

January 23, 2015

Advisory Neighborhood Commission 3G
PO Box 6252
Northwest Station
Washington, DC 20015

To the Commissioners:

We are descendants of Senator Francis G. Newlands and are writing to you in response to recent efforts to pass a resolution calling for the renaming of the Francis Griffith Newlands Memorial Fountain.

As Senator Newlands' descendants, we are aware of his many notable achievements as well as his imperfections. In short, we reject and heartily disagree with his sentiments on race. He was a multifaceted man, and we agree that historical accounts of his life and career should not overlook his defects in an attempt to avoid uncomfortable truths. However, like many other imperfect yet important historical figures of his time, he should be evaluated fairly, factually, and on the basis of his accomplishments and his faults.

Unfortunately, the proposed resolution that was introduced to the ANC includes a number of factual errors and unsupported allegations, and completely ignores the historical reasons for which the fountain was originally dedicated to Senator Newlands by an Act of Congress in 1938. These errors were described in detail in a December 4, 2014 letter by the Chevy Chase Historical Society to the ANC. They include assertions that the original property deeds in Chevy Chase included restrictive racial covenants (they did not), that he opposed women's suffrage (he supported women's suffrage), and that he intended for Chevy Chase to be "forever racially segregated" (there is no historical evidence for this claim). Facts should speak for themselves, and we do not dispute the evidence that Senator Newlands made racist statements—but it is simply wrong to knowingly spread false information about him.

Congress dedicated the fountain in Chevy Chase Circle to Senator Newlands in acknowledgement of his many contributions. He served the people of Nevada in the U.S. House of Representatives for 10 years, and was elected to the Senate in 1903 where he served until his death in 1917. Senator Newlands was a respected and accomplished legislator, and considered a visionary by many of his colleagues in Congress. He worked for twenty years to draft the Newlands Reclamation Act of 1902, paving the way for federal funding of irrigation projects in twenty states, thereby transforming their economies. Senator Charles Henderson of Nevada said, "there was hardly an important subject that had not the benefit of his intelligence, his judgment and his powers...Any one of several of his efforts was great enough to have been the work of a great man." Newlands was a progressive Democrat who supported women's suffrage in Nevada as early as 1913, and consistently advocated for unions and workers' rights, helping establish the 8-hour workday. He was deeply interested in new ideas about land use and planning, and developed Chevy Chase as one of the earliest streetcar suburbs. As Chevy Chase was being developed, he graded what is now Connecticut Avenue from Calvert Street to Chevy Chase Lake for a streetcar line and then dedicated it to the city

of Washington, D.C. at no cost. Of course, these accomplishments do not excuse Senator Newlands' abhorrent statements about race. But as with any historical figure, it is important to fully understand his story and place him within the context of his time.

Even more importantly, we believe the entire purpose of the proposed resolution is misguided. It is an unavoidable fact that many of our country's greatest historical figures held beliefs that we find repugnant today, particularly on matters of race and gender. It would be an exhausting and costly effort to rename or remove every monument and statue honoring someone who expressed sentiments or held beliefs that we now find rightly offensive, and the effort would include obliterating our public spaces of any mention of at least several U.S. Presidents. Senator Newlands should not be judged by a different standard than that which we apply to any other historical figure.

We cannot undo our country's terrible legacy of racial discrimination by pretending it didn't happen—to the contrary, we should seek out every opportunity to understand that many of our predecessors were flawed human beings who held beliefs that we must still struggle against today. Our family's complicated history is not unique, and as Americans we should all engage in honest dialogue about how to embody our country's best ideals and make sure that we do not repeat the terrible mistakes of our past. Renaming the Newlands Fountain would not help achieve these goals—it would merely erase an important reminder of our complicated history.

For these reasons, we urge you to vote against this resolution. If you have any questions, please contact us at fgndescendants@gmail.com.

Sincerely,

Sandia J. Johnston, Great Granddaughter to Francis G. Newlands

Rosy Strachwitz Schlueter, Great Granddaughter

Andrew McNear, Great Great Grandson

Timothy C. Schlueter, Great Great Grandson

Heidi Johnston, Great Great Granddaughter

Diantha J. N. Kidder, Great Great Granddaughter

Janine V. Johnston, Great Great Granddaughter