

Testimony of John Forster  
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Before Committee on Government Reform, Tom Davis, Chairman  
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Committee on Government Reform  
Tom Davis, Chairman  
Common Sense Justice for the Nations Capital: An examination of Proposals to Give D.C. Residents Direct Representation

Thank you Chairman Davis for calling these important hearings to explore legislative solutions for the problem of District of Columbia residents not having adequate voting representation in Congress.

My name is John Forster. I am activities coordinator of the Committee for the Capital City. The Committee was founded nine years ago by concerned citizens who wanted to evaluate alternatives for achieving voting rights for the residents of Washington DC. We seek to identify solutions to this problem that meet three key criteria:

- \* Fairness dictates that Washington DC residents must be represented in the House and Senate like all other Americans.
- \* The solution must be legally sound; and,
- \* The solution must have the potential to gain wide bi-partisan support.

We are pleased to testify today in favor of the bills introduced by both Congressmen Dana Rohrabacher and Ralph Regula. These bills successfully meet the criteria needed to provide equal voting rights and democracy for the citizens of Washington DC in a constitutional, bi-partisan approach.

Our research of Washington DC history shows that DC residents voted in Maryland federal elections for ten years after Congress established the District of Columbia in 1791. During this period, one District resident was part of the Maryland delegation in the House, and a resident of Alexandria then also a part of the District represented Virginia.

The right of DC residents to vote in Maryland federal elections ended when Congress enacted the Organic Act of 1801. Congressman Rohrabachers bill restores this right to DC residents.

Over the years, Congress has passed legislation to allow the citizens of all other federal enclaves except the District of Colombia to vote in the state from which that enclave was carved. As recently as 1986, Congress voted to allow citizens who live overseas to vote in federal elections from the state which they could last claim a connection, even if they are not a resident of that state.

While we enthusiastically commend the work of you and Delegate Norton in fashioning proposals of your own, we believe that the constitution is quite clear that representatives and

senators come from states. The district clause of the constitution grants exclusive legislation to Congress over the District of Columbia and federally owned lands. However, we do not believe that the constitution gives Congress the power to create by simple legislation a congressional district exclusively for the District of Columbia, just as Congress does not have the power to similarly create a congressional district exclusively for any piece of federally owned property. Congressional districts come from states and are apportioned for population changes every ten years, as would be the case in the Rohrabacher bill.

The Committee for the Capital City believes that representation in the US Senate is essential for DC residents. However, history and political realities indicate that gaining two senators exclusively for the District of Columbia through either statehood or a constitutional amendment are unlikely to happen.

Both the Rohrabacher and the Regula proposals provide representation in the US senate for DC residents by the existing two Maryland senators. We recognize that Congressman Regulas bill to provide for the reunion of the city of Washington and the state of Maryland will require the approval of Maryland. For reunion to occur, both Maryland and District residents must understand and support the many political, economic and social benefits that reunion would bring to both jurisdictions.

The Rohrabacher bill, however, can solve Washington, D.C.s federal voting rights problem by Congressional action alone. We believe passage of the Rohrabacher bill will solve our federal voting rights problem and will demonstrates Congress conviction for democracy here in the nations capital.

Congressman Rohrabachers bill is uniquely capable of gaining the bi-partisan support needed to provide DC residents full representation in Congress equal to all other Americans in a constitutionally sound approach.