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## District of Columbia Officials Push for Statehood at a Senate Committee Hearing

By Emmarie Huetteman

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Local officials implored a Senate panel on Monday to approve a bill that would grant statehood to the District of Columbia and give its residents the same electoral rights enjoyed by other Americans.

It was the first congressional hearing on district statehood in more than two decades, but only one senator sat through the whole thing.

Mayor Vincent C. Gray; Eleanor Holmes Norton, the district's nonvoting delegate in the House of Representatives; and other leaders told members of the panel, the Senate Committee on Homeland Security and Governmental Affairs, that it was long past time to provide district residents, who pay federal taxes, a voice in the House and Senate.

"We're not asking for special treatment," Mr. Gray said. "We're asking for the same treatment other Americans get."

Statehood would also strip Congress of its right to overturn the District of Columbia's laws and control its budget, as outlined in the Constitution. Representative Andy Harris, Republican of Maryland, [angered district residents](#) this year when he tried to block [a new law](#) decriminalizing marijuana possession in some cases.

Officials said the District of Columbia — which, with a population of 646,000, has more people than Vermont and Wyoming, according to the Census Bureau estimate for 2013 — is unjustly subject to lawmakers' whims and forced to close its government during federal shutdowns.

"We were casualties of national politics," Mr. Gray said.

Critics argue that statehood would give the District of Columbia an unfair advantage over more populous states and other cities. Roger Pilon, director of the [Cato Institute's Center for](#)

[Constitutional Studies](#), told the committee the “proposal is not only unconstitutional but impractical as well.”

District officials have been pushing a statehood bill since the first one was introduced in 1983, but it had been more than 20 years since lawmakers held a hearing on the matter.

Senator Thomas R. Carper, Democrat of Delaware and chairman of the committee, introduced the latest bill last year. It would keep federal property like the White House and the Capitol under congressional control but would grant statehood to the rest of the District, which would be known as New Columbia.

Senator Harry Reid, Democrat of Nevada and the majority leader, is one of the bill’s co-sponsors, and [President Obama](#) has said he supports district statehood in general, which has spurred the effort.

A standing-room-only crowd of statehood advocates flooded the hearing room on Monday and spilled into the hallway. Mr. Carper, in his opening statement, noted that the United Nations had criticized the district’s lack of congressional representation.

But only two of the committee’s 16 members — Mr. Carper and, briefly, Senator Tom Coburn of Oklahoma, the ranking Republican — showed up.

“Here we are again, debating this issue, even though it has no chance of success in this chamber and is dead on arrival in the House and will not and cannot possibly be considered before we go sine die,” Mr. Coburn said, referring to the end of the legislative session.

The committee is not scheduled to vote on the bill.

Many Republicans are outspoken in their opposition to statehood, which would almost certainly add two Democratic senators and one House member. And even statehood advocates tempered their optimism on Monday.

“Our residents are grateful for today’s hearing even though they doubt statehood will come tomorrow,” Ms. Holmes Norton said.