

Testimony of
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United States Senator
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Chairman Cummings and members of the Committee, thank you for allowing me to submit testimony in support of HR 51, the Washington, DC Admission Act.

This critical legislation, which would restore the rights of the citizens of our nation's capital, taken away by Congress in 1801, is long overdue. For more than 200 years, Washingtonians have been denied their basic rights of citizenship, and this is unacceptable. In spite of this, they've never shirked a single responsibility of democracy. They have always been exemplary citizens – paying taxes, serving in our military, taking on every obligation and receiving only partial compensation in return.

In the 116th Congress, I know that there are many proud veterans, who know what it means to risk life and limb in defense of our country. But imagine what it was like to serve in a world war knowing that you did not even have the right to vote for president. I am proud to represent people with this kind of character. Proud to call myself a Washingtonian, knowing that DC residents have always cared more about America than their own self interests.

Our Founding Fathers established this great nation through a sacred covenant with the people based on freedom, liberty and mutual obligation. Although we have faithfully fulfilled our end of the bargain, our government has consistently failed in its responsibility to reciprocate and has defaulted on the solemn pledge of citizenship that forms the basis of all legitimate governments. One nation, indivisible – not separate, but equal. That's the promise of democracy that we have been denied for 218 years. Once the contract has been breached, all that flows from it is tainted and the covenant that binds us is diminished.

We're tired of hearing irrelevant excuses – too small, never meant to be, a violation of the Constitution. Insults like "move if you don't like it," "stop whining," "go back to where you came" only perpetuate the misconception that we expect to be *given* something rather than *reclaiming* that which is ours. The Framers may have given the power to Congress but, as Thomas Jefferson proclaimed, the rights were given us by God.

I say enough. We have earned our citizenship – paid with our sacrifices, our money, our service to America and the time has come to right a wrong which violates every principle that Americans hold dear. Make no mistake – only statehood makes us whole. Any other solution glosses over the inherit inequity in our subjugation and perpetuates our second-class citizenship.

Only statehood makes us equal. Only statehood resolves the injustice that has resulted in us becoming colonists rather than citizens. Passing HR 51 would be the fulfillment of an indenture as old as America itself. It would finally right a wrong that has perpetuated a political anachronism, which outlived its usefulness more than 100 years ago.

We are asking for nothing more than the restoration of our rights. No favors, no special treatment, no dispensation – only the justice of equality that democracy demands. Former President Barack Obama said, “I’m for it.” Eighty percent of Americans, in a nation-wide poll, said they support it and more than 80 percent of DC voters said we want it. Now is the time to finally push to make it happen. We are the **ONLY** representative democracy in the world that denies full citizenship to the residents of its capital city and this terrible injustice must end.

As a child, I stood up every morning, put my hand over my heart and said “...with liberty and justice for all.” I believed it then, and I believe it now. And I call upon the members of this Committee, and in both houses, to make it true and show the same courage that the residents of the District have always exemplified. Not asking what’s in this legislation for me, but rather, what’s in it for our democracy.

Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. said injustice anywhere, is a threat to justice everywhere, and this injustice can no longer stand. Our democracy can no longer tolerate it. Our government can no longer support it. And the way to abolish it is statehood.

The partisan politics that has characterized this struggle must end. We must rise above the rancor, divisiveness and partisan politics and act selflessly to pass this legislation and continue to form a more perfect Union.

This should not be about Republicans or Democrats. This is about 702,000 citizens and 30,000 veterans who have sacrificed for our freedom and billions in federal taxes paid by people who have no say in their own governance. This is about taxation without representation. This is about tyranny, and the beginning of the end of it must start here in “the People’s House.”

Today, I wear a button that proclaims that “**I Am A Citizen**.” It is fashioned after the signs carried by protesters in the infamous 1968 Memphis Sanitation Workers’ Strike. The strikers carried placards emblazoned with the slogan “**I Am A Man**” to make the point that, as men, democracy demanded that they be treated with basic civility and human rights. I make the same point to this Committee. I am a citizen and ask for nothing more – for me and my constituents – than to be treated as one.

Thank you for any consideration that you give my testimony, and please help pass HR 51 and fulfill the promise of democracy for the people of your nation’s capital. Let’s truly make America the land of “liberty and justice for all.”