

The Washington Post

Senate committee to hold D.C. statehood hearing on June 22; Lieberman to speak

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June 15, 2021

Former senator Joseph I. Lieberman, a political independent from Connecticut known for building relationships with members of both parties, will speak at a June 22 Senate committee hearing in support of D.C. statehood — offering a moderate voice as bitter partisanship overshadows the debate.

Lieberman will join Del. Eleanor Holmes Norton (D), the District's nonvoting delegate in the House, in providing opening remarks. And D.C. Mayor Muriel E. Bowser (D) and a host of legal and civil rights experts will serve as witnesses, Sen. Gary Peters (D-Mich.), chairman of the Senate Committee on Homeland Security and Governmental Affairs, announced Tuesday.

Statehood advocates are hoping to break new ground with a favorable vote out of committee, even though odds are steep that the Washington, D.C. Admission Act can clear the Senate filibuster to pass the full chamber.

Odds are also somewhat tough on the evenly divided committee: Sen. Kyrsten Sinema (D-Ariz.), one of seven Democrats on the panel, has not revealed her position on the legislation.

Lieberman, then, is coming in as a relief pitcher of sorts for Democrats, returning to a address the committee he once chaired. The former four-term lawmaker and vice-presidential candidate supported voting rights for D.C. while in the Senate and introduced a D.C. statehood bill when he was on his way out.

Sen. Thomas R. Carper (D-Del.), the Senate sponsor of this year's bill, has sought advice from Lieberman about how to push the bill forward, describing him as the ideal independent voice to present statehood as a civil rights issue without partisan baggage.

Republicans have repeatedly framed D.C. statehood as a Democratic "power grab" intended to solidify a Democratic majority in the Senate and facilitate a "radical" liberal agenda.

Democrats frame the issue as a matter of basic civil and voting rights for a plurality Black city of nearly 700,000 people.

D.C. Mayor Muriel E. Bowser said the support of President Biden and Senate Majority Leader Chuck Schumer makes the District's push for statehood different this time around. "As long as

the Senate and the president is pushing for the passage of D.C. statehood, we're going to follow their lead and rely on them and their strategy to get big things done in the Senate." (Washington Post Live)

"I know a lot of people think this is just an effort to add a couple Democratic senators, but people who know Joe Lieberman remember Joe Lieberman — he was not a partisan Democrat," Carper said in an interview just before the statehood bill passed the House. "I don't think he ever got up in the morning thinking, how can we pass a D.C. statehood bill and elect a couple more Democratic senators? That was just not his motivation."

D.C. statehood legislation last got a Senate committee hearing in 2014, not long after Lieberman left office. But the committee did not hold a vote on the bill.

Democrats want to make more headway in the Senate this year after obtaining narrow control of the evenly divided chamber. Senate Majority Leader Charles E. Schumer (D-N.Y.) has said he will try to find a way to advance the bill, which passed the House for the second year in a row in April, with no GOP support.

But Sen. Joe Manchin III (D-W.Va.) scuttled much of the optimism among statehood advocates when he revealed earlier this spring he did not support D.C. statehood legislation. Still, Carper said Tuesday the record number of Senate co-sponsors made him "more confident than ever that we can make D.C. statehood a reality this Congress."

The other witnesses on June 22 will include Richard Primus, a professor at the University of Michigan Law School; Marc Morial, president and chief executive of the National Urban League; Derek T. Muller, a professor at the University of Iowa College of Law; and Roger Pilon of the Cato Institute, who has long argued that D.C. statehood is unconstitutional.