



ROGER NYHUS

Former communications executive and longtime political and community advocate says he wants to see some core issues fixed before he dives back into politics

ANTHONY BOLANTE | PSBJ

BY NICK PASION
npasion@bizjournals.com

It's hard to talk about Roger Nyhus without bringing up his house, colloquially known as the White House on Capitol Hill. Nyhus bought the property in 2007 and turned into a conclave for Seattle business and politics. The house where he helped launched the push for marriage equality in Washington, fundraised for major politicians and nonprofits, and hosted Joe Biden's presidential campaign during his tour through the Pacific Northwest.

It was at that first-floor soiree where Nyhus helped bring in \$250,000 for the would-be president. From his third-story office, he raised nearly \$1 million more over Zoom. As the election neared, Nyhus was also in his "White House" when he received a call from the soon-to-be Biden White House to see if he wanted anything in return. After a coy back-and-forth, Nyhus asked for a role at an embassy on the other side of the world. They said yes.

Nyhus sold his company, packed his belongings, and put his house on the market for a cool \$5.98 million for what he hoped would be a long-term move to his new home as ambassador to Barbados and the East Caribbean.

The home "did not receive one offer," as Nyhus puts it, so he yanked it off the market and headed east. Three years later, Nyhus has grown a beard, moved back into his old house, and refilled it with "two truckloads" of stuff weighing 6,700 pounds.

Nyhus, a longtime advocate for the LGBTQ+ community, has been named the recipient of the Business Journal's 2025 Outstanding LGBTQ+ Voices Lifetime Achievement Award.

The son of a fisherman and a court clerk, Nyhus grew up in Westport, a coastal town on a peninsula along Grays Harbor. He earned a communications degree from Washington State University

and after school went to work at the Associated Press.

Nyhus' LGBTQ+ advocacy began during the AIDS epidemic in the '80s, when friends began dying from an outbreak largely overlooked by the federal government.

"I delivered food to people dying of AIDS," he says. "It motivated me to do more. And I think as I grew in my career and in my influence, I was able to channel that in different

ways."

After a year, the AP wanted to send Nyhus to Anchorage, Alaska. He declined.

"I love Alaska, but no," he recalls. So with the help of a college mentor, Nyhus started working at Washington Mutual, where he helped herald the live Peregrine falcon camera feed in what's now 1201 Third.

Eventually, he jumped to Russell

Roger Nyhus, who served as an ambassador to Barbados and the East Caribbean, returned to Seattle in early 2025.

Investments, but a head-banging commute from Seattle to Tacoma led him to ask his boss if he could work from Seattle, or else he would quit.

"These are the words that changed my life: Don't quit. Become a consultant for us," Nyhus remembers. "I never looked back."

In 1994, he started Nyhus Communications, a consulting and communications firm. Over the years, the company attracted a

range of clients, including Alaska Airlines, American Express, Wright Runstad and Providence Swedish.

Marc Berger, a partner at Nyhus Communications, says Nyhus had a "passion for doing work that mattered and doing work that advanced the firm's values, the firm's goals and his personal goals as a community and civic leader." Berger is now the executive vice president at DH, the Spokane firm

OUTSTANDING LGBTQ+ VOICES LIFETIME ACHIEVEMENT AWARD

that bought the company in 2022.

The sale wasn't the first time Nyhus stepped away from the firm. Throughout his career, he took a few small breaks for side projects: attempting to assist the then-Mayor Paul Schell, a stint at the Gates Foundation and a half-term as the press secretary for former Gov. Gary Locke.

All the while, Nyhus grew his Rolodex of mentors in LGBTQ+ advocacy, including the late state Rep. Cal Anderson, former CEO of the Greater Seattle Business Association Louise Chernin and state Sen. Majority Leader Jamie Pederson, his close friend.

He continued to host regular events in support of LGBTQ equality. Most notable among them was the political action committee that backed the referendum on marriage equality in Washington state, which he launched at an event he hosted at his home in 2011.

But Nyhus always returned to his firm. More than anything else, he said, he works to support people and issues, which is what attracted him to President Biden. Nyhus could relate to his middle-class upbringing and his people-first approach.

"Plus, he also was really the reason that Obama ultimately supported marriage equality," Nyhus says. "He pushed Obama to support marriage equality, so I was like, 'You know what, this is my person.'"

Nyhus continued fundraising for Biden throughout the pandemic and organizing events. So, three years after the election, when he was finally confirmed as the ambassador to what he says is the culturally conservative Barbados and the East Caribbean, Nyhus knew his sexuality and advocacy came with the new role.

"It was part of the calculus that they knew sending me there would send a message that we care about the equality of all people," he says.

While serving as ambassador, Nyhus invited LGBTQ people to speak at his events, not just those related to LGBTQ issues.



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Nyhus, a prolific art collector, has filled his colonial-style home with artwork and told the Business Journal about some of the memorabilia he has kept from his time as U.S. Ambassador in the East Caribbean.

He met activists on the other Islands. He went to a Pride Festival in St. Lucia. And from his new house in Barbados, Nyhus flew a 30-foot Pride Flag between two palm trees in his front yard, which people could see from more than a mile away.

"It was a very visible statement from me, but also the U.S. government at the time that said LGBTQ people are equal partners in our society and deserve respect and protection just like everybody," he says.

The 30-foot Pride flag was torn in half during Hurricane Beryl, the strongest hurricane ever recorded in that part of the Caribbean. Nyhus spent the next day flying over the impacted areas and pushed to secure millions in relief funding from the U.S. Agency for International Development.

His proudest accomplishment was bringing together more than \$1 billion in business investments that will be split between the seven countries he represented. Since coming back, Nyhus has told the story of a senior political reporter telling him during his

exit interview, "Ambassador, you accomplished more in one year than your predecessor did in eight."

Nyhus says he's not the same person he was when he began the ambassadorship in November 2023.

Professionally, he said he's being more selective about what he says yes to. Now that he's home, he attends fewer dinners and receptions and has almost entirely stopped political fundraising. He says the Democratic Party became rudderless after the 2024 presidential election.

"We need to see one recognition that it wasn't just Joe Biden's fault. He played a role. Clearly, absolutely, his team played a role, but the Democratic Party has played a role," Nyhus says. "Candidates up and down in all kinds of places are playing roles. So, I would like to see that we understand what the electorate wants and know that we can deliver it."

Nyhus kept the remnants of the Pride flag torn apart by Beryl. He plans to sew it back together. He he wants to hang it from his White House, too. **Z**

ABOUT ROGER

Hometown:
Westport

Residence:
Seattle

Education:
Bachelor's in communications, Washington State University

Career history

- U.S. Ambassador to Barbados and the Eastern Caribbean

- Nyhus Communications founder and CEO

- PATH interim vice president of global engagement and communications

- Fred Hutch interim vice president of marketing and communications

- Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation senior advocacy officer