



## **Norton-Led Dems Back D.C. Statehood**

James Wright

September 19, 2019

Democrats on the House Oversight and Reform Committee, led by D.C. Del. Eleanor Holmes Norton (D), strongly backed the District becoming the 51st state despite Republicans' constant carping at a historic hearing Thursday on Capitol Hill.

Norton, author of The Washington, D.C. Admission Act of 2019, presided over the hearing considering her bill because committee Chairman Elijah Cummings (D-Md.) could not attend. Nevertheless, Norton praised Cummings for holding a hearing on the bill.

“Thank you, in particular, to Chairman Cummings for his continued leadership to make whole the 700,000 Americans living in the District of Columbia,” she said. “The next step is again historic — H.R. 51 will be marked up to move to the House floor.”

Mayor Muriel Bowser (D), Council Chairman Phil Mendelson (D), D.C. Chief Financial Officer Jeff DeWitt, Congressional Research Service attorney Kenneth Thomas, District veteran Kerwin Miller and Roger Pilon, a scholar with the Cato Institute, testified on Norton's bill, with the latter expressing opposition.

In her testimony, Bowser refuted GOP arguments against statehood, noting the District has more people than states Vermont and Wyoming, has balanced its budget for 24 consecutive years and becoming a state wouldn't violate the U.S. Constitution.

“But let's face it: these are bad-faith arguments by people who really oppose statehood because they think it will mean two Democratic senators,” she said.

Rep. Jim Jordan (R-Ohio), the committee's ranking Republican, said the District shouldn't be a state because “it would not be sustainable” financially and the “corruption” within the city government, citing the criminal accusations and investigations against D.C. Council member Jack Evans (D-Ward 2).

Jordan wanted Evans to appear before the committee to explain his legal woes instead of his views on D.C. statehood but Cummings vetoed that request earlier in the week. Evans and Councilwoman Mary Cheh (D-Ward 3) didn't come to the hearing, but their nine colleagues did to support Mendelson's testimony and the bill.

Regarding Evans, Rep. Jamie Raskin (D-Md.) said “one person who gets in trouble should not disenfranchise a community.”

“In the United States, we don't believe in mass punishments,” he said. “The sins of one person should not affect others.”

The Republicans tried to sidetrack the hearing with a parliamentary motion, but Norton managed to thwart it. Throughout the hearing, the GOP griped about the proposed state's boundaries, whether statehood affected the 23rd Amendment that allows District residents to vote for president, how the Trump Hotel downtown would be affected and whether Maryland needs to approve adding the new state.

In a surprise move, House Majority Leader Rep. Steny Hoyer (D-Md.) came to the hearing to support Norton.

"I am a strong supporter of D.C. statehood and Congresswoman Norton's legislation to admit the District as a state," Hoyer said. "It is completely unacceptable that over 700,000 American citizens do not have equal representation in Congress. Congresswoman Norton should have full voting rights in the House of Representatives and District residents are entitled to two U.S. senators."

Reps. Gerald Connolly (D-Va.) said bluntly that opposition to statehood had to do with Republicans' ambivalent attitude toward Blacks.

"The party of Abraham Lincoln has become the party of Stonewall Jackson and Jefferson Davis," Connolly said. When a Republican colleague asked him to take back that statement Connolly shouted, "never."

At a news conference after the hearing, Norton said she thinks her bill will move forward.

"We have 220 sponsors and 217 of those can vote on the bill and you need 218 to pass the House," she said. "We knew what the Republicans were planning to do and we were ready for them. I expect the bill to come to the floor during this congressional session."