

CONGRESSMAN RALPH REGULA  
TESTIMONY FOR THE HOUSE COMMITTEE ON GOVERNMENT REFORM  
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I would like to thank the House Committee on Government Reform for inviting me to testify on an issue that I feel strongly about. The idea that the citizens of the District of Columbia do not have one of the fundamental rights of democracy confounds me. As elected members of Congress, we should realize the importance of voting representation in Congress.

My background in District of Columbia affairs is extensive. From 1987 to 1993 I served on the House District of Columbia appropriations subcommittee. Since my tenure on the subcommittee, I have introduced the District of Columbia Retrocession Act in every Congress to date.

I am here today for many reasons: I am here because I care about our Nation's Capital, I care about the people who live here and I care about the Constitution that embraces every citizen of the United States. More specifically, I am here to discuss H.R. 381, the District of Columbia – Maryland Reunion Act. Returning all but a small federal enclave to the state of Maryland is the most practical method to provide the citizens of Washington D.C. with full voting representation.

Several efforts to achieve voting representation for the citizens of Washington D.C. have failed. First, the constitutional amendment to provide D.C. with two voting Senators and one voting Representative, though passed by Congress in 1978, never managed to spark the interest of the State Legislatures. Only 16 had ratified the amendment when time expired in 1985.

Secondly, in 1994 we saw the overwhelming defeat of the Statehood bill, H.R. 51, in the House of Representatives by a vote of 153 to 277. Retrocession is the only viable alternative to these failed initiatives. It is the best possible way to give District of Columbia citizens voting representation.

Retrocession dates back to 1846 when the portion of D.C. west of the Potomac was returned to Virginia. This establishes a historical precedent proving that retrocession can alleviate the distress experienced by the people of the District of Columbia. More importantly, the residents of the District of Columbia would gain voting rights in a way more likely to be accepted by Congress.

Through retrocession, current D.C. residents would become citizens of Maryland, with full voting representation. This would preserve Maryland's historical intent that the land it donated be the seat of the government.

Retrocession would be beneficial for both the District and Maryland. The voting rights issues would be resolved, as D.C. residents would gain not only a voting representative in

the House of representatives, but also two in the senate. They would also have new representation on the state level and enjoy access to Maryland's state infrastructure, facilities, and assistance programs. The most significant gain would be the influx of Maryland state funding on education.

Additionally, by gaining the District's nearly 600,000 residents, Maryland would gain a seat in the House and extend its influence in Congress. With the nation's 2nd highest per capita income, District residents would enhance Maryland's tax base and help create the 4<sup>th</sup> largest regional market in the country.

We must follow the example of other democratically based nation's throughout the world that provide voting representation in their national legislatures for its citizens residing in the Capital area.

Canada offers a model of how this proposal could and does work. Ottawa, like Washington D.C., is situated on the border of two larger political entities. The bulk of Ottawa lies in Ontario. However, a sizeable population resides across the Ottawa River in Hull, Quebec. The solution Ottawa has come up with is sending representatives to the Provincial Parliament in Toronto and to the Federal Parliament as part of the Ontario delegation.

Voting rights for the citizens of D.C. has been an issue ever since these rights were lost in 1800. Over two hundred years have passed and we are still trying to extend constitutional rights to citizens who are living in the shadow of Congress.

Over the years I have seen this debate evolve from constitutional amendment, to statehood, to simple voting representation, to retrocession. Each cause is inspired by the desire to help the people of the District of Columbia. Yet we appear no closer to a solution. As an advocate of retrocession I believe this plan offers the best course of action. I implore my fellow colleagues to take action on restoring the rights and privileges to the people of the District of Columbia.