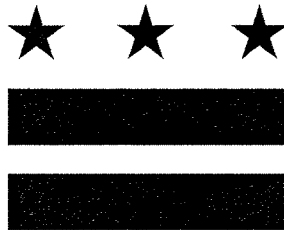


**H.R. 733: THE DISTRICT OF COLUMBIA
BUDGET AUTONOMY ACT OF 2007**

**H.R. 1054: THE DISTRICT OF COLUMBIA
LEGISLATIVE AUTONOMY ACT OF 2007**

**UNITED STATES HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES
COMMITTEE ON OVERSIGHT AND GOVERNMENT REFORM
SUBCOMMITTEE ON FEDERAL WORKFORCE, POSTAL SERVICE
AND THE DISTRICT OF COLUMBIA**

**THE HONORABLE DANNY K. DAVIS, CHAIRMAN
THE HONORABLE KENNY MARCHANT, RANKING MINORITY MEMBER**



**TESTIMONY OF ADRIAN M. FENTY
MAYOR
DISTRICT OF COLUMBIA**

THURSDAY, JUNE 7, 2007

Mr. Chairman, Ranking Member Marchant and distinguished committee members, it is my pleasure to be here today to speak to you about H.R. 733, the District of Columbia Budget Autonomy Act and H.R. 1054, the District of Columbia Legislative Autonomy Act. My name is Adrian Fenty, and I took office this past January as the fifth elected Mayor of the District of Columbia.

I plan to say a few words about why budget and legislative autonomy are crucial to the future of the government I lead. But first, Mr. Chairman, I'd like to thank you for your partnership and the work that you and the other members have done on the District's behalf.

I should also acknowledge the role of the United States Constitution in framing the relationship between the District and Congress. Everyone in this room is well aware that, under the District Clause, Congress reserves exclusive legislative authority "in all cases whatsoever." Congresswoman Norton's proposals for budgetary and legislative autonomy do nothing to diminish this constitutional authority. They simply reinterpret this authority to give the District's duly-elected government more autonomy in managing its own affairs, so that Members of Congress may remain focused on issues of national importance.

Budgetary Autonomy

In the 34 years since the District of Columbia has had a locally-elected government, that government has evolved and grown. First as Chief Financial Officer and then in 8 years as Mayor, my predecessor Anthony Williams put the District's fiscal house in order. His successor as CFO, Natwar Gandhi, has continued this work. You'll hear from Dr. Gandhi shortly.

We have come a long way since the Congressionally-mandated Control Board in the 1990s. A long way since the District Government couldn't pay its bills or pick up its garbage. Indeed, we are at this very moment preparing to send the President our 12th consecutive balanced budget. Our bonds are now A+ and A1 at all three rating agencies for the first time in District history, to the envy of most other major cities. And even though the Control Board era is over, many of its controls are permanently enshrined in our laws.

In short, we're running a tight ship. If Congress has in the past intervened to restrict the powers of the locally-elected government in times of financial distress, we think then that Congress should support our present-day tradition of fiscal discipline, by granting the enhanced budget autonomy we have earned.

At the same time, we remain unique among cities and states in this country in having our local property, sales and income taxes subject to the federal appropriations process. This means our agencies must plan their budgets almost a year in advance. It means we must rely on continuing resolutions to fund our operations as we wait an average of 2-1/2 extra months for Congress to approve our budget. And it means we need acts of Congress to reallocate funds mid-year to meet the changing needs of our residents.

At the same time, neither Congress nor the White House typically makes any change to the Local Funds expenditures in our budget.

For all of these reasons, we are simply asking for the ability to spend locally collected dollars without Congressional approval. This will mean better, more efficient government for my constituents, and less work for the federal staff who must review our budgets every year.

Legislative Autonomy

The Constitution declares Congress to be the supreme legislative authority for the District of Columbia. Depending on the nature of the bill in question, we must wait 30 or 60 legislative days for passive Congressional approval before our legislation becomes law. This makes me the only chief executive of a city or state in this country for whom the act of signing legislation does not make the legislative final.

It also means the Council of the District of Columbia passes, and I sign, hundreds of bills every year that must await Congressional approval. The vast and overwhelming majority of these bills are of no interest to Congress whatsoever.

I can think of no better example than alley closings.

Under the laws of the District of Columbia, legislative action is required to close an alley. Once the change in law becomes final, our surveyors, engineers and sign crews can get to work. But, as with all of our legislation, alley closing bills must go through the Congressional review process. This leaves residents to wonder when the work will begin - based on a schedule we do not control - and puts Congress in charge of a hyper-local issue that could hardly be considered a matter of national interest.

It's hard to imagine a scenario where this body or the Senate would object to the District closing one of its alleys. Nonetheless, Congress would retain that ability even after granting us legislative autonomy. The difference is that the bill would become law immediately upon my signature and could later be overturned by Congress.

To be sure, most of our legislation is of more substance than alley closings. But, as I mentioned in my discussion of our budget, it is extremely rare that Congress intervenes. To properly acknowledge that reality would be to put the District Government in the driver's seat and hand us the keys, while keeping your Constitutional mandate to watch how well we're driving.

I urge you to take action on these two pieces of important legislation as soon as possible.

Thank you again for the opportunity to testify today. I'm happy to answer any questions.

