

House of Representatives passes Washington D.C. statehood bill

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On Thursday, the Democratic-controlled House of Representatives voted for the second time in less than a year to admit the District of Columbia—the seat of the federal government—as the 51st state in the United States. House Resolution 51 passed on a party-line vote of 216-208, with every Republican opposed. The bill will now go to the Senate, where Democrats hold narrowest of majorities, thanks to the tie-breaking vote of Vice President Kamala Harris.

The District of Columbia, renamed the state of Washington, Douglass Commonwealth, with a population of 700,000, would become the geographically smallest state in the United States, one-eighteenth the size of Rhode Island, although it would have a larger population than the states of Wyoming and Vermont.

House Democrats passed an identical bill of the same name in June of last year. That bill was promoted by the Democratic Party in the weeks following former President Donald Trump's initiation of a presidential coup d'état. Following mass protests against the police killing of Minneapolis man George Floyd, Trump summoned the National Guard and threatened military action against the mostly peaceful protesters on the streets of Washington D.C.

The bill was promoted at the time as a means to restrict the president's ability to deploy the National Guard on the streets of Washington D.C. Because the District is not a state, control of the National Guard rests with the president, not a state governor. "The federal occupation of D.C. occurred solely because the president thought he could get away with it here," stated Democratic Congressional Delegate Eleanor Holmes Norton, D.C.'s sole nonvoting member of Congress and the bill's chief sponsor, at the time. The bill was subsequently buried in the Republican-

controlled Senate.

This year the procedure, with a Democratic-controlled Senate, is different, but the outcome will be the same. Majority Leader Chuck Schumer has promised a vote, which means in practice that there will be a vote to end a Republican filibuster, which will fail for lack of 60 votes. The Democrats and Republicans each have 50 seats, and 10 Republicans would have to break ranks and vote to create two new Democratic seats in the Senate.

The bill's passage in the House, where 216 of the 218 Democratic representatives sponsored it, is thus an empty exercise in political demagoguery. The Biden administration published a statement Tuesday declaring it "strongly supports" D.C. statehood. According to the *Washington Post*, the bill's Senate sponsors are pushing to have a committee hearing on the bill "as soon as this spring." But no change in the District's status will actually take place.

The bill's Democratic sponsors have presented the bill as a means of bestowing democracy upon the District's residents. "For more than two centuries, the people in Washington, D.C. have been denied their right to fully participate in our and their democracy," stated Democratic House Speaker Nancy Pelosi last Thursday.

She did not bother to note that for most of those two centuries, it was the Democratic Party that led the way in opposing any form of democratic governance in the District, with the House District Committee, under the leadership of a succession of Southern segregationists, operating as a virtual dictatorship over the population of the nation's capital.

If adopted, the bill would shrink the District of Columbia to a roughly two-mile area comprising "federal buildings and monuments, including the

principal federal monuments, the White House, the Capitol Building, the U.S. Supreme Court Building, and the federal executive, legislative, and judicial office buildings located adjacent to the Mall and the Capitol Building.” The legislation indicates that the office of the District of Columbia’s mayor “shall issue a proclamation for the first elections to Congress of two Senators and one Representative of the commonwealth” for the newly formed state.

Republican congressional leaders have denounced the D.C. statehood plan as a Democratic-led effort to expand their majority in the legislative branch. Pennsylvania Republican Guy Reschenthaler declared the House bill “an unconstitutional power grab by Democrats to gain two ultra-progressive D.C Senate seats [and] enforce radical, far-left policies on the American people.”

Other congressional Republicans have offered their own, equally cynical alternative to the Democrats’ posturing, by offering to retrocede nonfederal parts of the city to the neighboring state of Maryland, which originally donated the land to the federal district more than 200 years ago. Such a move would give residents a seat in the House of Representatives, while denying additional Senate seats.

Many Democratic Party representatives have sought to present D.C. statehood in purely racial terms, insisting that Republican hostility to the bill is a desperate effort to insulate the Senate from the city’s plurality of African American residents. Several Republican senators have made derogatory statements about the District population that play into those arguments.

In fact, the Democratic Party campaign for statehood has nothing to do with genuinely advancing the democratic rights of the people of the District or defending the social interests of black workers. The Democratic-run city government of Washington D.C. has advanced anti-working class policies and legislation for years with the same zeal of its federal counterparts.

The Democratic Party has presided over a vicious assault on the living standards of the city’s population. According to SmartAsset, the District has one of the highest costs of living in the country. Rent for apartments typically eats up nearly half of the city’s median income of \$87,000.

Homelessness in the District has steadily increased on a yearly basis since 2016. In statements last June, representatives of the city’s Interagency Council on Homelessness declared, “It would be hard to imagine a scenario that we won’t see an increase in homelessness” during the pandemic. In a particularly cruel move, the Bowser government announced plans to cut city grants to programs assisting the homeless population last year.

The city government has likewise deprived inmates in the Washington D.C. jail of their basic due process rights during the pandemic and has subjected the prison population to vast health and physical abuses.

As for the statehood proponents’ claims that a Douglass Commonwealth would defend the population against the deployment of militarized police forces, a lawsuit filed last year against the Metropolitan Police Department alleged the police force, under the control of the local Democratic administration of Mayor Muriel E. Bowser, attacked peaceful demonstrators, including children, alongside federal military forces.

Last fall, Bowser and the Trump administration clashed after the mayor issued antidemocratic demands that the federal government jail protesters on specious legal grounds. So naked were the authoritarian demands that the Trump administration’s acting District Attorney for Washington D.C. Michael Sherwin admonished Bowser’s office, stating, “without some evidence to establish probable cause of a particular arrestee’s criminal conduct—e.g., a police officer’s observation or video footage of the alleged crime—we cannot bring federal charges.”

In between their breathless proclamations of defending democracy and the sanctity of the vote, Democrats have likewise sought to bury the evidence of the Trump administration and congressional Republicans’ state and military plots to overturn the November election of Joe Biden through the assault on Congress during the January 6 Electoral College vote.



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