

**TESTIMONY OF
CHAIRMAN LINDA W. CROPP
COUNCIL OF THE DISTRICT OF COLUMBIA**

**BEFORE THE
UNITED STATES SENATE
COMMITTEE ON GOVERNMENTAL AFFAIRS**

THURSDAY, MAY 23, 2002

2:30 P.M.

**DIRKSEN SENATE OFFICE BUILDING
ROOM 342**

Chairman Lieberman, Senator Thompson, and members of the Committee on Governmental Affairs, good afternoon! Let me begin by thanking you, Mr. Chairman, for sponsoring legislation and holding this public hearing on the denial of voting representation in Congress for the 600,000 American citizens who live in the District of Columbia. This is the first Senate hearing on the District's voting rights in an extremely long time, so we very much appreciate this historic opportunity to urge you and your colleagues to use the power that you have to bring democracy to the nation's capital.

Attached to my testimony is a resolution and report, adopted unanimously by the D.C. Council earlier this month, supporting the "No Taxation Without Representation Act" that has been introduced by Senators Lieberman and Feingold in the Senate and by Congresswoman Norton in the House. The Council's findings in its resolution essentially mirror the findings contained in the "No Taxation Without Representation Act," which I would like to highlight here.

As you know, United States citizens residing in Washington, D.C. have no voting representation in the House, and no elected voice at all in the Senate. This was not always the case. For approximately 10 years after ratification of the U.S. Constitution and selection of the federal district, residents of the District of Columbia were allowed to vote for members of Congress. In 1800 Congress voted to end this practice, and thereby disenfranchised District residents. Throughout the past two centuries there have been various efforts to restore the franchise.

There are many reasons full voting rights should be restored, but each evolves from a single principle: the right to vote is a fundamental principle of our democracy. Americans throughout the nation agree, or would agree if they knew. A survey conducted in October 1999 found that 72% of respondents support full voting rights in the House and Senate for District residents. That same poll showed high levels of support across party lines. Polling conducted a month later found that 55% of college graduates who were registered to vote were unaware that District citizens do not have Congressional voting representation.

You have heard these facts before, but until there is a remedy to the fundamental injustice of our subordinate status, they must be reiterated:

- The residents of the District of Columbia are the only Americans who pay federal income taxes but are denied voting representation in the House and Senate.
- The District of Columbia is second per capita in income taxes paid to the federal government. The District is a source of over \$2 billion dollars in federal taxes each year -- an amount per capita greater than 49 other states. Yet we have no say in Congress in how these tax dollars are spent.
- More District citizens have died in wars protecting the nation than have the citizens of 20 other states. Congress has the exclusive right to declare war, and again we have no say in this decision.
- The impeachment proceedings in the Congress a few years ago again highlighted the glaring anomaly of our lack of vote on the issue of removing from office the President of the United States whom we had a vote to elect.
- The United States is the *only* democracy in the world in which residents of the capital city are denied representation in the national legislature equal to that enjoyed by their fellow citizens.
- The denial of voting representation in Congress locks District residents not only out of our national legislature but also out of what is in a structural sense our state legislature -- a legislature that has extraordinary approval authority over all of the District's local legislation and all of the District's locally raised dollars.

We who are the elected representatives of District citizens are reminded daily, sometimes painfully, of the "exclusive jurisdiction" that Congress exercises over the District of Columbia pursuant to Article I, Section 8 of the United States Constitution. We believe that this same broad jurisdiction provides Congress with the constitutional authority to

enact a bill by simple majority to restore Congressional voting rights to District citizens. The Congress and the Constitution treat the District as a state for hundreds of purposes, whether they are federal benefits, burdens or rights -- why not the most precious and fundamental right in a free and democratic society: the right to vote?

The denial of District citizens' right to Congressional voting representation is the last unbreached frontier of civil and human rights in America. As the United States rightly tries to be a model and defender of democracy around the world, we implore you to find a remedy to remove the inexcusable hypocrisy of democracy denied in our nation's capital.

We have tried in the past -- and without success thus far -- to obtain Congressional voting rights through a constitutional amendment, through a statehood bill, and through litigation. The Supreme Court, while sympathetic, has essentially stated that it is the Congress where the remedy to this problem must be resolved. As we ask the Senate to take action this year to remedy our lack of voting representation in the Congress, we also request that you take favorable action as soon as possible on legislative and budget autonomy for the District of Columbia.

Thank you again for this opportunity to testify before the Committee today. As always, I look forward to working with you to ensure a brighter tomorrow for the nation's capital and for all who live, work and visit here.