



Testimony of the Federal City Alumnae and Washington DC Alumnae Chapters
Delta Sigma Theta Sorority, Incorporated
In Favor of H.R. 51, the Washington D.C. Admission Act

Introduction

I am Antoinette Harper, and this testimony is on behalf of the nearly 1000 members of the Federal City Alumnae Chapter and Washington DC Alumnae Chapter of Delta Sigma Theta Sorority, Inc. For over 100 years the members of these Delta Sigma Theta Sorority Chapters have faithfully served the residents of Washington, D.C. We support the passage of H.R. 51, the Washington, D.C. Admission Act, for the following reasons.

First, taxation without representation is morally and ethically wrong. In 1773, American colonists calling themselves “the Sons of Liberty” revolted against the British government because they reportedly believed that any tax was a violation of their right not to be taxed by a government in which they lacked representation; hence, “No taxation without representation.”¹

The colonists argued that they should not be held accountable for taxes which were decided upon in England, where no one represented the interests of the American Colonists.² This was one of the core principles of our “Founding Fathers” in their quest to establish this great nation that we call the United States of America. Yet, 246 years later, the over 693,972 (and counting) U.S. citizens living in the District of Columbia (D.C.), have no representation in the Senate and only

one non-voting Delegate in the House of Representatives. Decisions such as paying taxes and going to war are made for D.C. residents who have no real voice in the decision-making process. It is not just the tax dollars, but the bodies of D.C. residents that are sacrificed in wars without any representation in the government body making that decision. It is morally and ethically right to give D.C. residents fair and equitable representation.

Second, absent the protections afforded by statehood, the residents of the District of Columbia are at the mercy of Congress. For example, in June 2016, California passed unprecedented gun control laws. The Council of the District of Columbia has, on several occasions, passed similar laws. Every time D.C. attempts to pass gun control laws, the city is faced with opposition from Congress. The very thought that Congress would interfere with California on basic laws that were written, voted on, and passed by its electorate sounds preposterous.

Can you imagine the residents of New York being told that they were prohibited from putting tolls on any of the many bridges and tunnels that enter New York because Representatives from Pennsylvania or New Jersey would not allow it? Imagine that Representatives from other states actively lobby against the rights of people living in New York because the law would be an imposition on their residents that work in New York. To complicate the hypothetical, imagine that there was no member of Congress from New York to speak on behalf New Yorkers. That scenario is not hypothetical for D.C. residents. Congressional representatives from other states actively lobby for their constituents while D.C. residents are denied a champion to vote on their behalf on a regular basis. It is inherently wrong to deny the tax paying United States citizens the rights and privileges every other citizen enjoys just because the citizens live in the District of Columbia.

It is worth noting that the non-voting delegate for D.C. has limited rights similar to those of representatives in U.S. territories. However, those rights are subject to the political control of Congress. Furthermore, and perhaps most importantly, residents of the U.S. territories do not pay federal taxes unless under certain conditions.³

Third, passage of H.R. 51 is within the bounds of the U.S. Constitution. The opponents of D.C. Statehood often argue that statehood is prohibited by the U.S. Constitution. That argument is incorrect. Article I, Section 8, Clause 17 gives Congress the right

[t]o exercise exclusive Legislation in all Cases whatsoever, over such District (*not exceeding ten Miles square*) [emphasis added] as may, by Cession of particular States, and the Acceptance of Congress, become the Seat of the Government of the United States, and to exercise like Authority over all Places purchased by the Consent of the Legislature of the State in which the Same shall be, for the Erection of Forts, Magazines, Arsenals, dock-Yards and other needful Buildings.

The operative words are “not exceeding ten miles square.” H.R. 51 provides for a carve out of the federal enclave containing the buildings that comprise the “Seat of Government,” while giving the D.C. residents all the rights afforded to the residents of the 50 States. The amount of “ten miles square” was already reduced when the residents of the area that is now Arlington, Virginia, determined that the retrocession to Virginia was the only way to get back their right to Congressional representation and to ensure their rights to own slaves.

The rationale for a federal seat of government unbound to a specific state is neither valid nor rational today. Those in favor of denying the rights of D.C. residents often mention the unfortunate incident of 1783 in Philadelphia, where a band of Revolutionary War soldiers were upset about compensation and stormed Congress. During that time, the nascent federal government, less than 10 years old, was incapable of protecting itself and was reliant upon the

state of Pennsylvania, founded over one hundred years earlier, in 1681. Today, Congress has its own militia in the form of the U.S. Capitol Police and other federal jurisdiction law enforcement (such as the Park Police) and all branches of the federal military, as well as the Coast Guard. The federal government is not in need of protection by or from the residents of D.C. In fact, it is D.C. residents that need protection from Congress in an effort to stop the deprivation of rights. That said, H.R. 51 actually provides protection for Congress by excluding the Federal enclave of buildings, thereby not subjecting it to the control of a state.

Lastly, alternative proposed arrangements, such as retrocession to Maryland, and granting D.C. territorial status are not reasonable and are typically rooted in racist politics. The option of retrocession is opposed by a majority of both D.C. and Maryland residents. The residents of D.C. have developed a brand of culture that is unique to D.C. The area has functioned as its own “quasi-state” for centuries and would change the political and cultural landscape of Maryland. The argument to treat D.C. as a territory and not charge the residents federal taxes, while attractive, is unrealistic. It is highly unlikely that the Federal Government would willingly give up the revenue that D.C. residents generate. In 2014, D.C. residents paid the Federal Government \$26.4 billion in taxes and received \$3.5 billion in return.⁴

Then, there are some critics that have patronizingly suggested that the residents of D.C. should “just move.” In comparison, there are millions of people who live in “Tornado Alley” where tornadoes are a way of life. Their homes have been destroyed multiple times and yet they continue to rebuild. Their resiliency is celebrated. However, aside from being patronizing, telling District residents to “just move” ignores the fact that generations of people have made their home, here, in Washington, D.C. And with the indomitable spirit of true Americans, when a problem is presented, we should face it head on and fix it.

The reality is that the continued disenfranchisement of the District's residents is rooted in racism and politics. Until recently, D.C. residents were majority black and labeled as "liberal." To some, the very likelihood of African-American liberals being repeatedly elected to Congress is unfathomable.

For all the reasons stated, the Washington DC Alumnae Chapter and the Federal City Alumnae Chapter urge Congress to vote in favor of H.R. 51, the Washington, D.C. Admission Act.

¹ John C. Miller, *Origins of the American Revolution* (Boston 1943) p. 74

² The Colonists began to protest taxes imposed by English Parliament because there was no representative from the colonies. Notable examples of such tax protests include, "The Stamp Act," of 1765, which imposed a tax on all printed materials, and the "Tea Act" of 1773, which imposed a tax on Tea. See <http://www.ushistory.org/declaration/related/stampact.html> and <http://www.ushistory.org/us/9f.asp>.

³ According to the IRS website, the governments of Puerto Rico, U.S. Virgin Islands, Guam, American Samoa, and The Commonwealth of the Northern Mariana Islands, impose their own taxes for income earned in their own territory. However, income earned by territorial residents from other nations, including the United States, may be subject to U.S. Federal income tax. See generally "Persons Employed in a US Possession" (<https://www.irs.gov/individuals/international-taxpayers/persons-employed-in-us-possession>)

⁴ Rachel Sadon, "DC Paid More in Federal Taxes Than 22 States Last Year," (<https://dcist.com/story/16/04/25/infuriating-tax-figure-time/>) April 25, 2016. Data gathered from *Internal Revenue Service SOI Tax Stats—Gross Collections by Type of Tax and State*.

