

## Congress hears arguments for, against DC statehood

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DC Mayor Muriel Bowser testified today before the **House Oversight and Reform Committee** at a hearing on the Washington, DC Admission Act (**H.R. 51**), cosponsored by a record 219 Members, the first House hearing on DC statehood in over 25 years.

“It should not matter what our politics are or what yours are—that is beside the point,” Bowser said in prepared testimony. “The point is that to continue to deny statehood to the 702,000 residents of Washington, DC is a failure of the members of this body to uphold their oath of office. I would, likewise, fail to do my duty by not forcefully advancing our statehood petition.”

Rep. Gerry Connolly (D-VA) and Sen. Mark Warner (D-VA) were among those supporting Bowser’s argument.

“Today’s hearing examines whether we are truly a democratic republic,” Connolly said. “Do we as a nation, want to continue to disenfranchise the nearly 702,455 Americans who currently reside in Washington, D.C.? Are we okay with denying our neighbors the same rights as other U.S. citizens because they live on land suitable to a dinner table compromise between Thomas Jefferson and Alexander Hamilton regarding the location of our nation’s capital? Our Founding Fathers denied many Americans the right to vote, but through centuries of work we have reversed their narrow view of the franchise – except here in the nation’s capital.”

“Virginia’s neighbors in D.C. pay their fair share in taxes – it’s only fair they get an equal voice in their government,” said Warner.

The District’s single nonvoting member of Congress, Del. Eleanor Holmes Norton, a Democrat, is the bill’s sponsor, which has the backing of most House Democrats, including House Speaker **Nancy Pelosi**.

Sen. Elizabeth Warren, D-Mass., also a Democratic presidential candidate, **tweeted** in support of the statehood push. “Washington D.C. residents deserve an equal voice in our government – they deserve statehood now,” she wrote.

“There’s nothing that can be done”

Among the opponents of statehood is Roger Pilon, Director of the CATO Institute for Constitutional Studies, who planned to speak at today’s hearing.

Pilon maintains in his **prepared testimony** that it requires a Constitutional amendment to make DC a state, although many Constitutional scholars argue that Congress has the power to adjust state lines.

So what should DC residents do if they want to vote?

“If the vote means that much to you, you’re going to have to move to a real state. The District of Columbia is not and was never meant to be a real state,” Pilon said in a **WUSA9 report**.

#### Statehood arguments listed

Bowser listed the arguments against admitting DC, then provided her answer to them:

“You’re too small,” they say. But we’re bigger by population than two states, bigger than all states but Oklahoma at the time they were admitted to the union. And what’s more, we pay more federal taxes per capita than any state. And we pay more total federal taxes than 22 states.

“You’re badly governed,” they say. In fact, we do a better job of that than most states. We have a budget of \$15.5 billion, which we have balanced 24 times in the last 24 years. And we already do the things that states do: we operate our own schools, we manage state Medicaid programs, and we receive federal block grants. Like states, we issue drivers licenses, license plates, and birth and death certificates. We regulate banks and insurance companies, operate our state-based Affordable Care Act marketplace, and we enforce environmental regulations. For the purposes of thousands of federal laws, we act as a state, and we do it well.

“The Constitution forbids it,” they say. That one is simply false as Constitutional experts have repeatedly proclaimed. Or, “DC can’t be a state because the Constitution requires a federal district.” This is also false. The Constitution sets a maximum size of 10 miles squared for the federal district, but it does not prescribe a minimum size to qualify for the federal district or statehood.

Bowser said the real motive behind many objections is that granting statehood to DC would mean two Democratic Senators. “The fact is, denying American citizens a vote in the body that taxes them goes against the very founding premise of this nation,” she said.

Bowser said the lack of statehood deprives DC residents of more than just full representation in this Congress; it has practical and dire consequences:

- Our men and women register and are subject to the draft, but we have no congressional vote on whether to go to war. Since World War I, Washington, DC has sent nearly 200,000 brave men and women to defend and fight for democracy abroad, and tragically 2,000 of those patriots never made it home.
- The Supreme Court and other federal judges render judgments binding on us, but we lack Senators who can vote on their confirmations.
- We pay federal taxes, but we have no vote on how those taxes are appropriated.
- The prosecutors of our criminal laws are federal officials, not elected by the residents of Washington, DC.
- Worse, we are abused by Congress in ways that would be unconstitutional if we were a state.