

## Preserving the Independence of ANC 3/4G in the Civic Core Debate – A Response to Concerns

In a March 14 listserv post, I proposed disclosure and recusal guidelines to preserve the independence of ANC 3/4G in the Civic Core debate. The original text is attached.

The responses in opposition have raised various concerns, but collectively they fail to address the core question:

*Can ANC commissioners be, and be seen as, fair and independent in official deliberations on an issue before the commission – in the present case, the Civic Core – while simultaneously leading an organization advocating a specific outcome on that same issue?*

In light of that question, I'll address the concerns directly.

**Recusal is not disenfranchisement.** It is a basic feature of responsible governance. Officials at every level routinely step aside when their impartiality may reasonably be questioned. Doing so does not silence voters — it protects them by preserving confidence in the process.

**Great weight requires independence.** ANC recommendations receive “great weight” precisely because they are expected to reflect an independent, deliberative process that considers the views of the entire community. When that independence is called into question — because commissioners are simultaneously leading advocacy efforts on the same matter — the foundation for that deference erodes, along with confidence that the commission reflects the community’s considered views.

**Conflict-of-interest rules are not limited to financial gain.** They also address situations in which impartiality could reasonably be questioned. When commissioners lead organizations actively advocating specific outcomes on matters before the ANC, the issue is institutional credibility. In a body whose influence depends on public trust, appearances matter.

**This is not about restricting speech.** Commissioners remain free to advocate, organize, and speak as they wish. But advocacy and official decision-making are different roles. The principle is straightforward: advocacy is protected; conflicted decision-making is not.

**The matter at hand is not hypothetical.** The formation of Chevy Chase Forward coincided with ANC 3/4G’s recent effort to reappoint and recruit members for its Racial and Social Equity Committee. Several individuals later identified as founders withdrew or declined to serve, leaving the committee unable to be fully constituted and limiting its work. This sequence illustrates how overlapping roles can have practical consequences for how the ANC functions.

**Line-drawing is manageable and narrow.** The proposal relies on existing ANC bylaws requiring disclosure of relevant affiliations, including membership in organizations advocating positions on matters before the ANC, and adds a limited recusal requirement only for commissioners who hold leadership roles in organizations actively advocating specific outcomes on those matters. It does not affect ordinary civic participation.

**Invoking McCarthyism is not just misplaced — it is irresponsible.** It substitutes overheated rhetoric for analysis. My proposal does not punish beliefs, restrict association, or require anyone to resign from office. It calls only for limited recusal in defined circumstances. That is standard governance, not ideological policing.

**Elections do not resolve the issue.** Some have argued that voters already made their choice at the ballot box. But in this case, the advocacy organization — Chevy Chase Forward — launched just a few weeks ago, long after the commissioners who helped found it were elected to the ANC. Voters never had the opportunity to consider this role when casting their ballots. That is exactly why conflict-of-interest rules exist. They address situations that arise during a term, not just at election time.

**In the end, this is about institutional integrity.** The ANC is meant to be an independent forum representing the entire community, not an extension of any advocacy effort. Disclosure and recusal are basic tools to ensure that when the ANC speaks, residents can trust that it does so as an independent voice.

If that standard cannot be maintained, the core institutional question follows:

*Can the ANC function as an independent body if its members simultaneously lead outside advocacy efforts on the very issues they are deciding?*

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