

The State

Should DC become a state? Here are the pros and cons as House passes bill

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House Democrats passed a bill on Friday to make Washington D.C. a state, the first time a statehood bill for the district has been approved.

The bill would create a 51st state called the Washington, Douglass Commonwealth, making the current House representative a voting member and granting DC two senators, CNN reported. The Capitol building, White House, Supreme Court, and other buildings in the National Mall would remain separate as the federal capital.

The bill passed mainly along party lines and had 277 Democratic co-sponsors from the House and 40 co-sponsors in the Senate, The Washington Post reported. Rep. Collin Peterson was the only Democrat to vote against the bill, according to the publication.

The new name would come from first President George Washington and from abolitionist leader Frederick Douglass, according to ABC News.

Calls for statehood from Democrats have increased after Trump deployed law enforcement during the protests against racism and police brutality, according to CNN.

“Not only do we not have voting senators and our congresswoman not have the right to vote, the whims of the federal government can encroach on our even limited autonomy, and it can do so in ways that are threats to all of the American states and all of the American people,” D.C. Mayor Muriel Bowser said, according to CNN. “Let’s fight back against the cries that we’re too liberal or we’re too black or there are too many Democrats. Who we elect is our business, and the business of America is to make sure that each person is represented fully in this House and in the Senate of the United States of America.”

Supporters of statehood point out that D.C.’s population is higher than Wyoming’s and Vermont’s and they still pay federal taxes without having a voice in government, according to Reuters.

People were also angry that Washington, D.C., received \$500 million from the government during the pandemic, as opposed to the \$1.2 billion given to each of the 50 states, according to Reuters.

Proponents of statehood say that race is also a factor.

“It is no coincidence that Washington — affectionately known as Chocolate City — is also the only capital of a democratic nation that denies its residents a vote in the federal legislature. To

think these two truths are not related is to be willfully ignorant of our nation's history," Bowser wrote in a June 14 Washington Post op-ed.

Washington, D.C., became the first majority Black city in 1957 in the country and was nicknamed "Chocolate City," according to The Washingtonian. In 2011, the district's Black population dipped below 50% for the first time, the outlet reported.

According to the U.S. Census Bureau, Washington D.C. is around 46% Black as of July 2019.

THE ARGUMENT AGAINST

Republicans have opposed D.C. statehood for years due to Washington having elected Democratic mayors and the prospect of making it harder to get majorities in the Senate, according to Reuters.

President Donald Trump told The New York Post in May: "DC will never be a state. You mean District of Columbia, a state? Why? So we can have two more Democratic — Democrat senators and five more congressmen? No thank you. That'll never happen."

The Office of Management and Budget (OMB) said that the bill is "unconstitutional" because it violates the 23rd Amendment, which grants D.C. three Electoral College votes, The Hill reported. The OMB said that Trump's advisers will recommend that he veto the bill if it passes.

The OMB said the 23rd Amendment "would give the tiny population of individuals living within those borders the same voting power in the Electoral College as the smallest state in the country," according to The Hill.

After House Democrats planned to hold a hearing on D.C. statehood in 2019, Senate Majority Leader Mitch McConnell, Republican senator of Kentucky, said: "This is full-bore socialism on the march in the House," according to The Washington Post. "And yeah, as long as I'm the majority leader of the Senate, none of that stuff is going anywhere."

In 2016, D.C. residents voted in favor of statehood, according to NPR.

But some locals still opposed the measure, saying it would be expensive, unconstitutional, and won't pass in Congress anyway.

Patrick Mara, the executive director of the D.C. GOP, said Republicans are concerned about the expenses of running D.C. as a state and funding for prisons and courts, which the federal government currently pays for, WAMU reported. "Certainly, it's billions of dollars," he told the station.

Roger Pilon of the Cato Institute said that statehood is a "non-starter" because Congress doesn't have the power to create a 51st state, according to WAMU. Creating a state would also need Maryland, which gave up land to D.C., to agree to it.

Mara said D.C. statehood was unlikely to pass due to congressional Republicans. "It's very unlikely that D.C. would become a state without any elected Republicans on the Council or in other positions," according to WAMU.