



United States Senate
Committee on Homeland Security and Governmental Affairs
Chairman Joseph I. Lieberman, ID-Conn.

**“Equal Representation in Congress:
Providing Voting Rights to the District of Columbia.”**
May 15, 2007
Senator Joseph I. Lieberman

Good morning and welcome to our hearing today. We gather here to discuss a matter of injustice that affects almost 600,000 American citizens and that is a tear in the fabric of our democracy. I’m talking, of course, about the fact that the citizens of the District of Columbia lack voting representation in Congress.

In fact, America is the only democracy in the world that denies the citizens of its capital city democracy’s most essential right - representation in the national legislature. That’s an embarrassment.

The people of this city have waited too long for that right. But I believe the tide is now changing and that this is the year we can and will bestow upon the citizens of the District the civic entitlement that every other federal tax-paying American citizen enjoys, no matter where he or she lives.

I want to thank, in particular, my good friends Senators Hatch and Bennett for adding to the possibility of success this year with their support for this effort. Earlier this month, the three of us introduced legislation, S. 1257, which would provide the District of Columbia with a voting representative in the House and also give the state of Utah the fourth congressional seat it deserves, based on the 2000 census.

Let me also thank two people whose drive has brought us to where are today - D.C. Delegate Eleanor Holmes Norton and Congressman Tom Davis, who worked so cooperatively in the House to pass a similar bill in April by a vote of 241-177.

Notwithstanding the remarkable service of Congresswoman Norton, the citizens of the District of Columbia deserve more than a non-voting delegate in the House. They deserve a representative who can vote in committee, as Delegate Norton now does, and on the House floor, which she cannot.

I would also like to welcome Mayor Fenty, whose first few months on the job have been marked by a strong advocacy for voting rights in Congress for the people he serves.

The people of D.C. have been the direct target of terrorist attacks and yet they have no voting power over how the federal government provides homeland security. They have given their lives to protect our country in foreign wars but have no say in our foreign policy. They pay taxes, like every other American. In fact, they pay more: Per capita, district residents have the second-highest federal tax obligation. Yet they have no voice in how high those taxes will be or how they will be spent.

The District is also the only jurisdiction in the country that must seek congressional approval- through the appropriations process- before spending locally-generated tax dollars. So when Congress fails to pass appropriations bills before the beginning of the fiscal year, the District’s budget is essentially frozen. And yet D.C. has no say in that appropriations process.

Giving the residents of D.C. voting representation in the House is not only the right and just thing to do; it has popular support. A 2005 poll by KRC Research found that 82 percent of the nation believes it is time to end centuries of bias against the District.

Let us not waste this moment. The legislation introduced in both the House and the Senate represents an expression of fairness and inclusivity and an example of what we can do if we work across party lines.

I look forward to hearing today’s testimony from our distinguished witnesses. Senator Collins?

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