC NAMING OF A PUBLIC STREET
2600 BLOCK OF WISCONSIN AVENUE, N.W.

EDMUNDS STREET, N.W.

DAVIS STREET, N.W.
December 18, 2017

Phil Mendelson, Chairperson
Committee of the Whole
Council of the District of Columbia
1350 Pennsylvania Avenue, N.W.
Washington, D.C.

Dear Chairman Mendelson:

I am writing in support of B22-0539 - Boris Nemtsov Plaza Designation Act of 2017 that is currently pending before the Council. My name is Aleksey Mikhaylov, I am an American citizen of Russian origin who moved to the United States in 1999 and currently works as an IT professional in New York City.

Even after leaving Russia I have kept keen interest in Russian affairs due to extensive personal and family connections that I have maintained. During the last 18 years I have followed with great concern and great sorrow a process of dismantling of democratic institutions and of slipping into autocratic lawlessness that my homeland had to endure at the hands of the small group of people who took over power in Russia in 1999. I watched over years how it became more dangerous to oppose the regime of personal power of Vladimir Putin, and I learned to admire the people who continued this fight against all odds for the better future of Russian people. Boris Nemtsov was one of them and even in this noble circle he stood out.

Nemtsov belonged to a generation of politicians that had come to power in Russia soon after the collapse of Soviet Union. Unfortunately, due to decades-long erosion of ethics and morals under Soviet rule, big part of this group of people was marked by a level of corruption and political squalor that was almost unparalleled in the history of Russia.

But Boris Nemtsov was a notable exception. Being right in the middle of this "political cesspool", throughout his career as a provincial governor, Vice-Prime Minister in the government, member of parliament and later as an opposition leader he was always a man of unquestionable integrity. He openly and consistently maintained and stood by his principles in his every public action. The way Boris Nemtsov held himself in public office
was exemplary even by the highest standards of the Western democracies, and in 1990s Russia such example was one of the very few.

When the short period of democracy in Russia ended, Boris had every opportunity to "blend in" with the new regime and participate in the trillion dollar looting of Russian state budget that took place during the years of booming hydrocarbon prices - Russia's main export commodity. Instead, he rejected any support for the regime when its real substance became apparent and dedicated his life to opposing it, sacrificing many things, enduring smear campaigns in state-controlled media, numerous physical attacks, constant harassment by pro-regime "youth activists", multiple unlawful detentions by the police, and eventually paying the ultimate price of his life for his efforts to free Russia from the tyranny.

Boris Nemtsov was a great statesman who loved his country and worked tirelessly to serve it until the last hours of his life. He was murdered just hours before a large rally that he was organizing with other opposition leaders and soon after finishing an appearance on the radio show to promote it. I still remember listening to this show and the shock of learning less than two hours later about Boris' murder, and to this day I still find it hard to accept that Boris Nemtsov is no longer with us. I am certain that the history of Russia had made a dramatic turn to the worse on that fateful day.

The regime many consider responsible for his murder is still in power in Russia, and its operatives are disrespecting Boris' legacy and memory by denying any memorial signs in his tribute to be put up anywhere in Russia and by organizing periodic vandalizing of the "People's Memorial" on the site of his murder on Nemtsov Bridge in Moscow. But I believe that this designation is right and appropriate not because of these reproachful actions but because Boris Nemtsov was a figure of global proportion, a politician who would make any country and any nation proud and whose life and political activity made a global impact.

It is also my strong belief that the time will come, and this most significant political murder in post-Soviet history of Russia will get fully investigated; all responsible will be brought to justice; and the memory and legacy of Boris Nemtsov will get recognized officially there. Until then, I do hope to be able to pay tribute to one of my personal heroes and one of the greatest politicians in the recent history of Russia here in the capital of my new home country.

This designation would be greeted with deep gratitude to the people of DC by me and like-minded Russians here, in Russia and everywhere else where freedom, rule of law and true democracy are recognized as values worth fighting for.

Thank you for the opportunity to address the council and for your consideration.

Sincerely,

Aleksiy Mikhaylov 12/18/2017
Fifty years ago, during the Chinese Cultural Revolution, a group of fragile-looking girls from the No. 2 Beijing Secondary School converged on Yangwei Road leading to the Soviet Embassy. They tore down the old street signs renaming it Anti-Revisionist Road. After that, for days on end, school-age children filed on past, waving red banners, shouting anti-Soviet slogans, and trashing the street with posters with calls for revolutionary justice. In February 1967 the Red Guards attempted to storm the Embassy and lynch the diplomats. Fortunately, the attack was called off after Chinese Premier Zhou Enlai pleaded with the ring leader, a ponytailed teenage girl.

I was reminded of that drama when I read of the initiative, led by the D.C. Council Chairman Phil Mendelson (D) and Ward 3 member Mary M. Cheh (D), to rename the intersection near the Russian Embassy in Washington as “Boris Nemtsov Plaza” after the Russian opposition activist, assassinated in Moscow in February 2015. The initiative is a resurrection of a hair-brained effort spearheaded by Sen. Marco Rubio (R) to name and shame the Putin regime for Nemtsov’s murder. That earlier effort was thankfully defeated by Sen. Bob Corker (R) but bad ideas die hard.

True, D.C.’s legislators have not taken the hammer in their hands to rectify a perceived injustice but the juvenile prank of changing street names to embarrass foreign countries puts Mendelson and Cheh, like Rubio before them, in about the same league as the banner-waving teenage girls from the No. 2 Beijing Secondary School.

Honouring Russian dissidents is not in itself problematic. The ideals behind the proposal are admirable. Nemtsov, whom I knew and respected, was a passionate advocate of democratic reform. And yes, there should be a Boris Nemtsov Plaza. Just not in Washington. Just imagine if the Russians decided to rename the street next to the U.S. Embassy in Moscow as the “Black Lives Matter Street.” Not that they should not try: bad ideas are often contagious.

Nemtsov’s story is a properly Russian story. He challenged an increasingly authoritarian regime, and paid the ultimate price. His death galvanized the opposition, and, a thousand days on, his spirit lives on. He has become a symbol of dissent. As is often the case, Nemtsov means more to Russia today than he did when he was alive. Mendelson and Cheh do a considerable disservice to Nemtsov by involving him, despite himself, in their political posturing. The ongoing effort to rename the street tarnishes Nemtsov’s name back in Russia, making him look less like a defender of liberty and more like a tool of “Western propaganda.” The apologists for the regime will waste no time advertising Nemtsov’s supposed American connections to discredit not just Nemtsov but the rest of the Russian opposition as agents of foreign influence.

For the Russians are an interesting bunch. Left to their own devices, they are more than capable of opposing injustice and defending liberty. But the moment someone like Mendelson and Cheh, or Rubio and McCain, come along and say “hello, friends, we are with you,” you will have an instinctive and angry reaction. Lecturing the
Russians about the blessings of liberty cannot be interpreted as anything other than a deliberate effort to humiliate.

Humiliate whom – the regime? No. Humiliate the country, because the Embassy does not just represent the regime. It represents the country.

Humiliation was a feature of the Chinese Cultural Revolution. Girls from the No. 2 Beijing Secondary School only appeared fragile. They – and their peers, boys and girls, across the country – unleashed an orgy of violence against their teachers, officials, and ultimately against each other. Chinese "revisionists" were beaten, forced to wear dunce caps, and smeared in faeces. Foreign diplomats were also singled out for abuse. In the end, these teenagers knew nothing of the Soviet Union. Soviet "revisionism" was instrumentalized as a weapon of domestic political struggles, much as today Russia is instrumentalized in America's domestic politics. But the consequences for Sino-Soviet relations were negative and long-lasting. Later on, the Chinese thought better of it and restored the street's original name.

The latest initiative should, and will probably fail, much like its predecessor in the U.S. Senate. Mendelson, Cheh and the others stand to benefit from advertising their names as defenders of freedom. Ironically, this initiative, now passionately endorsed by The Washington Post, comes at a time when liberty is under attack in America itself. But instead of bravely facing up to these domestic realities as Nemtsov would have done, the legislators are taking their struggle to Russia's faraway shores, where liberty, true, is in short supply. But the D.C. Council's involvement won't change that. It won't, as Mendelson claims, send a loud message to Putin about American "values." The only message it will send is that of the intellectual arrogance of some U.S. politicians who, not for the first time, want to be seen telling the Russian people, like so many disobedient children, who, among their own, are worthy of respect and admiration.

Sergey Radchenko is Professor of International Relations at Cardiff University, UK, Zi Jiang Distinguished Professor at East China Normal University, Shanghai, and Global Fellow at the Woodrow Wilson International Center for Scholars, Washington D.C.
Dear Chairman Mendelson and Honorable Council Members,

Thank you for allowing me the opportunity to send you my testimony!

My name is Dmitry Valuev, and I am a Program Director of Magnitsky Acti Initiative, the American organization that advocates for the greater accountability for human rights abusers in Russia. On behalf of many Russians living in the United States who want to see Russia free and democratic, I’d like to ask you to strongly consider supporting the bill B22-539 designating the unit block in front of the Russian embassy as Boris Nemtsov Plaza.

Boris Nemtsov devoted his life and career to implementing democratic principles in Russia, to making Russia free, modern, innovative, and successful country. He stood up for very principles that lay in the foundation of the United States and many other democratic countries. His name deserves to be recognized and memorized in front of the Russian embassy.

We, pro-democracy Russian immigrants, have organized numerous protest events in front of the Russian embassy on Wisconsin Ave, the place that is proposed to be designated to remember Boris Nemtsov, and the residence of the Russian ambassador on the 16th St in Washington, D.C. since 2011. We have demanded free and fair election in Russia, we have protested against the Putin’s crackdown on political opposition and independent media, we have demanded a release of political prisoners. We held many protests on the same days when Russian activists, including Boris Nemtsov, held their protest events in Russia. While we enjoyed freedom of assembly in Washington, D.C., hundreds activists in Russia, and Boris Nemtsov among them, were constantly arrested for peacefully expressing their opinions (see Appendix 1 to this testimony). A few days after the murder of Boris Nemtsov, memorial rallies and marches were held in Russia and many other countries. On the same day, we organized an event in front of the embassy in D.C., the place that already became designated to the Russian pro-democracy movement (see Appendix 2). Since Nemtsov’s death, the place in front of the Russian embassy has naturally become an area dedicated to Nemtsov’s memory. For the second anniversary of the Nemtsov’s assassination, we gathered there along with activists representing other diasporas - Ukrainian, Belarusian, Baltic counties and others. The foreign relationship adviser to Senator Marco Rubio Bethany Poulos read the Senator Rubio’s statement where he proposed a legislation to designate the area in front of the embassy to Boris Nemtsov. Along with bitterness and sadness of the tragedy that brought us together on that day, we felt hope and saw a chance to recognize the name of a Russian statesman and a passionate activist devoted to democratic ideas who Nemtsov was.

Right after the Nemtsov’s assassination in Moscow, Russia, pro-democracy activists organized an improvised memorial made of portraits, candles and flowers on the spot where Nemtsov was shot (see Appendix 3). Dozens of times the memorial has been destroyed by the city authorities. Volunteers who stay at the memorial days and nights have been arrested by the city police and physically attacked by the secret service-backed pro-Kremlin group SERB (see Appendix 4). One activist died after he was beaten up by a SERB member. The Moscow authorities have refused to place a plaque on the bridge where Nemtsov was killed and removed a plaque from the building where he lived.
Nemtsov once said: “Democracy is universal. Democracy is the people’s right to elect government officials and let them go when they don’t do their job. Democracy is the people’s right to criticize the government. Democracy is the people’s right to information and independent courts.” We know that one day Russia will become a free democratic country in which memory of Russian patriots will be honored. Now we hope that Honorable Council Members will respond to wishes of many people in Washington, D.C., many other cities in United States and other counties, and those Russians who value the memory of Boris Nemtsov and democratic principles he stood for.

Dmitry Valuev
Program Director, Magnitsky Act Initiative
Dear DC Council Chairman Phil Mendelson,

I’m Natalia Arno, President and Founder of the Free Russia Foundation (www.4freerussia.org). Prior to that, in 2004-2014, I was working for the International Republican Institute (www.iri.org). I was Russia Country Director for IRI for six years.

I knew Boris Nemtsov for many years. We first met at IRI Russia’s conference in October 2004. It was my first day of working for that democracy promotion organization. Since that time and until his assassination we had good working relations and cooperated on a number of projects aimed to encourage civic engagement, strive for democracy and freedom, defend core human rights and promote fair elections. Quite often, Boris Nemtsov was a keynote speaker at our conferences. Even when IRI Russia was forced to close down its office in Moscow and relocate to Europe, Boris would attend our events in Vilnius first and later in Warsaw.

I established the Free Russia Foundation in the U.S. in December 2014 to assist Russian pro-democracy forces, civil society and independent media.

It’s been nearly three years since the audacious murder of Russia’s former Deputy Prime Minister Boris Nemtsov steps from the Kremlin. For those of us who believe in his message of democracy and human rights, we lost a shining light of hope that evening. To the Kremlin and its apologists, a voice of opposition was silenced. Since his murder, a makeshift monument has been built where he died that cold February night. Every day, flowers, photos, and memorabilia are placed there and every night is it taken down by police or government workers or desecrated by nationalist gangs. It has become a location that has drawn people from all over Russia to make a statement that his life and accomplishments should not be forgotten.

With the Kremlin doing all it can so his memory is lost to history, it is necessary for those of us who believe in human rights and essential freedoms to ensure his memory and his cause lives on; even if outside Russia. This is why we ask the Council, in its knowledge that freedom of thought should know no boundaries, allow for the passage of the ordinance of the naming of Boris Nemtsov Plaza. While the Kremlin will ignore his accomplishments, Russians and leaders of other countries who visit the Russian embassy will need to drive past this plaza named in his honor and, for that one short moment, remember in their own way that people who challenge great power and die for that cause will never be forgotten.
Sincerely,

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NATALIA ARNO
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+1.916.849.3057 (cell)
Dear Chairman Mendelson:

I have been living in USA for 26 years. When I had left the former Soviet Union, Boris Nemtsov was in the beginning of his colorful and impressive political career. I was in the beginning of mine in the newly adopted country. Nevertheless, I was witnessing Boris from across the ocean and was impressed how this young and extraordinary fellow inserted himself into highly charged, intense and unconventional political battles during 1990-s in Russia. Then his wheel of fortune had made a full circle and in the era of Putin's presidency he became his harsh critic and - as one of the leaders of opposition - he was trashed by official Kremlin, became a pariah and pushed onto sidewalks of Russian politics. Finally, the bullets of his government sponsored assassins had found the target on February 27, 2015......

Chairman, when you and your council members will be deliberated about naming the plaza next to the Russian embassy after Boris Nemtsov, please remember the life story of another extraordinary man - Andrei Sakharov. Fellows who had renamed one of the landmarks of our capital after him are not ashamed at all and should be proud what they did almost 40 years ago.

I believe that you and incoming generations will be proud too of your decision!

Sincerely,

Anatoly Belogorsky

1507 Sheridan Ct, Wheeling, IL 60090
December 18, 2017

Gleb Latnik

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Council of the District of Columbia

Committee of the Whole

Attn: Ms. Sydney Hawthorne

1350 Pennsylvania Avenue, NW
Washington, DC 20004

Via E-mail: shawthorne@dccouncil.us, cow@dccouncil.us

Council of the District of Columbia:

As a resident of the District of Columbia since 2014 living in Ward 6;

I am writing to support Bill Number B22-0539: Boris Nemtsov Plaza Designation Act of 2017 which symbolically designates the unit block of Wisconsin Avenue, N.W., between Davis and Edmunds Streets, N.W., As Boris Nemtsov Plaza.

As a strong advocate for democracy and human rights, Boris Nemtsov, symbolizes the type of leader which the District of Columbia should honor.

I would be proud to honor Boris Nemtsov’s memory by symbolically naming unit block of Wisconsin Avenue, N.W., between Davis and Edmunds Streets, As Boris Nemtsov Plaza.

Thank you

Gleb Latnik
December 18, 2017

Eileen Sickle

401 Massachusetts Avenue NW Apt 603
Washington, DC 20001

Cell: 480-221-2696
e-mail: eileensickle@gmail.com

Council of the District of Columbia

Committee of the Whole

Attn: Ms. Sydney Hawthorne

1350 Pennsylvania Avenue, NW
Washington, DC 20004

Via E-mail: shawthorne@dcouncil.us, cow@dcouncil.us

Council of the District of Columbia:

As a resident of the District of Columbia since 2011, living in Ward 2 from 2011 to 2014 and now residing in Ward 6 from 2014 to the present;

I am writing to support Bill Number B22-0539: Boris Nemtsov Plaza Designation Act of 2017 which symbolically designates the unit block of Wisconsin Avenue, N.W., between Davis and Edmunds Streets, N.W., As Boris Nemtsov Plaza.

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Thank you
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