

FIFTY YEARS AND COUNTING
THE STRUGGLE FOR DC STATEHOOD



Introduction

What follows is the story of DC Statehood's 50-year journey from a dubious idea to legislation passed by the United States House of Representatives. For most of this journey, DC's political establishment continued to view statehood as a questionable strategy. Within the last ten years, as advocacy increased, momentum for statehood grew, and the city's political leaders recognized it as the path to first class citizenship for Washingtonians. Now, with the strength of a Mayoral initiative and referendum and support of Congressional Democrats behind it, DC statehood is moving closer to political reality.

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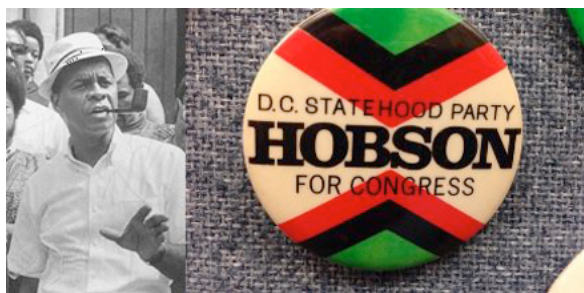
Research for this history did not proceed as planned, because the DC Library's Washingtoniana Room, along with the rest of the city, was closed by the coronavirus pandemic shortly after the grant was awarded. I did have a copy of *Chocolate City* and was able to make good use of my computer and telephone. Fortunately, *Evening Star* and *Washington Post* articles are easily accessible online. It was also possible to use the internet to order a number of key books, including Sam Smith's *Captive Capital* and an account of the 1982 Constitutional Convention by Delegate Philip Schrag. Another valuable online resource was the series of oral history videos recorded by John Hanrahan. The title of this series, available on Youtube, is *Washington DC Lessons of the Sixties*; there is a link to it in the bibliography. I was also able to interview 11 people who took part in this history and generously agreed to "meet with me" by telephone. Their names are listed in the bibliography.

Finally, I want to express my gratitude to the people I interviewed for making time to talk with me and for their commitment to DC self-determination. I also want to thank the advocates whose efforts sustained the statehood movement, even when it was a lonely cause. And I am indeed grateful to the Office of the Secretary of the District of Columbia for the opportunity to chronicle this important part of DC history.

Elinor Hart

Fall 2020

New Approach to Self-Determination



Julius Hobson, founder of the DC Statehood Party

"Statehood is a clear, just, and attainable goal to which District residents can aspire," declared publisher Sam Smith, in the June 1970 issue of the *DC Gazette*, an alternative newsweekly. "That's what we should demand, not some more benevolent form of colonialism foisted off as 'home rule'.... Our right is entire membership in the United states of America as the 51st state." Today, this statement would seem more than reasonable to a majority of Washingtonians and a growing number of people from the 50 states. Considering 220 years of being denied a voice in our national government and the harm and humiliation visited on DC by Congressional interference, most DC residents would find it obvious.¹

Yet in the summer of 1970, the response to Sam Smith's "Case for Statehood"" was, as he recalls, "underwhelming." Most Washingtonians concerned about self-determination were focused on incremental steps. They were enthusiastic about pending Congressional legislation that would grant the city a nonvoting delegate in the House of Representatives, and they were hopeful that the House would finally approve a home rule bill that had been passed many times by the Senate.²

While many DC residents were eager for the DC home rule legislation to advance, Sam Smith was one of the few Washingtonians who recognized the shortcomings of what he dubbed "colonial reorganization" and Julius Hobson called "home fool." Their successful battle against the efforts of powerful Congressmen to slice the city with freeways, made the limitations of home rule very clear to Hobson, Sammie Abbott, and their allies. They were well aware that the authority the U.S. Constitution gives Congress over the District of Columbia could be used to overturn the actions of a home rule government and thwart the will of DC citizens.³

In the fall of 1970, after Congress passed the DC delegate legislation, a special election was set for March 1971. To Hobson and anti-freeway activists Sammie Abbott and the Reverend Joe Gipson, this election offered an opportunity to advocate for statehood. They formed the D.C. Statehood Committee with the immediate goal of adding a statehood referendum to the Delegate election ballot. DC election officials informed the Committee that while it would take

a court order or Congressional action to put the proposed referendum on the special election ballot, the Statehood Party itself could appear on the ballot with a Delegate candidate who had gathered several thousand signatures.⁴

Advocacy for DC statehood then became Julius Hobson's campaign for Delegate. When Sam Smith, Julius Hobson, Lou Aronica and others met to plan the campaign, Smith's "Case for Statehood" became the platform and the rationale for the new DC Statehood Party. Julius Hobson became co-chair, with Josephine Butler, who took on organizational and administrative responsibilities. Hobson's supporters proudly offered DC voters what they considered a much better way to achieve self-determination than the incremental approach championed by Walter Fauntroy, the Democratic candidate. After Fauntroy handily won the election, the new DC Statehood Party turned its attention to Congress.

In the spring of 1971, Lou Aronica went to work on drafting statehood legislation. "I took a crash course on how other places became states," he recalls. "And I relied heavily on Alaska and Hawaii." In the summer, two statehood bills were introduced in the House of Representatives. The first, by Republican Fred Schwengel of Iowa, proposed that the entire District of Columbia become a state. The second, introduced by California Democrat Ron Dellums, was based on the platform of the DC Statehood Party. It called for the residential and commercial areas of the District to be the 51st state. Dellums' bill closely resembles the legislation that was passed by the House of Representatives on June 26, 2020. However, in 1971, the statehood legislation went nowhere, largely because of the opposition of Delegate Fauntroy, who also successfully blocked its introduction in the Senate.⁵

Home Rule and Congressional Voting Rights



Martin Luther King and Walter Fauntroy march for Home Rule

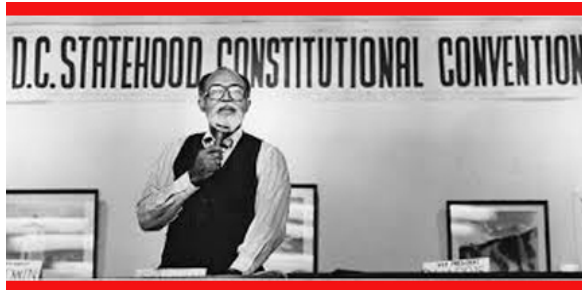
Fauntroy's agenda was the home rule legislation that had been stuck in the House, specifically in the House District Committee, chaired by John McMillan, a Dixiecrat from South Carolina, known as "Johnny Mac." Fauntroy began building support for the home rule legislation as soon as he arrived, and he formed a strong working relationship with the Self-Determination for D.C. Coalition that continued and expanded the advocacy of the city's long-standing Home Rule Committee. In 1972, he also took busloads of DC residents to McMillan's Congressional district where they registered African American voters and campaigned against McMillan. After Johnny Mac's defeat, Charles Diggs of Detroit and Chair of the Congressional Black Caucus, took the helm of the House District Committee. His leadership and the lobbying of the Self-Determination for DC Coalition, which had advocates across the country, made it possible for DC home rule to become a reality.⁶

In the fall of 1974, for the first time in 100 years, DC voters went to the polls to elect their local government—a Mayor and 13 Councilmembers. One of the new Councilmembers elected was Julius Hobson, who had run as the DC Statehood Party's candidate for an At-Large Member. In 1976, Hobson along with 11 cosponsors introduced legislation calling for a referendum on statehood. But when he tried to move the bill, Marion Barry and David Clarke were the only Councilmembers who supported it. DC's political leadership was ambivalent about statehood, and, for the most part remained so for decades. Statehood was merely tolerated by the city's political leaders. Their attitude was one of forbearance. Hardly anyone spoke against it, and even Mayor Walter Washington found it "interesting." But it would be nearly 40 years before, DC's political leaders invested political capital or significant financial resources in statehood.⁷

In the seventies, DC political leaders and residents alike were enthusiastic about the prospect of gaining representation in Congress, a cause championed by Delegate Fauntroy. Working with the Self-Determination for DC Coalition, Fauntroy managed to get the DC Voting Rights Amendment (D.C. VRA) passed by two-thirds of both the House and the Senate. The bipartisan group of supporters included Senator Strom Thurmond of South Carolina and several other conservative Republicans. In 1978, as the Amendment was sent to the states for ratification,

Washingtonians were confident that it would be ratified by the required 38 state legislatures before the seven-year deadline.⁸

Statehood on the DC Ballot



President Charles Cassell presiding during the 1982 Constitutional Convention

In 1980, Ed Guinan, founder of the Community for Creative Non-Violence (better known as CCNV), a former Catholic priest, and DC Statehood Party member, challenged the party's Central Committee. He informed them that he would soon file a statehood initiative with the DC Board of Elections, and if enough petition signatures could be gathered, the November ballot would have a referendum calling for a convention to draft a state constitution. He was hoping to have the help of the DC Statehood Party, but he was prepared to collect signatures without their help. Although the members of the Central Committee felt the timing was not right for the party to take on a ballot initiative, they reluctantly decided they had to be part of the effort. "And that's what wrecked all of our lives for nearly a year, because we had to gather thousands of signatures in five of the eight wards to put this thing on the ballot," recalls Debby Hanrahan, who represented Ward 2 on the Central Committee. "And we could not let it fail. And so, this ragtag party picked it up and went with it."

The ragtag party and other volunteers recruited by Ed Guinan, Lou Aronica, Jo Butler, and Debby Hanrahan managed to collect almost double the number of signatures required to put the statehood initiative on the ballot. The measure was opposed by the *Evening Star*, Delegate Walter Fauntroy, and the local League of Women Voters (which is now a very strong advocate of statehood). Fauntroy and the League, both very committed to the Voting Rights Amendment, were worried about the statehood effort interfering with the campaign for ratification of the amendment, and they felt that statehood was likely to mean a financial burden for DC residents.

Mayor Marion Barry and eight members of the DC Council made statements in favor of the initiative, but did nothing else to support it. Statehood Party founder and leader, Hilda Mason, was the only Councilmember to actively campaign for it. In November, 60 percent of DC voters

approved the referendum calling for a statehood constitutional convention of delegates elected by District voters.⁹

The convention delegate campaigns and election in 1981 resulted in the selection of 45 delegates--five from each of the city's eight wards and five at-large. Three delegates were DC Councilmembers; one was a member of the Board of Education, and one was a former member of the Board. The other 40 were largely unknown outside of their own neighborhoods and organizations, although 13 were Advisory Neighborhood Commissioners. According to Delegate and law professor Philip Schrag, who wrote an account of the convention, the drafters of the 51st state constitution faced financial and time constraints that did not challenge the drafters of other state constitutions. The DC Council appropriated only \$150,000 for the convention and allowed only three months for the delegates to complete their work.¹⁰

There were racial tensions at the beginning of the convention, and many of the sessions were contentious. However, the delegates managed to create a constitution within the allotted time and budget. In many ways their new 51st state resembled the 50 states. According to Convention President, Charles Cassell, this constitution was "the most progressive official state document.... in the history of the nation." Cassell's claim is probably still true. The new constitution guaranteed full employment and a living wage. It also protected public workers' right to strike and expanded rights for those accused of a crime. The majority of the delegates were considerably more progressive than most DC residents. Making a bold social statement was a priority for them.

The constitution's very progressive elements sparked strong opposition from the *Washington Post*, DC's Republican Party and the Greater Washington Board of Trade. Mayor Barry, however, and most DC Councilmembers, as well as Delegate Fauntroy, verbally supported voting for the constitution. Hilda Mason was the only councilmember to campaign for it. In November of 1982, District voters approved the Constitution of New Columbia with 53 percent of the vote. The next year, Mayor Barry submitted the constitution and a petition for statehood to Congress.¹¹

By the mid-eighties it was clear that the DC Voting Rights Amendment which had been sent to the states with such high hopes in 1978 would not become part of the U.S. Constitution. The conservative American Legislative Exchange Council, better known as ALEC, mounted a robust campaign against the D.C. VRA that included sending briefing books to every state legislator in the country. These briefing books warned against an "affirmative action campaign to get blacks in the Senate" who would be "ultra-liberal" Democrats intent on pushing "federally funded abortions...gun control...and labor law 'reform'." Opposition to the D.C. VRA had a devastating impact. Only 16 of the required 38 states ratified the amendment by the 1985 deadline.¹²

Early Statehood Advocacy in Congress



Delegate Eleanor Holmes Norton, Shadow Senator Jesse Jackson, and Mayor Sharon Pratt Kelly at a statehood rally in 1992

As the inevitable death of the D.C. VRA became more and more obvious, support for statehood increased. Local leaders of the Self-Determination for DC Coalition became 51st state advocates, but their national affiliates refused to support statehood. The DC Council provided a new state constitution, free of the controversial elements. Delegate Walter Fauntroy introduced the New Columbia Admission Act in the House, and, with the help of local advocates, worked to build support. Interest in the legislation led to six hearings, and by the end of 1987, DC statehood legislation had 101 House cosponsors. Companion legislation, introduced by Senator Edward Kennedy in the Senate, did not lead to hearings, nor did it have as many cosponsors as the House bill. But in 1990, the prospect of Jesse Jackson's involvement in DC statehood raised expectations of increasing Senate support.

When DC voters approved the 1982 referendum on their state constitution, they also approved "shadow" members of Congress for DC, but the DC Council repeatedly put off legislation providing for their election. Shadow members had represented Alaska and several other territories as they were preparing to enter the union. The shadow senators from these territories were seated in Congress as voting members when their territories became states. Being DC's shadow senator offered Jackson the opportunity to continue his advocacy for DC statehood while enhancing his political stature. He bought a house in Le Droit Park and made DC his second home. In February of 1990, Jackson held a well-publicized press conference where he chastised the DC Council for failing to provide for the election of the shadow delegation to Congress approved by DC voters. A few weeks later, the Council passed legislation setting the election of two shadow senators and one shadow representative for November. Jesse Jackson and Florence Pendleton were elected as DC's first Shadow Senators, and Charles Moreland, the first Shadow Representative. They have been succeeded by two additional shadow senators and seven shadow representatives.¹³

The 1990 election brought optimism to the statehood movement. Not only would Jesse Jackson be pressing the case in the Senate and across the country. The city's new mayor, Sharon Pratt Dixon (whose last name would be changed to Kelly), was an unequivocal

statehood supporter, and Eleanor Holmes Norton, the new Delegate to Congress, was expected to advance statehood in the House.

The early nineties included a variety of statehood activities—lobbying, rallies, protests, and votes in Congress. In 1991, the House District Subcommittee on the Judiciary held a two-day hearing that featured the testimony of Jesse Jackson, Sharon Pratt Dixon, and DC Councilmember John Wilson. Presidential candidate Bill Clinton was scheduled to testify.

One of the most impressive rallies, in 1992, featured 2,000 statehood supporters almost surrounding the Capitol. The group included DC officials, statehood activists, singer Lou Rawls, and representatives of unions and other organizations supporting statehood. That same year the Democratic Party's platform, as it had in 1988, included DC statehood. In 1993, there were Tax and Emancipation Day protests. Later that year, Mayor Kelly, along with Jesse Jackson and comedian and civil rights activist Dick Gregory, was arrested during a tea party protest.¹⁴

Knowing that it was not likely to pass, Delegate Norton and statehood advocates anticipated the possibility of an historic 1993 House vote on statehood with ambivalence. House committees and subcommittees had held at least seven hearings on the New Columbia Admission Act, and many statehood advocates had tired of waiting for a floor vote. Norton decided that "an unprecedented floor vote would give the undemocratic treatment of the District of Columbia the serious national attention it could never have in any other way." The vote on November 21 failed 153 to 277.¹⁵

One reason for the large number of votes against the 51st state was the national grassroots campaign spearheaded by Citizens United against DC Statehood, a direct mail and advocacy group organized in 1990 by Floyd Brown, a Republican activist. His group sent out thousands of inflammatory mailers to conservatives asking, "Do you want a U.S. Senator who applauds Castro?...who embraces Arab terrorists? Or Black Muslim hatemongers? Or who wants socialism for our economy?...My friend, that's what you'll get if Ted Kennedy's plan to make Washington, D.C. the nation's 51st state goes through." This grassroots campaign motivated conservatives in the 50 states to contact members of Congress. While statehood activists lobbied members of Congress, they did not have the capacity to mobilize support beyond DC.¹⁶

The Senate gave a lukewarm welcome to both Senator Jackson and DC statehood. The number of Senate cosponsors increased to 17, and 30 Senators promised Jackson to vote for the statehood bill that Kennedy had introduced. But there were no committee or subcommittee hearings on the legislation.

At mid-decade, political and economic developments were making it difficult for advocates to sustain the statehood movement. Following the midterm elections in 1994, Republicans became the majority in the House. Republican control of the House continued for 12 years. In 1995, Congress responded to DC's desperate financial condition by installing a Control Board

to oversee spending and the management of government agencies. There seemed to be little energy for statehood advocacy. Jackson decided not to run again for shadow senator and moved out of his Washington home. Neither Delegate Norton nor Senator Kennedy introduced statehood legislation at the beginning of 106th Congress in 1997. For the next 15 years, there would be no DC statehood legislation in Congress. The statehood movement came to a standstill.¹⁷

Protests and Court Cases



Interference with DC's Budget sparked numerous protests

During the Control Board period (1995-2001), advocacy for self-determination involved both protests against heavy-handed Congressional interference and federal court cases. The grassroots organization, Stand Up! for Democracy in DC Coalition, grew out of a meeting to protest the transfer of authority over the District government's largest agencies to the Control Board in 1997. The group met weekly at the National Council of Negro Women where Dr. Dorothy Height gave her blessing and support to the Coalition and its activities. Stand Up! also organized protest rallies at the Capitol and the offices of the Control Board.

In 1999, Ben Armfield, Anise Jenkins, and Karen Szulgit were arrested and charged with "Disruption of Congress" for protesting in the gallery of the House of Representatives against Congressional prohibitions on how DC tax dollars could be spent. Two of the many prohibitions or riders passed by the House that year prevented DC from implementing a medical marijuana initiative that had been approved by DC voters in 1998 and reinstating a needle exchange program to prevent the spread of HIV/AIDS. Armfield, Jenkins and Szulgit were all tried and acquitted. The next year, seven activists, who became known as the DC Democracy 7, were also arrested for protesting against Congressional interference with DC's budget. After two trials in DC Superior Court for "Disruption of Congress," the members of the DC Democracy 7 were found not guilty.

Two federal lawsuits seeking justice for DC residents were brought in 1998. Attorney George LaRoche, who shared the perspective of the Stand Up! for Democracy in DC Coalition, filed *Adams v. Clinton*. The plaintiffs included Lois Adams, Sam Smith, Reverend Graylan Hagler,

Anise Jenkins, and other Stand Up! for Democracy in DC activists. Claims made in this suit on behalf of the “20 DC Citizens” included the rights of these citizens to be represented by duly elected Representatives and Senators in Congress and to participate through duly elected representatives in a state government insulated from Congressional interference.¹⁸

A law review article drafted in 1996 by Jamie Raskin, who was then a professor at The American University Washington College of Law, became the impetus for the other lawsuit. His article, widely circulated in the legal and civil rights communities, forcefully argued that DC residents have a Constitutional right to be represented in Congress. And it inspired John Ferren, DC Corporation Counsel, and Walter Smith, Special Deputy Corporation Counsel, to urge the federal court to end the unconstitutional disenfranchisement of DC residents in *Alexander v. Daley*. (In 2004, the Office of the Corporation Counsel of the District of Columbia became the Office of the Attorney General of the District of Columbia.) The plaintiffs included Clifford Alexander, former secretary of the Army, former Mayor Walter Washington, and prominent business leader John Hechinger, as well as a dentist, a plumber, and small business owners. Because a Congressional budget rider prevented the DC government from spending city funds on voting rights litigation, the involvement of the law firm of Covington & Burling as co-counsel was particularly valuable.

The two cases were consolidated by the DC District Court and assigned to a three-judge panel—with two federal district court judges and one court of appeals judge.

While the oral arguments in the *Alexander v. Daley* case were being prepared, an organizational effort, spearheaded by Daniel Solomon, Joe Sternlieb, and Arthur Schultz was underway. This effort brought together veterans of the self-determination coalition from the seventies and new residents to form the Coalition for DC Representation in Congress which soon came to be known as DC Vote.¹⁹

In 1999, the DC Statehood Party affiliated with the national Green Party and changed its name to the DC Statehood Green Party. The renamed party’s agenda expanded to include Green Party issues that had traditionally been important to many active in the DC Statehood Party.²⁰

In early 2000, the DC Court of Appeals panel ruled that because the District is not a state, its citizens are not entitled to a vote in Congress. The ruling also implied that Congress does have the authority to grant DC citizens voting representation. Several months later, the Supreme Court declined to hear the case on appeal. The plaintiffs in *Adams v. Clinton* complained that because the cases were consolidated around the question of Congressional voting rights, not all of their issues were addressed. The Court, for example, was silent on their claim that DC residents have the right to participate through duly elected representatives in a state government insulated from Congressional interference.

The city’s leadership, DC Vote, and many residents were surprised and disappointed by the court’s rejection of DC’s right to Congressional representation. They were also defiant. Mayor

Tony Williams agreed with activists that DC automobile tags would proclaim "TAXATION WITHOUT REPRESENTATION." Delegate Norton, along with DC Vote and its supporters, voiced their determination to persuade Congress to exercise its authority to grant voting rights to DC residents.²¹

Enthusiasm for Voting Rights and Statehood



Statehood advocates take their message to the mall

In 2003, the announcement by Republican Congressman Tom Davis from Northern Virginia of his support for a full-fledged House member to represent DC brought renewed hope to voting rights advocates. DC Vote, led at the time by Ilir Zherka as executive director, saw an opportunity to get a foothold in Congress for DC residents.

DC Vote worked with the Leadership Conference on Civil Rights, the League of Women Voters, and other civil rights organizations to form a national voting rights coalition that grew to 100 members, providing remarkable national support for expanding the rights of DC residents. After a key meeting with Delegate Norton encouraged the Voting Rights Coalition to continue working on voting rights legislation, DC Vote and the Coalition were able to gain the support of Mayor Williams and the DC Council.

The next year, after conferring with voting rights advocates, legal scholars and others, Davis introduced legislation that called for adding two seats to the House: one for the overwhelmingly Democratic District and another for the next state in line to pick up a representative, Republican-leaning Utah.

After several years of organizing and lobbying, the legislation, renamed the District of Columbia House Voting Rights Act (DC HVRA), gained momentum and was reintroduced in 2007 by Norton, Davis, and a bipartisan group of eight additional cosponsors. This legislation had the support of prominent Republicans, including Orrin Hatch, Utah's senior senator, and John Huntsman, Governor of Utah. In April of that year, on DC Emancipation Day, Mayor Adrian Fenty led a march, organized by DC Vote and the Leadership Conference on Civil

Rights, from the District Building to the Capitol in support of the bill. Three days later, the legislation was passed by the House. After several months of intense lobbying, a majority of Senators supported the DC HVRA, but its progress was halted in the Senate by a filibuster.²²

Barack Obama's election in 2008 filled DC self-determination advocates with optimism. Knowing that it was possible for the United States to elect such an inspiring African American leader as Barack Obama encouraged advocates to see new possibilities in their hopes and dreams for statehood and voting rights. Statehood advocates felt that people outside of DC who had the wisdom to vote for Barack Obama would understand that DC residents should have all the rights that people in the 50 states enjoy.

It wasn't only optimism that gave new energy to statehood advocacy. In the seventies when statehood and Congressional voting rights were competing self-determination strategies, statehood advocates argued that statehood would not only bring representation in Congress, but also prevent Congressional interference, which in the seventies, was not a major concern for most Washingtonians. But by 2008, the city had endured over a decade of oppressive Congressional interference, and for many self-determination advocates, ending Congressional interference had become as important as gaining Congressional representation.

"Yes We Can! DC STATEHOOD NOW!" proclaimed hundreds of red and white placards along Pennsylvania Avenue and other major DC streets in the days leading up to Barack Obama's inauguration. The placards were the work of shadow senator Michael D. Brown, who arranged for their production and statehood advocates who put them up. Early in 2009, DC Council Chair, Vincent Gray, established a special Council Committee on Statehood and Self-Determination, and statehood advocates urged Delegate Norton to introduce statehood legislation.

Delegate Norton, Mayor Fenty, and the DC Council were focused on the DC House Voting Rights Act. They were committed to the incremental approach to DC self-determination, and they saw the DC HVRA as the next step. They were confident of its success, because the 2008 election had also given the Democrats a filibuster-proof Senate.²³

Voting rights advocates were thrilled when the Senate scheduled a vote on the DC HVRA for the end of February. During the "debate" preceding the vote, Senators had little to say about the need for DC residents to have a vote in Congress. One of the first to speak was John Ensign, a Republican from Nevada, who proposed an amendment that would have repealed all of DC's current gun laws and prevented the city from any future gun regulation. The DC House Voting Rights Act passed with the amendment attached. For over a year, Delegate Norton tried to find a way to decouple the Ensign Amendment from the DC HVRA. But the National Rifle Association (NRA) was adamant about keeping the amendment on the bill.

By the spring of 2010, time was running out on a House vote for the DC Voting Rights Act. The bipartisan pairing of Democratic DC and Republican Utah would no longer work if Utah, as

expected, gained an additional seat as a result of the 2010 census. "I believed we could get our gun laws back, but we could never get Utah back," explained Norton. "It really was a now or never proposition." The message she and Ilir Zherka of DC Vote thought they were hearing from the city government, DC residents, and a coalition of voting rights advocates, was: "'Don't lose the only chance we have.'" In April, Norton told the House leadership to schedule a vote on the DC Voting Rights Act with the attached gun amendment.

As soon as the time for the vote was announced, fierce opposition emerged. The DC Council passed a resolution against the legislation and urged Norton to abandon it. A *Washington Post* editorial denounced it, and DC Vote's long-time Voting Rights Coalition partners, including the League of Women Voters, came out against the bill. At the last minute, Norton decided that the amendment was not something the District could accept, and she asked Majority Leader Steny Hoyer to "pull the bill."²⁴

Renewed Statehood Campaign



Statehood exhibit at Southern Christian Leadership Conference

The sudden demise of the six-year campaign for the DC House Voting Rights Act reminded self-determination advocates that an incremental step can lead to a dead end, and statehood advocates again pressed DC's Delegate to introduce statehood legislation. Norton announced that at the beginning of the next Congressional session (112th), she would introduce three "voting rights bills," one of which would be statehood legislation.

In 2011, a renewed campaign for DC statehood gained momentum. For the first time in 15 years, there was the essential element of Congressional statehood legislation after Norton again introduced the New Columbia Admission Act in the House. Also essential was the grassroots coalition of statehood advocates eager to recruit cosponsors for the legislation and build support for statehood.

As they organized to recruit cosponsors for the New Columbia Admission Act, statehood advocates decided to begin their efforts with a focus on current members of Congress who had cosponsored DC statehood bills in the eighties and nineties, members of the Black and

Progressive Caucuses, and the chairs of the Asian Pacific American and Hispanic Caucuses. Former cosponsors of DC statehood legislation and members of the Black Caucus enthusiastically agreed to be cosponsors. Particularly encouraging were staff in the offices of John Lewis and John Conyers, as well as Congressman Conyers himself. By the end of the 112th Congress, the New Columbia Admission Act had 28 cosponsors.²⁵

April 16, 2012, was the first DC Emancipation Day that advocates lobbied on the Hill for DC statehood. Because of their success in scheduling meetings and recruiting cosponsors, lobbying for DC Statehood on Emancipation Day became an annual statehood tradition that continued until the coronavirus closed the Capitol in 2020.

Statehood advocates welcomed the need to expand their campaign in 2013, at the beginning of the 113th Congress, when Senator Thomas Carper (D-DE) introduced the New Columbia Admission Act in the Senate. His co-introducers were three senior Democratic Senators-- Richard Durbin (IL), Patty Murray (WA), and Barbara Boxer (CA).²⁶

Recruiting Cosponsors – What Worked and What Didn’t



Statehood advocates with long-time supporter and co-sponsor of numerous statehood bills, John Lewis

DC statehood advocates found three strategies effective for recruiting cosponsors. Simply asking did work with some members of Congress, particularly those in the Congressional Black Caucus. A number of Senators and Representatives responded to persistent and respectful requests from statehood advocates. Other members of Congress wanted to know that the statehood legislation was important to their constituents before they put their names on a bill. Usually it was difficult to determine exactly what motivated a member of Congress to become a cosponsor. Often it was a combination of factors that provided a sufficient impetus, but occasionally, what made the difference was clear. Sherrod Brown’s (D-OH) staff, for example, informed Josh Burch that the Senator’s decision to become a cosponsor was the result of Josh’s persistence. Josh Burch, the founder and leader of Neighbors’ United for DC Statehood, is a

champion of the persistent and respectful request strategy, particularly with Senators and their offices.²⁷

After contacting Senator Claire McCaskill's (D-MO) office several times in 2013 and 2014, statehood advocates learned that the Senator wanted to know how her constituents felt. In response to a request from the DC Statehood Coalition, the Missouri Federation of Women's Democratic Clubs passed a resolution supporting DC statehood at the end of June in 2015. A few weeks later in July, several other Missouri Democratic organizations urged the Senator to cosponsor the New Columbia Admission Act. Toward the end of July, Senator McCaskill became a cosponsor. Developing constituent advocacy for DC statehood is the most effective strategy for recruiting cosponsors.

Attending the Democratic National Committee's Winter Meetings in Washington proved to be an effective way to build Democratic support. Because of efforts at the 2014 Winter Meeting, the DNC's Black Caucus, Eastern Caucus, Ethnic Coordinating Council, and the LGBT Caucus passed resolutions endorsing DC statehood.²⁸

Statehood advocates initially assumed that cosponsors of statehood legislation would be overwhelmingly, but not exclusively Democratic. They did not consider statehood a partisan issue. In 1971, statehood was introduced in Congress by Fred Schwengel, a Republican Representative from Iowa. In 1987, H.R. 51 had six Republican cosponsors, and in 1993, one of the Congressmen voting for DC Statehood was a Republican. Statehood advocates tried several strategies to get Republican cosponsors on more recent statehood legislation. In 2013, they sent Republican members of Congress combinations of thank you notes for supporting a bipartisan continuing resolution on the budget and a request to cosponsor the House statehood legislation. In 2014, they asked the Republican cosponsors of a bill that included a statehood option for Puerto Rico to become cosponsors of the New Columbia Admission Act. They also entertained the hope of recruiting two moderate Republicans who would agree to become cosponsors of a statehood bill at the same time. Efforts to recruit Republican cosponsors have not yet been successful.

DC's shadow delegation has also been involved in lobbying as well as a variety of other advocacy projects. The visits of former Shadow Representative Nate Bennett-Fleming and current Shadow Representative Franklin Garcia, to many Congressional offices helped recruit cosponsors for statehood legislation in the House.

Building Local and National Support for DC Statehood



Facebook Group for statehood supporters in DC and the 50 states

Statehood advocates have been involved in numerous efforts to build support locally and nationally for the 51st state. One of their first was attending the Democratic National Convention in 2012. In September of that year, the late Jerry Clark, Chair of DC for Democracy, led the effort to mobilize thirty plus volunteers to travel from Washington to Charlotte, North Carolina for the Democratic National Convention. They were hopeful that the final version of the Democratic Party platform would include DC statehood and determined to remind everyone they met that it is in the Democratic Party's best progressive tradition. The omission of DC statehood from the platform was a huge disappointment to everyone from Washington, but the response of Delegates, party officials and volunteers to their statehood message was encouraging.

Several weeks after the Democratic National Convention, statehood advocates gathered for a debriefing. They decided that their developing coalition should become the DC Statehood Coalition and that Jerry Clark would be the chair. The Coalition agreed to continue efforts to build support for DC statehood, both locally and in the 50 states, and to continue advocacy on the Hill. Groups participating in the Coalition included the ACLU of the National Capital Area, DC for Democracy, and DC Statehood – Yes We Can! as well as Neighbors' United for DC Statehood, Standup! for Democracy! in DC Coalition, and the Statehood Green Party. Individual participation has also been welcome.

The wide range of support-building activities included exhibiting at national conferences, visiting states, polling and educational efforts on the National Mall, DC Statehood Trivia Nights at local bars, and canvassing in DC neighborhoods, as well as banners, buttons, curriculum materials, videos and websites. Many of these activities were supported by Voting Rights and Statehood grants awarded to nonprofits by the Office of the Secretary of the District of Columbia. Local nonprofit groups whose statehood activities were supported by these grants included DC Vote, Historical Society of Washington, League of Women Voters, Stand Up! for Democracy, Students for DC Statehood, and Vision House.²⁹

An important part of building support was persuading national organizations to endorse DC Statehood. Advocates, working through local affiliates in which they were active, were able to persuade national organizations, such as the American Civil Liberties Union, Episcopal Church USA, League of Women Voters, and the Sierra Club to endorse DC Statehood. By the end of 2016, the DC Statehood Coalition's website listed 15 national and 16 local organizations that had endorsed DC statehood.³⁰

DC's shadow senators have been involved in creative projects to build support for statehood. In 2013, Senator Michael D. Brown launched "Shadow Politics," a weekly satellite radio program, featuring a variety of guests, including Eleanor Holmes Norton and Major Charles F. Bolden, former NASA Administrator. The program is initially available on Sunday evening at 7, and later on the show's website. The next year, Senator Paul Strauss launched 51 Stars with the goal of getting 51 celebrities to record public service announcements promoting the 51st State. The first PSA was recorded by Hayden Panettiere. Other stars, including DC's own Dave Chapelle, have recorded spots advocating for DC statehood.³¹

The Senate's first hearing on DC statehood, which brought hundreds of Washingtonians to the Dirksen Building on September 15, 2014, helped build support for statehood. The hearing was organized by Thomas Carper (D-Del), who was then chair of the Senate Homeland Security and Governmental Affairs Committee. While the hearing did not lead to follow-up action in the Senate, the testimony of key witnesses did refute typical objections to DC statehood. One of the witnesses, for example, was the late Alice Rivlin, a distinguished economist, who had led both the federal Office of Management and Budget and DC's Control Board. Her testimony, that the residential and commercial areas of the District will be a "fiscally viable state" addressed doubts about whether DC can afford statehood. Viet Dinh, constitutional scholar at Georgetown University and former legal advisor to President George W. Bush, presented convincing testimony that the statehood legislation is constitutional. He predicted that the courts will refuse to hear a case challenging the constitutionality of an admission act for DC.³²

The hearing also increased Senate support for DC statehood. Three Senators became cosponsors the day of the hearing.

Because of the advocacy and efforts to build support that began in 2011, there was more support for DC statehood in Congress by the end of 2015 than there had ever been.

DC Government Champions Statehood



On election day, November 8, 2016, eighty-seven percent of DC voters said “Yes” to statehood

Council Chair Vincent Gray had an interest in statehood, even when DC’s elected leaders were very focused on the House Voting Rights Act. In 2009, he appointed a Special Council Committee on Statehood and Self-Determination and led a delegation of Councilmembers to the National Conference of State Legislatures to promote DC statehood.

After his election as mayor, Gray spoke eloquently about statehood during his inaugural address in early 2011. He also spoke forcefully during DC’s statehood rally at the World War I memorial in August of 2013. After the rally, he led the DC march to the Lincoln Memorial to join the main anniversary commemoration of the 1963 March on Washington.

By 2013, the conventional wisdom among Washingtonians, DC’s Mayor and Council included, was that when self-determination came to the people of DC, it would come through statehood. However, neither Mayor Gray nor members of the Council expressed any urgency about statehood, and the DC government’s financial investment in achieving self-determination continued to be very modest.³³

Statehood advocates did not see the 2014 Mayoral campaign as particularly relevant to their cause, even though it was included in the platforms of both Mayor Gray and Muriel Bowser, the challenger who defeated him. It was not a major issue in the campaign, and it had been twenty years since a DC mayor had given serious attention to statehood.³⁴

Mayor Muriel Bowser’s dramatic announcement of her statehood initiative at the DC government’s annual Emancipation Day breakfast in April of 2016 surprised most Washingtonians. Statehood advocates were thrilled that statehood was at last becoming a priority of the DC government. They were, however, disappointed that the Mayor had not consulted them about her initiative,

Bowser modeled her initiative on the Tennessee Plan. The would-be 51st state was taking the approach pioneered by the territory of Tennessee and later used by six other territories to enter the union. Her plan for January 2017 was to present Congress with a formal petition for

statehood and a new constitution ratified by DC voters in a statehood referendum during the November election.³⁵

Since the new constitution had to be ready for ratification by November, there wasn't time for a convention of democratically elected delegates to craft the new constitution. In early May, the New Columbia Statehood Commission released a draft constitution. The new state government created by the Mayor's 21-member legal team resembles the current DC government with delegates instead of councilmembers, a governor instead of a mayor, and state agencies instead of District agencies. The members of the New Columbia Statehood Commission were Mayor Muriel Bowser, Council Chair, Phil Mendelson, Shadow Senators, Michael D. Brown and Paul Strauss, and Shadow Representative, Franklin Garcia.

In May and June, the New Columbia Statehood Commission held a series of town halls where people could comment on the draft constitution. And in mid-June, three 4-hour sessions, called a constitutional convention, provided further opportunities for DC citizens to weigh in. People could also submit comments and amendments online. During the town halls and "convention" sessions, statehood advocates and other Washingtonians who felt strongly about a democratically developed constitution urged that the constitution include a requirement for a constitutional convention with elected delegates to be held two years after the admission of the 51st state. But this requirement was not included in the revised constitution, released by the New Columbia Statehood Commission at the end of June.³⁶

The final step in the development of the new constitution was review and possible revision by the DC Council. In October, the DC Council made two significant changes to the constitution of the proposed 51st state. In response to the advocacy of statehood advocates and others concerned about a democratically developed constitution, it added the requirement for a constitutional convention with elected delegates to be held two years after statehood. The Council's revision also requires that any constitutional amendments adopted by the convention be approved by the voters of the new state. The other change made by the Council was the new name for the 51st state. The Council renamed it the State of Washington, D.C., with D.C. standing for Douglass Commonwealth, in honor of the abolitionist and DC resident Frederick Douglass.³⁷

Statehood advocates looked forward to the November election with optimism. They were pleased that DC statehood was again in the Democratic National Committee's platform, after a 12-year absence. The statehood referendum increased the ranks of advocates, and DC Vote joined the campaign. On election day in 2016, eighty-seven percent of DC voters approved the statehood referendum. The very large number of voters who supported statehood can, in part, be attributed to the summer canvassing by DC vote in 2015 and 2016. With ninety-six percent of their votes, DC voters also overwhelmingly supported Hillary Clinton. Voters in the 50 states, however, elected a President and a Congress that were not ready to admit the 51st state.³⁸

Statehood Gains Momentum



Statehood gains support on the Hill, in the city, and across the country

Because of the shock and disappointment of the Presidential and Congressional elections, the success of the statehood referendum was largely overlooked by DC's press and pundits. But statehood advocates were confident that the DC voters' strong affirmation of statehood would make it possible to recruit even more cosponsors of the statehood bills certain to be introduced in both a House and a Senate where the leadership was hostile to DC self-determination. And statehood advocates joined the record crowd that came to DC on January 21 for the historic Women's March, which gave them and Mayor Bowser the opportunity to recruit supporters from outside of DC.

As the 115th Congress got underway, Washingtonians were appalled by proposed federal legislation that would gut DC's progressive policies. A succession of bills for overturning the District's death with dignity law, repealing the city's gun safety laws, and permanently banning abortions for poor women were painful reminders of why DC needs statehood. Because a growing number of Washingtonians were feeling a sense of urgency about self-determination, the rallying cry of Hands-Off DC drew a huge crowd to a town hall and sparked numerous follow-up protest activities.³⁹

By 2017, DC had significantly increased its financial investment in statehood. In addition to the annual budgets of \$200,000 for the Voting Rights and Statehood Grants and \$257,800 for Shadow Delegation expenses, the budget for the statehood efforts carried out by the Mayor's office was over \$900,000 a year.⁴⁰

During the 115th Congress, statehood advocates continued to build Congressional support for statehood and with the help of DC Vote organized lobby days with record numbers of participants. In 2018, they were able to take advantage of the Democratic National Committee's Winter Meeting to recruit additional cosponsors for the House and Senate statehood bills. The DC Statehood Coalition drafted letters from 20 Democratic state committees to the Senators and Representatives from their states who were not yet cosponsors of Congressional statehood legislation, urging them to add their names to the bills. During the Winter Meeting in early March, coalition volunteers spoke to the officers of the state

committees and asked them to sign the letters. Most of the state committee leaders were glad to sign the letters.

In April on Emancipation Day, the signed letters were in the packets of a record group of statehood advocates recruited by DC Vote to visit Congressional offices. Between the April lobbying event and the end of the Congressional session, eight more Senators became cosponsors and 31 Representatives added their names to the House bill.

Statehood advocates, like many other Washingtonians, were glad to say goodbye to the 115th Congress and its threats to DC self-determination. They were, however, pleased and proud that it ended with more Congressional support for DC Statehood legislation than there had ever been. The Washington DC Admission Act now had 30 Senate cosponsors and 181 in the House.⁴¹

As a result of the 2018 Congressional election, for the first time in 25 years, DC statehood legislation was being considered by a House of Congress controlled by Democrats. Moreover, DC statehood, which was included in the House leadership's principal legislative package--H.R. 1, was a priority. As the House convened on January 3, Delegate Eleanor Holmes Norton introduced H.R. 51, the Washington, D.C. Admission Act with a record number of 155 cosponsors, more than any other measure introduced on the first day of Congress. Statehood advocates also welcomed the news that Congressman Elijah Cummings, Chair of the House Committee on Oversight and Reform, was committed to holding a hearing and having a vote on H.R. 51.⁴²

The DC Statehood Coalition again organized letter signing at the Democratic National Committee's Winter Meeting. The letters, signed by state party leaders, were delivered to Congressional offices during a February lobby day. That year's lobby day, organized by DC Vote, involved a record number of volunteers and managed to visit a record number of offices. Between the lobby day and the end of 2019, twenty-six more House members and eight additional Senators became cosponsors.

As Congressional support for statehood continued to grow, so did support from other states and from organizations. In April, DC Attorney General Karl Racine delivered a statement signed by him and Attorneys General from 20 states urging Congress to approve DC Statehood. In anticipation of the hearing on the House statehood legislation Delegate Norton announced that over 100 local and national organizations were on record in support of DC statehood.⁴³

September 19 was a sparkling late summer day. Pennsylvania Avenue was lined with 51-star flags. And nearly a thousand Washingtonians, many in red statehood t-shirts, headed for the Rayburn Building and the first House hearing on DC statehood in over 25 years. The hearing room and overflow rooms quickly filled up, and several hundred statehood supporters gathered in a park behind Rayburn to watch the hearing on a giant television screen. Testimony from the Mayor, Council Chair, and Chief Financial Officer demonstrated that DC is ready for

statehood. Many Democratic members of the House Committee on Oversight and Reform voiced their support for DC statehood, while Republican members made their opposition clear.⁴⁴

A Year to Remember



Mayor Muriel Bowser hands House Majority Leader Steny Hoyer (D-Md) a 51-star flag during the news conference announcing the date of the House vote on DC statehood.

Caroline Brehman/CQ Roll Call

Statehood advocates greeted 2020 with optimism and expectations of historic success for DC statehood. They looked forward to a vote by the House Committee early in the year and an affirmative vote of the full House in the spring. On February 11, the House Committee on Oversight and Reform debated H.R. 51, approved it on a party line vote, and sent it to the full House.⁴⁵

Optimism gave way to anxiety in mid-March, as the coronavirus pandemic sent everyone, including the United States Congress, home and put a great many expectations on hold.

Protests over the police killing of George Floyd in late May triggered a new and frightening form of federal interference in DC. In the early evening of June 1, people participating in a peaceful demonstration in Lafayette Park were suddenly pushed out of the park and onto H and 16 Streets by Secret Service officials, Park Police, and National Guard. The fleeing demonstrators were then scattered by the downdraft from a very low-flying Army helicopter. For nearly a week, DC residents had to put up with unwanted and unneeded National Guardsmen from 11 states and law enforcement officers from numerous federal agencies who wore no identifying badges or insignias. Mayor Bowser strongly objected to the occupation. DC's status as the seat of the U.S. Government makes it a convenient target for the abuse of federal authority.⁴⁶

In early June, when Washingtonians felt very much under siege, House Majority Leader Steny Hoyer's statement provided a needed morale boost: "President Trump's behavior in the District of Columbia in recent days . . . has underscored in dramatic terms the urgency of giving the

District the same constitutional rights and authorities that the nation's 50 states have had since 1789," he declared as he promised that there would be a House vote on DC statehood legislation in 2020. Less than two weeks later, Hoyer held a press conference to announce that the House vote on H.R. 51 would take place on June 26.⁴⁷

The day before the vote, every member of the House of Representatives received a letter from DC Vote and over 140 local and national organizations, urging all members of Congress to vote for H.R.51.⁴⁸

With 227 cosponsors of the bill, the positive outcome of the vote on June 26 was not in doubt, but it was a thrill for statehood advocates to hear their Delegate and a dozen members of Congress champion DC statehood on the floor of the House of Representatives. The 232 to 180 vote in favor of H.R. 51 was a powerful affirmation of the "Case for Statehood" introduced 50 years ago by Sam Smith: "Statehood is a clear, just, and attainable goal to which District residents can aspire....Our right is entire membership in the United States of America as the 51st state."⁴⁹

This Fall, the most important of elections is on the horizon. It's impossible to foresee the impact it will have on DC, our nation, and the world. One prediction, however, is certain to come true: In 2021, Washingtonians will be advocating for DC statehood.

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