

President Trump signs executive order facilitating federal takeover of the District of Columbia

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On March 28, President Donald Trump signed into law an executive order which amounts to a takeover of the District of Columbia, thereby ending “home rule” in the nation’s capital city. The executive order, bearing the lying title “Making the District of Columbia Safe and Beautiful,” furthers Trump’s efforts to establish a dictatorship by means of cracking down on demonstrations, heightening police presence and targeting agencies in the District.

It is the culmination of a threat Trump had made on February 19 while being interviewed aboard Air Force One. In his interview he spoke of taking over D.C. and vowing to “run it strong, run it with law and order.” Trump bemoaned a proliferation of crime and graffiti and of “too many tents on ... these magnificent lawns” and spoke of further deployment of the Metropolitan Police Department (MPD).

The executive order aims to “make the District of Columbia safe, beautiful, and prosperous by preventing crime, punishing criminals, preserving order, protecting our revered American monuments, and promoting beautification and the preservation of our history and heritage.” In fact, the order aims to do none of these.

The claim of high crime in D.C. is absurd. According to a report from the U.S. Attorney’s Office for the District of Columbia, overall violent crime was down 35 percent to the lowest rates in over 30 years.

Hyped to no end by the capitalist media, the topic of fighting crime is used as a political slogan both by the Democratic Party-controlled D.C. Council and Republican-controlled Congress, entirely on right-wing lines. None of the root causes of crime—high cost of living, low wages, deepening social misery, etc.—are addressed.

The supposedly “progressive” responses taken at the local and federal levels are symbolic at best, such as the painting of the “Black Lives Matter Plaza” on 16th Street NW in the wake of the worldwide protests against police violence in 2020. Earlier this year, D.C. Mayor Muriel Bowser ordered the painting removed.

Section 3 of the executive order establishes the “D.C. Safe and Beautiful Task Force,” which includes representatives from departments and agencies such as the Department of Homeland Security, the FBI, the Marshals Service and the Bureau of Alcohol, Tobacco, Firearms and Explosives (ATF). With coordination by local officials, the task force would work to ensure federal participation in the following:

- “Directing maximum enforcement of Federal immigration law”—bringing the capture, deportation and/or disappearance of undocumented immigrants to the D.C. metropolitan area and doing away with the sanctuary city status of Washington.
 - Speeding up and lowering the cost of concealed-carry weapons license requests in D.C.
 - Preventing fare evasion and crime on the Metrorail system. The subway system, run by the Washington Metropolitan Area Transit Authority (WMATA), charges some of the highest rates in the country for a subway trip; trips during peak hours on weekdays cost as much as \$6.75, and fines of up to \$100 are threatened for fare evasion.
 - Facilitating a massive police presence everywhere in D.C., helping the MPD to recruit more police officers and to work with the federal government to “reduce crime.”
 - Increasing pretrial detention of defendants.
- The latter points only accelerated policies already

introduced by the Democratic Party. The D.C. Council last year passed a draconian law-and-order crime bill, which included as one of its provisions a sharp increase in the maximum length of pre-trial detention from five days to 225 days.

The Secure D.C. omnibus bill, passed almost unanimously by the Democratic Party-controlled city government, also heightened penalties for certain crimes and established “drug-free zones,” where the MPD was empowered to disperse and possibly arrest groups even on the merest suspicion of illicit drug activity. Trump has invented nothing in continuing this bipartisan assault on the city’s working class neighborhoods.

Furthermore, Trump’s order would demand a heavy deployment of officers to specific areas of Washington, such as monuments, parks and highways. The deployment of police to monuments would essentially constitute a clampdown on protests in the D.C. area, like the demonstrations against the ongoing genocide of Gaza.

Section 4 proposes a beautification plan for the District, which includes cleanup of graffiti and the restoration of public monuments. Part of this plan involves removing homeless encampments on federal land, directing the National Park Service through the Secretary of the Interior to perform this task. There is no answer as to where the homeless will go after their belongings have been trashed and their living space essentially destroyed.

Mayor Bowser has not yet responded to Trump’s executive order. What is known, however, is her agreement with Trump on several key issues it claims to address.

Despite the aforementioned drop in crime, Bowser has nevertheless continued to make proposals to Trump, such as the addition of surveillance cameras and an increase in MPD officers. She has dropped all pretense of Washington being a sanctuary city, saying at a National Press Club conference in February:

I think it’s misleading to suggest to anyone that if you are violating immigration laws, that this is a place where you can violate immigration laws.

Prior to the District of Columbia Home Rule Act of 1973, Congress played a much more central and direct role in Washington D.C.’s funding and governance. The 1973 law afforded the District’s population the ability to elect local leaders, as well as giving them certain ability to pass laws and fund themselves.

However, Congress still maintains overall control of the city’s affairs. Even before Trump’s order, consecutive bipartisan administrations regularly intervened and interfered in the District’s governance. The most recent example of this occurred in 2023 under Democrat Joe Biden, who intervened to support Congress’s veto of a D.C. crime law reform.

Eleanor Holmes Norton, the non-voting Democratic congressional delegate to the House of Representatives, issued a statement opposing Trump’s executive order, calling for D.C. statehood, pointing to the report on crime that contradicted the fact sheet for the executive order. She opposed a move by House Republicans to slash the D.C. budget by \$1 billion.

As the *World Socialist Web Site* has said, the Democrats advocate D.C. statehood not to improve conditions for working people but to give themselves a political cover while they pursue right-wing policies, virtually identical to those of the Republicans, which boost business interests and assault the democratic and social rights of the population.



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