



## **Dems launch longshot bid for DC statehood at rare hearing, as Republicans hammer local corruption**

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House Democrats, in their first hearing on D.C. statehood in more than 25 years, on Thursday advocated for the District of Columbia to become the country's 51st state as Republicans raised concerns about recent corruption scandals involving local D.C. officials.

Critics of D.C. statehood have long cited local corruption as one reason to oppose statehood.

Ohio Rep. Jim Jordan, the top Republican on the House Oversight and Reform Committee, said he wanted Thursday's hearing to delve into the ongoing scandal involving D.C. Councilman Jack

Evans.

Evans resigned from his role as the chairman of the Washington Metropolitan Area Transit Authority board this summer after an internal investigation determined that he failed to disclose a profitable conflict of interest. But committee Democrats denied his request, he said.

"Sadly the allegations against Mr. Evans are just the latest in a series of local D.C. political scandals," Jordan said, ticking off several former D.C. city officials embroiled in past scandals. "We cannot and should not ignore these unpleasant facts."

Del. Eleanor Holmes Norton, the sponsor of the D.C. statehood bill and the district's non-voting House representative, pushed back against the argument.

"The allegations against Mr. Evans have nothing to do with D.C. statehood," she said.

The D.C. statehood bill has more than 200 co-sponsors and the support of House Speaker Nancy Pelosi and Majority Leader Steny Hoyer, both Democrats. No Republicans in Congress have signed on to the legislation.

The bill calls for districtwide elections of two senators and one House representative. It says all district territory would be included in the declaration, save for specific exclusions of federal buildings and monuments, such as the White House and the Capitol.

Democrats argued statehood is needed because D.C. residents lack adequate representation in Congress.

"D.C. residents have all of the responsibilities of citizenship but they have no congressional voting rights and only limited self-government," the Democratic committee chairman Rep. Elijah

Cummings, of Maryland, said in a prepared statement, which was read by Holmes Norton at the hearing.

Republicans said the framers of the Constitution intended for the nation's capital to be a federal district.

"This is not what the Founding Fathers intended," Jordan said. "They understood and they carefully crafted the Constitution so that the seat of the federal government would purposely and specifically not be within a state."

If D.C. were to become a state, Democrats would likely gain two new senators and one House representative -- a reality which has played into the political motivations behind supporting or opposing it.

Republican Senate Majority Leader Mitch McConnell, of Kentucky, has vowed to oppose the statehood bill.

Speaking to Fox News' Laura Ingraham this summer, McConnell said Democrats want D.C. statehood so they can get "two new Democratic senators" and said "as long as I'm the majority leader of the Senate, none of that stuff is going anywhere."

Even if that bill passed through Congress, it would almost certainly be challenged in court, with some legal scholars saying it would require a constitutional amendment to be implemented. The 23rd Amendment currently gives D.C. the right to vote for president.

"In order for the district to become the fifty-first state, Congress needs to pass and the states need to ratify an amendment to the Constitution," Jordan said.

D.C. Mayor Muriel E. Bowser and D.C. Council Chairman Phil Mendelson – both Democrats – testified in support of the bill, with Roger Pilon of the libertarian Cato Institute speaking in opposition.

In a controversial move ahead of the hearing, the city of D.C. ordered about 140 American flags bearing an extra star to represent D.C. The flags were displayed by the city along Pennsylvania Avenue. Bowser led a caravan toward the U.S. Capitol on Monday to symbolize the city's fight for congressional voting rights.

The Washington Post reported that mayoral spokeswoman LaToya Foster said the event and flags cost about \$31,200, which came out of the \$1 million that city lawmakers set aside to fight for statehood.

*The Associated Press contributed to this report.*