



Democrat Senator Carper Introduces Bill to Make D.C. a State

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On Wednesday, Jan. 27, Senator Tom Carper (D-Del.) announced that he had introduced a bill to make the District of Columbia a state. In the U.S. Constitution, the District is described as the “Seat of the Government of the United States.”

“For years, I have fought alongside @EleanorNorton and @MayorBowser to make #DCStatehood a reality and to give the over 700,000 D.C. residents a voice, vote, and full representation in Congress,” Sen. Carper tweeted. “Today, I’m proud to introduce #S51 to make D.C. the 51st state in our Union.”

In a statement on his website, Sen. Carper said, “Our nation’s capital is home to more than 700,000 Americans who, despite our nation’s founding mantra — ‘no taxation without representation’ — pay their share of taxes without full voting representation in either chamber of Congress. In fact, despite paying more in federal taxes per capita than citizens of any of the 50 states, D.C. residents have no say in how those taxes are actually spent.”

“This isn’t a Republican or Democratic issue; it’s an American issue because the lack of fair representation for D.C. residents is clearly inconsistent with the values on which this country was founded,” said the senator.

“It is therefore incumbent upon all of us who enjoy the right and the privilege of full voting rights and representation to take up the cause of our fellow citizens in the District of Columbia,” he added. “We must use our voices to call out this historic injustice and right this wrong. I am hopeful that we can finally come together to do just that this Congress.”

The Democrats have many co-sponsors for the bill, but opposition is expected from Republicans. (Del. Eleanor Holmes Norton (D) introduced a companion bill in the House and it has more than 200 co-sponsors. Both Speaker Pelosi and Majority Leader Steny Hoyer (D-Md.) have said that they will allow a vote on the bill.)

Senator Chris Van Hollen (D-Md.) offered his support, “For far too long, D.C. residents have been denied their right of self-governance and have faced taxation without representation,” he wrote on Twitter.

Vice President Kamala Harris, the tie-breaking vote in the (50-50 split) Senate, supports statehood for D.C., as does President Joe Biden. However, the legislative process for statehood is not easy.

In order to pass the bill, Democrats will need 60 votes in the Senate, which means they would have to persuade 10 Republicans to join them. They also would have to overcome a probable GOP filibuster of the legislation.

Republicans, in general, oppose D.C. statehood and believe it goes against the intent of the Founding Fathers and the 23rd Amendment. As explained by the Constitution Center, “The [23rd] Amendment allows American citizens residing in the District of Columbia to vote for presidential electors, who in turn vote in the Electoral College for President and Vice President. In layperson’s terms, the Amendment means that residents of the District are able to vote for President and Vice President. Prior to the Amendment, citizens residing in the District could not vote for those offices unless they were validly registered to vote in one of the States.”

Cato Institute constitutional scholar Roger Pilon has explained and testified before Congress about the difficulty of making D.C. a state and why it is unconstitutional.

In one of his articles on the subject, Pilon wrote, “Even if Congress had the power to do so, in a deeply divided nation, where a closely divided Senate determines ultimately who sits on a closely divided Supreme Court, few if any Republicans are going to vote to create a most unusual state from a district that has never elected anyone other than a Democrat to citywide office in an open election.”

“When an amendment to afford greater representation for the District was put before the nation in 1978, only sixteen states had signed on by the time the allotted period for ratification had concluded in 1985,” he added. “Outside the Beltway, there is little support for even that kind of change.”