

Testimony of

Michael D. Brown
United States Senator
District of Columbia
Before
The United States Senate
Committee on Homeland Security
and Government Affairs

September 15, 2014

I would like to thank the Chairman and members of the committee for this opportunity to testify. Senator Carper, the first time I talked to you about DC Statehood. You said, “push and keep pushing. Your cause is just and you will prevail.” So, I have come here to push. My constituents have been denied their basic rights of citizenship and this is unacceptable. In spite of this, they have 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. I know there are several proud veterans on this Committee who know what it means to risk life and limb in defense of our freedom, 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-interest. 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 governance. One nation indivisible; not separate but equal; that’s the promise of democracy and for 200 years we have been denied. 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; and insults, like move if you don’t like it; stop whining; go back from where you came that only perpetuate the

misconception that we expect to be given something rather than reclaiming that which is already ours. The framers may have given the power to Congress but the right was given to us by God. I am here to say enough. We have earned our citizenship; paid for with our sacrifices, our money, and our service to America. The time has come to right this wrong which violates every principle Americans holds dear. You heard testimony today using words like budget autonomy, legal autonomy, and voting rights. Make no mistake; only Statehood makes us whole. Any other solution glosses over the inherent 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. You ask what are the implications of S. 132? They are simple; fulfillment of an indenture as old as America itself; the final righting of a wrong that has perpetuated a political anachronism that outlived its usefulness a hundred years ago. On this date in 1814 a member of the DC militia, Lieutenant Francis Scott Key, wrote a poem that became our National Anthem. This morning a group of veterans and citizens presented each member of this committee a flag with 51 stars and the inscription, "*in recognition of the 200,000 who have served during wartime and our special connection to the American flag.*" This was done to remind members that we ask for nothing more than the restoration of our rights. We ask for no favors, no special treatment, and no dispensation; only the justice of equality that democracy demands. You were right Senator. Our cause is just and we will prevail. The President said I'm for it; Senator Reid said, "we deserve it"; and 80% of Americans in a nationwide poll said we support it. 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; I believe it now; and I call upon the members of this committee and in both Houses to make it true showing the same courage that the residents of the District have always exemplified. Not asking what's in this for me but rather what's in this for our democracy. Dr. King said injustice anywhere is a threat to justice everywhere and this injustice can no longer stand on its own. 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 characterize this struggle must end. We must rise above the rancor and divisiveness, act selflessly to pass this legislation, and continue to form a more perfect union. I close by answering the question my

fellow Washingtonian asked 200 years ago. Yes, Lieutenant that star spangled banner yet waves and it's time to add another star so that finally it waves for all of us.