



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

The District of Columbia House Voting Rights Act of 2007
Senator Joe Lieberman
Markup Statement
June 13, 2007

I am proud to bring the District of Columbia House Voting Rights Act of 2007 before the Committee this morning. This legislation addresses a matter of injustice that affects almost 600,000 American citizens – who happen to be the residents of the District of Columbia, our nation’s capital – who have never had voting representation in Congress. It is a national disgrace that the greatest Democracy on the planet treats the citizens of its capital city this way, and it is time now to right this historic wrong.

After years of political stalemate on this issue, we now have a bill before us that is politically neutral, certainly in a partisan sense, with a diverse coalition of colleagues on both sides of the aisle. For this reason, I feel optimistic that this is the year we will finally 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.

This legislative proposal is simple. It would for the first time provide the District of Columbia with a voting representative in the House and at the same time, it would give the state of Utah the fourth congressional seat it deserves, based on the 2000 census.

I want to thank the senators from Utah, my friends Senators Hatch and Bennett, for their support in this effort. The three of us introduced this legislation - S. 1257 - on May 1, and Senator Hatch testified on behalf of the legislation at a hearing May 15. I also want to thank D.C. Delegate Eleanor Holmes Norton and Congressman Tom Davis, who teamed up to pass a very similar bill through the House by a vote of 241-177, with 22 Republicans supporting the measure. Notwithstanding the remarkable public service of Delegate Norton, she does not have a vote on the floor of the House of Representatives, and the citizens of the District of Columbia do not have voting representation on the floor.

The conscientious work of Mayor Fenty has also been instrumental in getting us to this point as have the years of letter writing and marching and appealing on the part of thousands of D.C. residents.

Let me make the case as clearly as I can: the residents of the District of Columbia 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, in disproportionate numbers, to protect our country in foreign wars but have no say in the development and funding of our foreign and defense 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 voting say in how high those taxes will be or how they will be spent.

The District is 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 voting say in that appropriations process.

Opponents of this legislation say it is unconstitutional because the Constitution has no provision granting Congressional representation to non-states. But that is an interpretation subject to widespread dispute. Recently, a group of 25 law professors and legal scholars – spanning a broad range of those identified as liberal or conservative – reassured members of Congress that extending House representation to the District of Columbia was consistent with numerous provisions in the Constitution. I have reviewed the arguments and the constitutional language cited in this debate, and I conclude that the weight of the Constitution is in favor of the constitutionality of this proposal, by far.

Let us not waste this moment. The legislation before us today would right an historic injustice.

Senator Collins?