

Congress of the United States

House of Representatives

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Opening Statement Chairwoman Carolyn B. Maloney Markup on The Washington, D.C. Admission Act February 11, 2020

Good morning, and welcome to all of our distinguished guests. Today is an historic day for our country—and our democracy. For the first time in a generation, we will vote on whether hundreds of thousands of American citizens will finally have their voices counted in Congress.

Today, we will vote on whether to honor the most fundamental principles of this nation, principles on which a Revolution was launched, principles for which countless patriots gave their lives, and principles that our Founders enshrined in the Declaration of Independence—no taxation without representation and consent of the governed.

Today, we will vote on whether to allow the people of the District of Columbia to do what they overwhelmingly want to do—join in this great Union as the 51st State of the United States of America. I can think of no more honorable or patriotic endeavor than taking up this legislation today to give the people of the District the same rights enjoyed by hundreds of millions of other Americans across our country.

The United States is a democracy, but its capital is not. The United States is the only democratic country that denies both voting rights in the national legislature and local self-government to the people of its capital. Ladies and gentlemen, as simply as I can say it, that is wrong. It violates everything we stand for as Americans.

The District pays more in federal taxes than 22 states, and more per capita than any state. Think about that. It pays more than nearly half the states in this country. Yet D.C. residents have no vote in Congress. That is wrong.

The District has a larger population than two states, and it has a higher per capita personal income and gross domestic product than any state—any state. Yet, D.C. residents cannot consent to the federal laws that govern them. That is wrong.

The District's annual budget is bigger than 12 state budgets, and its bond rating is better than 35 states. Yet, D.C. residents cannot give final consent to their own laws. That is wrong.

The people of the District have been fighting for equal rights for more than 200 years. In 2016, an overwhelming 86 percent of D.C. residents voted for statehood. They exercised their right to petition Congress to remedy this unfairness, and now we have an obligation to do so.

I am very proud to be an original cosponsor of this bill, which now has a record 223 cosponsors. This landmark legislation is strongly supported by our Democratic colleagues from Virginia and Maryland, including the Majority Leader, Mr. Hoyer, who has committed to bringing this legislation to the floor, where I believe it will pass for the first time in history.

Unfortunately, so far, Republicans have opposed our efforts. And they have offered several arguments.

They argue that D.C. is too corrupt to govern itself. They cite the actions of a few former D.C. elected officials, and they try to tar the entire population with their wrongs. At the same time, they fail to mention criminal convictions of corrupt officials in their own states. And they omit the recent criminal convictions of members of their caucus. All jurisdictions have an obligation to ensure that their officials serve the interests of their people. That obligation is no different in the District than in Ohio, North Carolina, or any other state.

Their second argument is more ominous. They would rather deny voting rights and self-government for hundreds of thousands of American citizens than even consider the possibility that the two Senators from the new State could be Democrats. Think about this argument. They are willing to violate the core principles of our democracy merely because the new Senators might be from a different political party.

This argument is anti-democratic and anti-American. The questions for Republicans are these: Do you truly believe in no taxation without representation? Do you truly believe in states' rights? Do you truly believe that the federal government should stay out of local affairs?

In 2007, Mike Pence, our current Vice President and our former colleague in the House of Representatives, said this:

“The fact that more than half a million Americans living in the District of Columbia are denied a single voting representative in Congress is clearly a historic wrong. The single overarching principle of the American founding was that laws should be based upon the consent of the governed. The first generation of Americans threw tea in Boston Harbor because they were denied a voting representative in the national legislature in England. Given their commitment to representative democracy, it is inconceivable to me that our Founders would have been willing to accept the denial of representation to so great a throng of Americans in perpetuity.”

Are these just words? Or do they mean something? Because if we truly believe these words, we need to do more than just say them. We need to do more than just repeat them. We must act on them. We must make them a reality. And that is exactly what we hope to do today.

Finally, before I close, I want to commend Congresswoman Eleanor Holmes Norton. She has been tireless, and she has been compelling. She is author not only of this legislation, but of this moment in our history. We thank her for her dedication and her service.

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