

Testimony

By

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In Support of

H.R. 733, the District of Columbia Budget Autonomy Act of 2007

And

H.R. 1054, the District of Columbia Legislative Autonomy Act of 2007

Before the

Subcommittee on Federal Workforce, Postal Service and the
District of Columbia

The Honorable Danny K. Davis, Chairman

June 7, 2007

Rayburn House Office Building, Room 2247

Good afternoon Chairman Davis and members of the Subcommittee on the Federal Workforce, Postal Service and the District of Columbia. For the record my name is Ted Trabue, and I am the Executive Director of the D.C. Economic Empowerment Coalition. My organization is dedicated to supporting the extension of economic opportunity to citizens of the District of Columbia.

Thank you for affording me the opportunity to testify in support of H.R. 733, the District of Columbia Budget Autonomy Act of 2007 and H.R. 1054, the District of Columbia Legislative Autonomy Act of 2007.

I have worked in or around the District's legislative process for almost the past three decades. In the late 70's, shortly after the enactment of Home Rule, I worked for the House District Committee which served in a similar capacity as the current Committee on Oversight and Government Reform. I also served as the Chief Staff to Councilmember Linda Cropp and as Vice President of Government Affairs for PEPCO.

Throughout my career I have personally witnessed the effect that the Congressional oversight role has had on our city and its citizens. And in my view, neither Congress nor the District Government benefit under the current structure. At a minimum, Congressional oversight adds a high degree of uncertainty to the District's legislative and budgetary process. This leaves me to wonder why a system should continue that adds little substantive value to either the policymaker or to the constituent.

H.R. 733 seeks to amend the District's Home Rule Charter, which currently requires Congressional approval of the District's now \$9 Billion budget. A practical consequence of this mandate is that the District must schedule its budgetary process to accommodate that of Congress. In order to do so, the District must begin formulating its budget many months prior to when it would with budget autonomy. As a consequence of this earlier starting time, the revenue and expenditure projections on which the budget is based must be made far in advance of implementation. Therefore, these projections are likely to be less accurate than they would be if we were making them closer to the time at which we were enacting the budget. As the months pass and more accurate budget projections become available, the District's leaders are forced to take a considerable amount of time to refine the budget through the supplemental budget process.

Additionally, Congressional delays in approving the District budget can cause significant problems in the procurement and contracting areas. For example, if a contractor's payment is delayed because the District is not authorized to expend funds, the contractor may discontinue its service to the District. Delays in payments have also made some contractors reluctant to do business with the District. When the District is not able to take advantage of a robust competitive bidding process, the District and therefore its taxpayers are forced to spend more money for goods and services. Higher prices spent in some areas can result in shortfalls in other areas.

H.R. 1054 seeks to amend the District of Columbia Home Rule Charter and eliminate Congressional review of newly-passed District laws. The delays and uncertainty that are caused by the Congressional review process have caused, at a minimum, the abuse of the Council's emergency legislative powers. As you clearly know, the Congressional review period for new legislation can add one and a half to two and a half months to the legislative process. The Council (and Executive branch), feeling that it needs to move forward quickly with initiatives, passes emergency legislation so that it can quickly enact reforms. Often, emergency legislation is passed without giving citizens and businesses the opportunity to provide input through the hearing process. In my view, if the Council believed that legislation would be enacted as soon as the mayor signed it into law, it would limit its use of emergency legislation and allow more input from citizens.

Moreover, Congress would not be harmed by the elimination of the Congressional review process. The Council's legislative process includes a bill's introduction, committee assignment, hearing, mark-up, reading in the Committee of the Whole and two readings at a Council Legislative Meeting. Each step maintains its procedural and notification requirements. Combined, the Congress has a minimum of at least 10 weeks to review and comment on any legislation that it may deem to be of interest. And, as with any other state legislature, Congress may affirmatively act to amend or overturn an objectionable law.

In conclusion, I would like to thank the Committee for holding this hearing on these important pieces of legislation and for affording me the time to present my views. As a fourth generation Washingtonian and a lifelong resident of the District of Columbia, I have watched this government grow and mature. After 30 years of Congressional oversight, I believe that it is time to take off the training wheels and let the District Government exercise the right that it has earned – to legislate and enact budgets independent of Federal oversight.

Thank you. I am available for any questions that you or other members of the Committee may have.