



Senate Committee Holds 'Historic' DC Statehood Hearing

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The fight to make Washington, D.C., the 51st state went before the United States Senate Tuesday, where it faces long odds without support from Republicans and a key Democrat.

The committee on Homeland Security and Governmental Affairs hosted a hearing Tuesday where speakers including D.C. Mayor Muriel Bowser and Del. Eleanor Holmes Norton advocated for the Washington, D.C. Admission Act, a statehood bill that the U.S. House passed in April.

"There is no legal or constitutional barrier to D.C. statehood," Bowser told the committee.

For the second time in less than a year the U.S. House of Representatives passed a bill to make D.C. the 51st state. News4's Scott MacFarlane reports on the political victory for the District and its residents.

"Obviously the founders designed the capital region to never be a state," said Sen. James Lankford, R-Okla.

University of Michigan Law School Professor Richard Primus and the libertarian Cato Institute's Roger Pilon questioned the constitutionality of admitting D.C. into the union as the 51st state via congressional action, which has been debated among constitutional scholars.

S. 51 would create the new state of Washington, Douglass Commonwealth, with one representative and two senators.

A piece of land including the White House, the U.S. Capitol and the National Mall would remain a federal district.

Democrats advocating to admit D.C. into the union as a state say the about 700,000 residents of the District deserve voting representation in Congress.

“D.C. residents are taxed without representation and cannot consent to the laws under which they, as American citizens, must live,” Norton said in a statement. “[The] hearing will be truly historic.”

“Prayerfully, I will be the last D.C. mayor who needs to sit here demanding on behalf of our 700,000 residents what is our birthright and what is owed to us as taxpayers, and that’s full citizenship and democracy,” Bowser said.

The Senate bill lists 45 co-sponsors but faces an uphill battle to pass that chamber.

Many Republican leaders have come out against the bill, saying voters in the District would elect more Democrats to Congress.

Democratic Sen. Joe Manchin of West Virginia said he opposes making D.C. a state via a congressional bill.

The fate of D.C. statehood now rests with the Senate committee. The Senate last held a D.C. statehood hearing in 2014, when the bill was never brought for a committee vote.

The committee is evenly divided with seven Democrats and seven Republicans. Sen. Kyrsten Sinema, D-Ariz., has not said if she supports statehood for D.C. and did not attend Tuesday’s committee hearing.