

Statement of Congressman Gerald E. Connolly (VA-11)
Committee on Oversight and Accountability
Overdue Oversight of the Capital City: Part II
Tuesday, May 16, 2023

As a former local government official, having served on the Fairfax County Board of Supervisors for 14 years, including five as chairman, I bring an informed and experienced municipal government perspective to the discussion of home rule. Throughout my career, I have consistently advocated for greater District autonomy, and I strongly believe that Congress's actions have had a negative impact on both the District and its residents. The lack of self-governance in D.C. not only affects the local community but also has wider implications for the entire National Capital Region. This issue is particularly important for the thousands of my constituents who are civil servants and work in the District. It is crucial that Congress refrains from interfering in matters of local self-governance and respects the voices of the 700,000 fellow Americans who call Washington, D.C. their home. I hope the irony of this situation is not lost on those who support the conservative principles of limited government and states' rights. Let me remind my colleagues of the words of fellow Virginian James Madison from the Federalist Papers, Number 43. He stated that the residents of this federal District "will have had their voice in the election of the government which is to exercise authority over them; as a municipal legislature for local purposes." It is clear he believed that D.C. authorities must remain accountable to its constituents through democratic election.

Since the beginning of our own nation's struggle for independence, self-representation has been a fundamental principle of our country's governmental system. Today, D.C. has proven both its effective capability to govern its own affairs and its fulfillment of all the historical requirements set by Congress for attaining statehood. In previous considerations, Congress has assessed three factors to determine a territory's suitability for joining the Union. First, it examines whether the residents are committed to self-governance. Second, it evaluates whether the residents support statehood. Third, it considers whether the proposed state possesses adequate resources and population to sustain itself and contribute to the federal government's costs. Let's explore these factors in relation to Washington, D.C. First and foremost, District residents have already displayed their commitment to achieving statehood. In the 2016 Washington, D.C. statehood referendum, 478,688 residents cast their votes, nearly matching the turnout rate of the 2016 Presidential election. This vote demonstrates the significance of the statehood question in the minds of D.C. residents. Secondly, the referendum revealed that over 85% of residents voted in favor of statehood, highlighting the unwavering support of voters towards achieving this goal. Third, the District's population surpasses that of two states, Vermont and Wyoming, and its annual budget of \$19.7 billion exceeds that of 19 other state governments. Moreover, D.C. residents contribute more in taxes to the federal government than 22 other states, including North Dakota, New Mexico, and Vermont, which are all represented on this very Committee. It is evident that Washington, D.C. not only fulfills the requirements but exceeds them in terms of resources and population to sustain both itself and the federal government.

Protecting voters' rights and public safety are fundamental functions entrusted to local authorities. Yet these issues are the very subject of Republicans' latest effort to force the will of Congress on the duly elected local representatives of the District of Columbia. The Disapproving the action of the District of Columbia Council in approving the Local Resident Voting Rights Amendment Act of 2022 (H.J.Res.24); the Disapproving the action of the District of Columbia Council in approving the Revised Criminal Code Act of 2022 (H.J.Res.26); and the Disapproving the action of the District of Columbia Council in approving the Comprehensive Policing and Justice Reform Amendment Act of 2022 (H.J. Res. 42); are all meant to score cheap political points at the expense of D.C. and its residents. So why do Republicans support "No taxation without representation," except for those that live within D.C.? The answer is that Republicans love to use D.C., a city with a nearly 50 percent Black population, as a politically expedient punching bag regardless of how hypocritical it makes them look. Today's latest attempt to intrude upon the District's local self-governance will do nothing to raise the voices of residents or make their communities safer.

Congressional Republicans are hardly the example to D.C. government they think they are. Local governments do not threaten to send their local economies off a cliff and imperil their own credit ratings as Republicans are doing with the federal debt ceiling looming. Local governments pass budgets, honor their debts, and guard closely their ability to finance necessary community investments. Standing over the shoulder of the D.C. government is just Congressional Republicans' latest outlet for their clinical case of projection. They cannot govern, so they are attacking those who do.