



## DC Statehood Gets 1st House of Representatives Hearing in a Generation

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The effort to make Washington, D.C., the country's 51st state went to the House of Representatives on Thursday — for the first time in more than two decades.

The bill considered by lawmakers, H.R. 51: The Washington D.C. Admission Act, would give the city of 700,000 admission into the Union and voting representation in Congress.

A line outside the hearing room stretched around two corners of the Rayburn building, many attendees wearing red and white statehood-themed shirts and buttons.

"We're more than just a city of tourists. We're more than just a city where Congress sits and makes decisions," veteran and D.C. resident Antoinette Scott told News4. "We are a city of people who want the proper representation."

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The Committee on Oversight and Reform, chaired by Maryland Rep. Elijah Cummings, met for more than four hours to discuss on H.R. 51. In Cummings' absence, Del. Eleanor Holmes Norton chaired the meeting.

### Statehood Support Fell Along Partisan Lines

In front of a room packed with statehood supporters and most of D.C.'s city council, Norton opened the hearing with a plea to expand democracy.

"Congress now has an opportunity to live up to the Constitution's goals," Norton said.

Camps for and against statehood fell along partisan lines, with local lawmakers and supportive Democrats making the case that District residents deserve the full benefits of citizenship.

"Yes, it is true that we are more brown and more liberal than some of you," D.C. Mayor Muriel Bowser said. "It should not matter what your politics are."

Rep. Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez, D-New York, later called on the city's diversity — and history as a city where freed slaves settled — to say the D.C.'s lack of congressional representation "is to deny the impact of slavery."

Republican committee members sidestepped accusations that many in the GOP are against statehood because voter rolls lean heavily Democrat. Rep. Jim Jordan, R-Ohio, and Rep. Mark Meadows, R-North Carolina, said that only a Constitutional amendment could make D.C. a state.

"It's just that you've got to bring the vote about the right way," said Roger Pilon, an expert witness and CATO Institute constitutional scholar.

Bowser disagreed, saying the Constitution doesn't bar most of D.C. from becoming a state and that fears that state would have undue influence over the federal government are overblown.

"We have a massive federal government that overpowers all of the surrounding states," she said.

Republicans also challenged local lawmaker's judgment by questioning financial mismanagement in the 1990s and a scandal that has wracked the local government this year.

Jordan and Meadows called for the hearing to end barring an appearance from embattled D.C. Council Member Jack Evans, who was stripped of his positions as Metro Board Chair and city council finance committee chair earlier this year after flaunting his position for personal gain.

Eventually, the hearing proceeded without Evans. D.C. Council Chairman Phil Mendelson and the city's chief financial officer, Jeffrey S. DeWitt, fought back against suggestions that the local government is unfit to govern without federal oversight.

DeWitt pointed to the city's AAA bond rating and pension funding plan as evidence of sound governance and finances.

### **What Does Statehood Mean?**

Statehood supporters want legislative sovereignty and voting representation in Congress. The new state would be called Washington, Douglass Commonwealth.

It wouldn't include every corner of the District: A zone that includes the White House, the Capitol Building, the Supreme Court and major federal monuments would be excluded from the new area.

Under H.R. 51, D.C. would be allowed to elect one Representative and two Senators.

### **Who Supports Statehood?**

In a city that cheekily puts the phrase "taxation without representation" on licence plates, endorsing statehood is de rigeur. The mayor, the city council as a whole and even the fire department urged residents to tune into Thursday's hearing.

City officials spent the week ahead of the hearing rallying support by hosting a veterans parade and hoisting American flags with 51 stars along Pennsylvania Avenue from the White House to the Capitol.

The measure isn't a hard sell for city residents, 80% of whom voted for a statehood referendum in 2016.

The Democrat-controlled House has warmed on statehood since the idea was roundly rejected by Congress in the early 1990s.

Now, twenty Democrat presidential candidates told News4 they support statehood in some capacity, citing reasons including expanding democracy, upholding equal protection and promoting racial justice. H.R. 51 goes to the committee Thursday with more than 200 co-sponsors — all Democrats, according to Del. Norton.

But a recent Gallup poll found 64% of Americans opposed statehood.

With 75% of the city's voters registered as Democrats, statehood hasn't won many supporters among Republicans. If the measure made it to the GOP-controlled Senate, it would have almost no chance to pass.