Quotes Supporting Full Democracy for the District of Columbia

Since the residents of the District of Columbia were disenfranchised by Congress in 1801, there have been more than 150 Congressional resolutions introduced which have been aimed at providing voting representation, in some form, for District residents. On more than twenty different occasions, hearings have been held on the subject.

Not since the Dred Scott decision or the former language of Article 1, Section 2 of the U.S. Constitution, have we said to a group of Americans that they are less than whole citizens.

Supporters DC Full Voting Representation

Republican Party Platform 1976:
“We...support giving the District of Columbia voting representation in the United States Senate and House of Representatives.”

Democratic Party Platform 1976:
“We support...full voting representation in the Congress [for the District of Columbia.]”

James Madison (The Federalist No. 43):
“The extent of this federal district is sufficiently circumscribed to satisfy every jealousy of an opposite nature. And it is to be appropriated to this use with the consent of the State ceding it; as the State will no doubt provide in compact for the rights and the consent of the citizens inhabiting it; as the inhabitants will find sufficient inducement of interest to become willing parties to the cession; as they will have had their voice in the election of the government which is to exercise authority over them; as a municipal legislature for local purposes, derived from their own suffrages, will of course be allowed them; and as the authority of the legislature of the State, and of the inhabitants of the ceded part of it, to concur in the cession, will be derived from the whole people of the State, in their adoption of the Constitution, every imaginable objection seems to obviated.”

President Andrew Jackson
1831:
“It was doubtless wise in the framers of our Constitution to place the people of this District under the jurisdiction of the General Government. But to accomplish the objects they had in view, it is not necessary that this people should be deprived of all the privileges of self-government... I earnestly recommend the extension to them of every political right which their interests require and which may be compatible with the Constitution.”

President Richard Nixon (in a message to Congress April 28, 1969):
“It should offend the democratic sense of this nation that the 850,000 citizens of its Capitol, comprising a population larger than 11 of its states, have no voice in the Congress.”
U.S. Vice President Walter F. Mondale speaking for U.S. President Carter  
September 1977
“We believe there is no justification for denying citizens equal representation at the federal level because they happen to reside in the District of Columbia.”

U.S. Senator Barry Goldwater (R-AZ), Senate Debate  
August 17, 1978:
“It has long ago been established by court decrees, as well as by American political tradition, that the right to vote in Federal elections is a right that flows directly from the Constitution to each citizen of the United States. This right is one belonging to national citizenship and it arises out of the very nature and existence of the Nation itself.”
1978 (in a ‘Dear Colleague’ letter supporting the 1978 Constitutional amendment):  
“We urge your support for this fundamental principle of justice for the citizens of the nation’s capital.”

U.S. Senator Edward Kennedy (D-MA), Senate Debate  
August 16, 1978:  
“We shall all agree that in this age of big government, no Americans are truly free unless they have a voice in the election of those who write the Nation’s laws. Two hundred years and 95 Congresses after the Nation was founded, it is time to welcome Senators and Representatives from the District of Columbia into our Congressional deliberations and decision.”

U.S. Senator Strom Thurmond (R-SC), Senate Debate  
August 16, 1978:  
“The residents of the District of Columbia deserve the right to (full) representation in Congress if for no other reason than simple fairness.”

U.S. Representative Romano Mazzoli (D-KY), House Debate  
March 1, 1978:  
“The approval of full voting representation in Congress for the District of Columbia would further the very principles of democracy which the Founding Fathers of our Nation envisioned for all citizens.”

U.S. Representative John Buchanan (R-AL), House Debate  
March 2, 1978:  
“History and justice cry out together that this inequity must be corrected now.”

U.S. Senator Howard Baker (R-TN) (as Senate Minority Leader) – 1978:  
“...we simply cannot continue to deny 700,000 American citizens their right to equal representation in the national government,... this basic right is a bedrock of our Republic that cannot be overturned.”

U.S. Senator Bob Dole (R-KS) (on the 1976 Republican Platform) – 1978:  
“The Republican Party supported D.C. voting representation because it was just, and in justice we could do nothing else.”
U.S. Senator Thomas F. Eagleton (D-MO), Senate Hearings – 1978:
“This letter was from a mother who had two sons in the army. 1971, as the Chairman will recall, was still a very high point in the Vietnam War. Her elder son had been killed, and naturally that had had a traumatic impact on her, her thinking, et cetera, and she wrote me a very moving but simple, letter saying, in essence, “I have lost one son. I may well lose another. Yet I have no voice in voting on how far this war should go, or how long it should go on, or how much expanded it should be – into Parrot’s Beak, or how many bombs we should drop on the Ho Chi Minh Trail. I am hopeless, and in that sense I am voiceless.’ “I think that one letter did more to shape my thinking than a million words or a 200-page memorandum. The appeal is not simplistic, it is just fair and equitable.”

Natasha Pearl, Student, Woodrow Wilson High School, D.C.; Senate Hearings – 1978:
“You may recall the one day of the Senate Youth Program that was set aside for the delegates to visit their Senators. I have never before felt inferior to fellow Americans. That day I did. All I could do was listen at dinner that evening when my friends told of how they had discussed important national issues, such as the Panama Canal Treaties, energy policy, and health care with their Senators. I, too, have opinions on these and other vital issues. That day, I could share them with no one who had a voice or a vote in the United States Senate.”

Scholarly Quotes in Support of a Solution for DC

There is no Constitutional prohibition against providing full congressional representation for the District of Columbia. There are several ways by which this goal could be accomplished. Throughout the years, Constitutional scholars have studied this issue, and their findings have been in favor of extending full voting representation to the citizens of the District. Some of their findings are listed in the following excerpts:

“...[T]he plain meaning of this provision (Article V of the Constitution) is that no state shall have any greater numerical representation in the Senate than any other State. It can not mean that the aliquot share of the legislative power possessed by a State at any given time which was originally 2 as to 26, has been steadily diminished by the admission of new States until it is now 2 to 96 [now 2 as to 100].”

U.S. Senate Committee for the District of Columbia, 67th Congress – 1922

“[Representation for the District] recognizes that the right to vote is the last we should ever withhold, because it can protect all others.”

Ramsey Clark, Former Attorney General for the United States – November 1967

“The need for an amendment [providing representation for the District] at this late date in our history is too self-evident for further elaboration; continued denial of voting representation from the District of Columbia can no longer be justified.”

The Chief Justice of the U.S. Supreme Court William H. Rehnquist (as Assistant Attorney General in June 1970)
“No serious constitutional issues exist as to the power or right of the Congress to amend the Constitution to provide full national voting representation for the District of Columbia...the basis exists, in history, in the Constitution, and in fact, for Congress to bestow equality of national representation among the citizens of the Nation’s Capital as it has in other legislation provided equal voting status to all citizens of the United States.”

Sherman L. Cohn, Professor of Law, Georgetown University Law Center – July 1971

“Among the many considerations related to full voting representation, one point stands out about all: If no Constitutional purpose is served by exclusion of the District, the broader principles of government which the Constitution is meant to effect favor [Congressional representation].”


“...the purpose of [Article V] is to ensure that no state gets more representation in the Senate than any other state. This principle would not be contravened by a constitutional amendment allowing the District two Senators. The practical effect of such an amendment would be no different from the practical effect of admitting new states to the union. The number of Senators has increased since the adoption of our Constitution from 26 to 100.”

Patricia M. Wald, Former Assistant Attorney General, Office of Legislative Affairs – October 1977

“It seems to me that the clear purpose of [the equal suffrage’ clause] was the ensure that the Great Compromise would not be undone and that representation in the Senate would not be put on the basis of population. That purpose is not compromised by allowing the District to have two Senators any more than it is when a new state is admitted.”

Professor Charles Alan Wright, University of Texas School of Law – October 1977

“Representatives...raise a threshold question that must be answered before any specific amendment to the Constitution is considered: i.e., is representation for the District necessary? The right answer must be ‘yes’.”

Professor Stephen A. Saltzburg, University of Virginia Law School – October 1977

“The Constitution is entirely clear in that Congress has plenary power to do whatever it wishes with respect to the District...”

Professor Arthur S. Miller, National Law Center, George Washington University – October 1977

“There is no constitutional mandate that says the Senate must have 100 members. Should Congress decide to amend the Constitution and allow citizens of the District congressional representation, there is nothing in the Constitution to forbid it.”

Professor Herbert O. Reid, Sr., Howard University School of Law – October 1977
Editorials and Columns on Full Congressional Voting Representation for DC

“The District of Columbia is not just a plot of land full of impersonal federal buildings. It is home to 700,000 people. These people – and their problems – deserve the same voice in Congress as any other 700,000 people.”
–Robert Colver

“...many Americans throughout the nation have reacted when apprised of the District’s disenfranchisement; they recognize the wrongness of taxation without representation, and of excluding the people of the District from participation in important national decisions. The incredibly long effort for full representation – having come this far – should not wind up crushed.”

“There is no legitimate reason that 750,000 person who reside in this nation’s capital shouldn’t be represented in Congress.”
**The Chicago Times: August 2, 1977**
–Aldo Beckman

“Human rights ought to start a home. And the District of Columbia where Carter and the Congress work would be a good place to start.”
**The Los Angeles Times: May 10, 1977**

“Through the years the principle has remained the same. It is one of basic justice; that residents of the nation’s capital should have the same voice in Congress as everyone else does.”
**The Philadelphia Inquirer: April 2, 1978**