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D.C. Politics

D.C. poised to change license plate slogan in push to become 51st state

By **Aaron C. Davis** April 19, 2016

Stamping “Taxation Without Representation” onto D.C. license plates was supposed to be an in-your-face protest of District residents’ lack of voting rights.

The sight of it was supposed to embarrass members of Congress, who spend billions in city residents’ tax dollars each year without their say. And it was supposed to increase awareness of District residents’ plight with visitors as being a message at odds with their own proud state slogans, like Connecticut’s “The Constitution State,” or Delaware’s “The First State.”

But after 16 years of having the provocative slogan adorn license plates in the nation’s capital — and even that of the presidential limousine — a large group of D.C. lawmakers on Tuesday said it’s proven to be ineffective and is in need of an update.

Taxation without representation, they said, was never supposed to be viewed as a permanent fact of life, like Arizona’s “Grand Canyon State.” Rather, it was supposed to motivate change, perhaps more like North Dakota’s

“Discover the Spirit.”

“We need a call to action, not a status quo,” said D.C. Council member Charles Allen (D-Ward 6).

His solution? A verb: “End Taxation Without Representation,” said Allen, introducing a bill Tuesday to make the new slogan law.

Allen said that by adding the three-letter word, the new slogan could “reflect a rallying cry for equality” for the District, and dovetail with D.C. Mayor Muriel E. Bowser’s new push to make D.C. a state.

Ten of the council’s 13 members joined in co-introducing Allen’s legislation, and a 11th member signed on as a co-sponsor, all but assuring the measure will pass the council and go to Bowser for her signature.

A spokesman said the mayor was reviewing the new legislation.

In addition to a new general slogan, Allen’s bill would also create a special D.C. statehood plate, with proceeds going to city efforts to win approval for the District to become the 51st state.


The new commemorative plate would be similar to one supporting environmental cleanup of the Anacostia River. Under Allen’s bill it would read “We Demand Statehood,” and would cost \$51.

One logistical challenge, however, may loom: At 31 characters, the District’s “Taxation Without Representation” slogan is already longer than that of any state. Designers could not figure out how to make it readable without punching bolt holes in the “i” and the “o” in “Taxation” and part of the first “n” in “Representation.”

Allen said his focus is on the meaning: “Congress denies our tax-paying citizens one of the most fundamental rights of an American, the right to

congressional representation,' he said. "It's past time to end that."

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