

**Opening Statement of Chairman Thomas R. Carper:
“Equality for the District of Columbia: Discussing the Implications of S. 132, the
New Columbia Admission Act of 2013”
September 15, 2014**

As prepared for delivery:

When I assumed the chairmanship of this Committee in January 2013 with its broad jurisdiction over federal government operations and homeland security, I also took on responsibility for federal legislation on matters concerning the District of Columbia, whose more than 600,000 citizens are denied a vote in Congress. I take that responsibility seriously, which is why last year, I introduced the “New Columbia Admissions Act” to create a path to end that voting inequality.

The District of Columbia is not just a collection of government offices, monuments and museums. It is home to a little more than 632,000 people –more than both Wyoming and Vermont. These residents pay over \$20 billion in federal taxes. That’s more than the federal taxes paid by states like Nebraska, South Carolina and New Hampshire. These residents work, study, raise families and start businesses here, just like people do in all 50 states. And they serve in the military and die for our country, just like other Americans.

Yet when it comes to having a voice in Congress, these men and women do not count. In truth, they never have. While they bear the full responsibilities of funding the federal government and dealing with the consequences of the laws it enacts, they do not enjoy the benefits and protection of having voting representation in our Congress. In my view, this situation is simply not fair. Neither is it consistent with our values as a country. Perhaps most importantly, though, it’s not consistent with the Golden Rule: treat other people the way we want to be treated.

Voting rights is a passionate cause for many of the citizens of the District of Columbia. It has been for years. I believe it should be a cause for concern of all of us. That’s a major reason why we are here today. Twenty years after the last testimony before Congress on District of Columbia statehood, my goal for this hearing is to educate a new generation of people about this injustice and restart the conversation about finding a thoughtful solution.

I was surprised to learn last year that the United States is the only democracy in the world that denies voting representation to the people who live in its capital city. Not one of one hundred, not one of ten, the only one. And the United Nation’s Human Rights Committee has called us out on that. They’ve deemed the District of Columbia’s lack of voting representation a human rights violation. But there’s more to this injustice than inequality. The District of Columbia’s disenfranchisement places its residents in a doubly vulnerable political position.

Unlike any other city in the United States, Congress holds ultimate control over the District of Columbia’s laws and even its day-to-day operations. In recent years, Congress

has shown less of an inclination to meddle in District of Columbia affairs than it has in the past, but the fact remains that my colleagues and I can – if we choose to – overrule the voters of the District of Columbia and their local officials on any local issue we want. So without their own vote in Congress or the ability to spend money and pass laws without Congress' consent, the District of Columbia is, at times, used as a political pawn by some Members looking to impose their own agenda on the city without regard for the views of the citizens who must live with the consequences.

And just last fall, the District of Columbia was caught up in the federal shutdown and was nearly blocked from using local tax dollars to keep basic city functions running – functions like schools, libraries, and trash collection – just to name a few. Some determined and creative efforts by city officials avoided that outcome, but only after incurring needless cost and uncertainty in planning for the federal shutdown.

We have tolerated this situation for a long time. I think most people know it just isn't right. It is incumbent upon those of us who enjoy the right and the privilege of full voting rights to take up the cause of our fellow citizens here in the District of Columbia and find a workable solution.

This is not a new cause. As soon as the capital city was organized in 1801, citizens of the District of Columbia began fighting for equal representation. Since that time, Congress has considered several legislative options. In 1978, Congress passed a constitutional amendment to give the District of Columbia full voting rights in Congress. In 2009, the Senate voted to give the District of Columbia a voting seat in the House. And for many years, members have offered bills to provide statehood for the District of Columbia.

The bill I introduced is the latest chapter of that ongoing effort. It may not be the last chapter, but it attempts to right a wrong that should be righted. S. 132 would pave the way for the potential creation of a 51st State, called New Columbia, with full voting rights in Congress. Under the bill, a federal district called Washington, D.C. – encompassing the White House, the Capitol, the Supreme Court and the National Mall – would still remain under the control of Congress as the Constitution mandates.

I realize everyone may not agree that this is the right solution and that there are a number of legitimate questions about how this would work. Our witnesses today will discuss these questions. Most—but not all of them—will lay out a strong case for why this approach is appropriate and constitutional and the preferred approach for many of the residents here in the District of Columbia.

The Senate bill currently has 18 co-sponsors – the most co-sponsors ever on a Senate District of Columbia statehood bill. Congresswoman Eleanor Holmes Norton, who will testify here today, has introduced companion legislation in the House which also has a record number of co-sponsors; 104.

Today, we will hear from two panels of witnesses who are going to shed some light on this topic. On our first panel, we have three elected officials from the District of

Columbia who will speak to how its current status affects its residents and their own abilities to govern effectively. On our second panel, we will have six witnesses who will discuss other the issues surrounding the topic of statehood including its constitutionality, feasibility and practicality.

Dr. Coburn and I agree on many issues, but on this one, we have an honest difference of opinion. With that, let me turn to him so we can hear those views. Then we will hear from our witnesses today.

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