

Case for D.C. Statehood

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Abstract

This article examines the ongoing debate over Washington D.C.'s statehood, focusing on the city's unique position as a cultural and economic powerhouse without full political representation. Despite its significant contributions to the U.S. economy, including a GDP larger than 16 states and the highest federal tax contributions per capita, Washington D.C. remains without voting representation in Congress. The research explores legal and constitutional barriers to statehood, the public's overwhelming support for D.C. statehood as evidenced by an 86% vote in the 2016 referendum, and the city's historical lack of political autonomy. The study also highlights the implications of statehood on economic growth and crime reduction, pointing out that D.C.'s current status hinders its potential for prosperity and effective governance. The article concludes that granting statehood to Washington D.C. would address long-standing issues of underrepresentation, enhance the city's economic development, and promote a more inclusive and fair democracy in the U.S.

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1. Introduction: The Case for Washington D.C. Statehood

Serving as the nation's capital since July 16, 1790, Washington D.C. stands among the top five cities in the country in terms of GDP, comprising 2.5% of the overall GDP of the United States.¹ In 2016, Washington D.C. stood as the second-highest collector of local taxes per person and contributed more tax revenue than 22 states, despite lacking control over the congressional authority in budget allocation.² African Americans make up the majority of 700,000 people (45%), standing in a unique position for the African-American culture. Despite these perspectives and the approval of the 'Washington D.C. Admission Act by an 86% vote in the 2016 referendum, Washington D.C., not being a state, faces constraints on its representation rights. The city is not represented in Congress and the Constitutional Amendment Process. Because of economic and cultural significance, Washington D.C. should be a state.

With 672,271 people, Washington D.C. has a larger population than 2 states: Vermont(645.570) and Wyoming(578.803).³ Washington D.C. also has the highest population density compared with other US districts, following New York, San Francisco, Boston, and Jersey City. Also, 548.968 D.C.⁴ residents have served in the armed services, and 30.000 veterans live in D.C.⁵

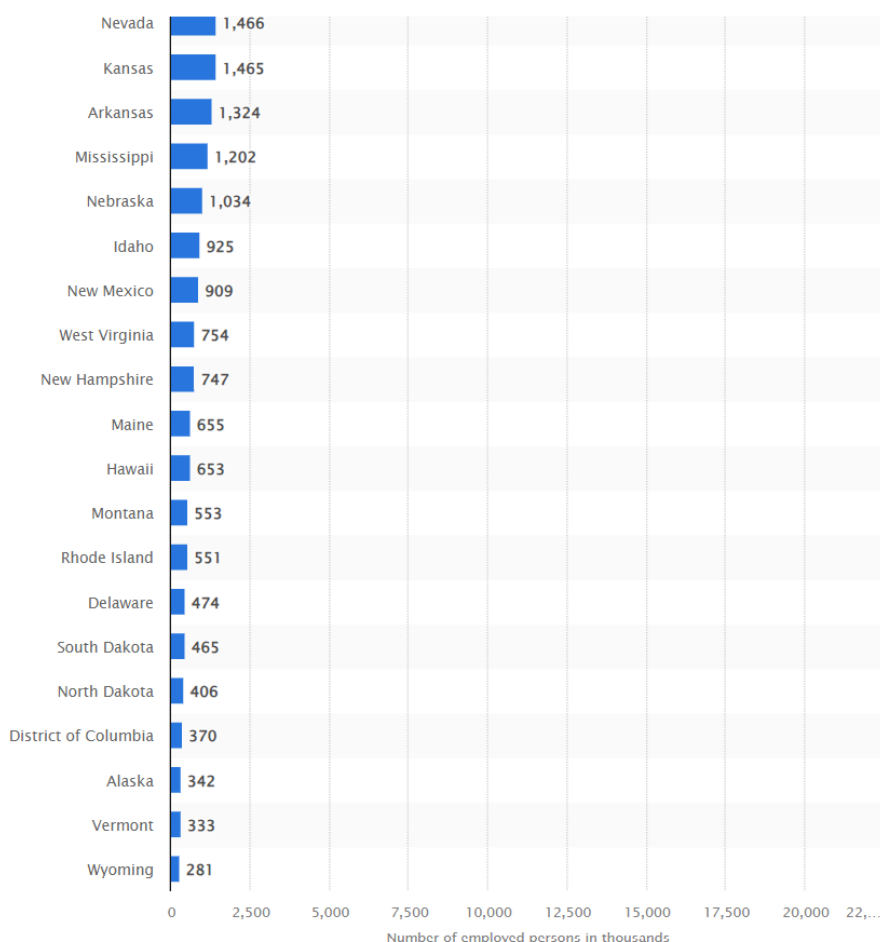
¹Statista Research Department: Gross domestic product of the United States in 2023, by state, Mar. 2024.

²Washington, DC, 2024.

³Veera Korhonen: Resident population of the U.S. in 2023, by state (including the District of Columbia), Dec. 2023.

⁴DC Health Matters: 2024 Demographics.

⁵Veera Korhonen: Number of veterans living in the United States in 2022, by state, Sept. 2023.

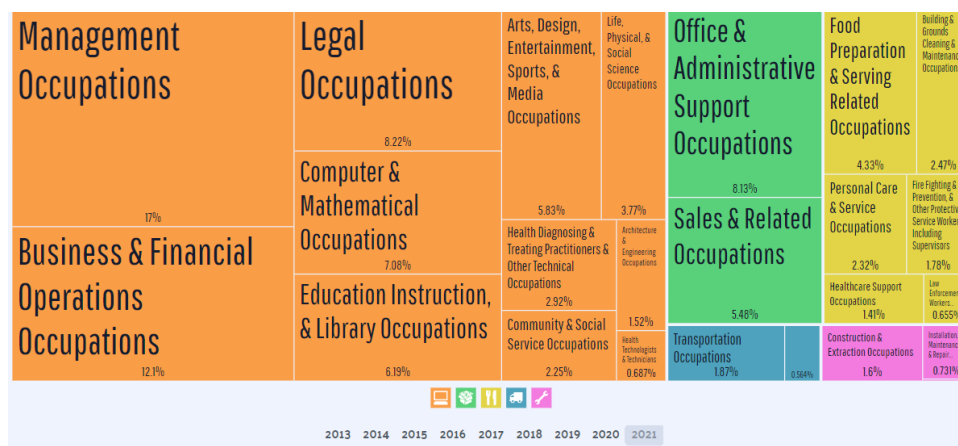


2. Economic and Demographic Considerations

Washington D.C. has a bigger GDP than 16 states (Vermont, Wyoming, Alaska, Montana, South Dakota, Dhire Island, North Dakota, Maine, Delaware, West Virginia, Hawaii, New Hampshire, Idaho, Connecticut, Mississippi, and Nebraska). The biggest GDP per capita compared to any other state, with \$242.853. District residents pay the highest federal taxes per capita in the country. The district pays more total taxes to the federal government than 23 current states. D.C. is a job source for the US, and hosts 374k employees (more than Wyoming, 281k, Vermont, 333k, and Alaska, with 342k). The residents also respond to this situation with “Taxation without presentation” slogans.

In 1953, in preparation for the prospective inclusion of Alaska and Hawaii as constituent states, the United States Senate Committee on Interior and Insular Affairs established a delineated procedure to a certain extent. This procedure delineated three overarching criteria that

delineated the qualifications for the readiness of a territory to attain statehood. The third article indicates that if a territory wants to be a state, the state should have enough population to support itself financially and contribute its share to the federal government's support. Thus, as mentioned in the recent paragraph, D.C. meets this requirement as fully as other states, with population, GDP, GDP per capita, taxation, and job opportunities.



3. Legal and Constitutional Challenges to Statehood

Article two says that “a majority of inhabitants must express their wish to become a state.”, and the Washington D.C. Admission Act by 86% voted in the 2016 referendum, this point provides Article two. The Washington D.C. public also ventilates their wish with “Taxation without presentation” slogans.

Moreover, the first article requirement of being a state is “Inhabitants of a territory wishing to become a state must profess republican principles of government as set down in Article IV of the Constitution.” Thus, D.C. meets this article with the developments in the way to give its public more and more presentation rights such as the 23rd amendment.

Other than Section 4 of Article IV of the Constitution, which stipulates that any new state must be constituted as a republic, the Constitution leaves the process of how new states enter the Union solely to Congress. A process for a territory to become a state was outlined by Congress in the Northwest Ordinance of 1787. From the inception of the United States as a union, addressing issues such as education opportunities, employment prospects, slavery, discrimination, and the republic requirements, some requirements of Northwest Ordinance, the

District, which has never been run afoul by a Government, because of it is the capital of the republic, fulfills the requirements of statehood.

Making the district a state is legally impossible due to Article 1, Section 8, that's because the Constitution says Congress should be in charge of the seat of government, which will be a "District not exceeding ten Miles square," so there are several proposals to make the district smaller, such as shrink the size of the federal district to the area just around the National Mall, the White House, and Capitol Hill to make a state out of the bulk of the city.⁶ However, if Washington becomes a state, the fact that 2 Senatorial seats will most likely pass to the Democrats means that almost any downsizing bill will be taken to court by Republicans. Additionally, although the district wants to become a state, 2/3 of the American people oppose the idea.

The issue of Washington, D.C.'s statehood raises crucial questions about democratic rights and fair representation. Although shouldering significant federal tax burdens, D.C. residents lack full representation in Congress due to constitutional jurisdiction. Political opposition, particularly for partisan reasons, has hindered statehood efforts, neglecting the fundamental democratic rights of D.C. citizens. The "State of Washington, Douglass Commonwealth" proposal offers a pragmatic compromise, aiming to balance representation while preserving the federal district. Yet, broader concerns persist regarding the fairness of the current representation system, notably in the Senate. This situation highlights the urgent need for equitable representation, aligning with foundational democratic principles and warranting a reevaluation of constitutional provisions to ensure equal rights for all American citizens.

Although D.C. residents shoulder crucial amounts of taxes in the US, they need more education opportunities than other states.

Even though D.C. pays the most taxes per capita in the United States, it has the 3rd highest income inequality after New York and Puerto Rico. This results from the territorial status, proving that the current political status is not beneficial for D.C. About every territory that has been statehood like Hawaii, Oklahoma, and California has seen increased prosperity. Population increases, investors take the plunge, and businesses flourish statehood is good for the economy. We can see this in the history of every state, and we expect to see it in D.C., too.

⁶Zachary B. Wolf: DC statehood: Why it should (and should not) happen, Apr. 2021.

Unlike other states, D.C. has no access to implement and review legislation without Congressional interference. This can make it challenging to address local needs quickly and effectively, because of political whims of biased congressmen. When in crisis, D.C. cannot fully satisfy the needs of the people who live there due to Congress blocking important legislation. Recently this has included access to needle exchange programs, affordable abortion, and affordable health care.

4. Political and Social Implications of Statehood

The denied statehood of D.C. highlights a broader pattern of underrepresentation of Black Americans in the US democracy. Granting D.C. statehood wouldn't just mark it as the first majority-Black state in the nation, it would signal a shift in priorities. It wouldn't just hand over full voting power, but would also be a crucial step towards dismantling the systemic imbalances that plague the US government, ensuring a fairer and more inclusive future for all.

When we take a look at the historical examples of civilizations that governed with a statehood system like the Aztecs, Sumerians, etc., we can notice that all of their capital cities became a world-renowned city like Tenochtitlan, Ur, and many others. These cities were the center of civilization exactly. Even though those civilizations were governments of small city-states like the US, they didn't hesitate to accredit power as much as other city-states to their capital city, and it didn't create negative aspects for the country. Statehood for D.C. can facilitate the increase of the development level without violating the equality between the capital and other states of the US. In addition, statehood can be very beneficial for the cultural and world-famous development of D.C.

All states have their own laws, so they can fix them regarding the State's current status. So that, they can prevent probable crimes and offenses with alterations in their laws. However, DC. experiences a really high rate of crime despite its dimension. Also, D.C. is home to several major cities where crime rates are on the rise. In 2023, the violent crime rate in Washington was 376 crimes per 100,000 residents, which is up from just 295 in 2020. The homicide rate is also up to 5 murders per 100,000 residents from 3.9 in 2020.

Seattle is becoming a major hotbed for crime, with a violent crime rate that's 127% higher

than the national average. Tacoma, Fife, and Tukwila are also smaller Washington cities with a violent crime rate that is over 100% higher than the rest of the country.

As a result of being a state, Vermont has very low crime ratios among other US cities. While their crime ratios (violent crime for 100.000 population) were about 150, the US crime rates were about 500. This handicap is also a big threat to D.C. security and economics. It deports the new opportunities and investigations out of D.C. If D.C. doesn't become a state, the crime ratios could increase rapidly as they increment in recent years.

5. Conclusion: The Path Toward Fair Representation

In conclusion, the statehood for D.C. is a political right. Even though the district stands as the second-highest collector of local taxes per person and contributes more tax revenue than 22 states, the residents are not able to present themselves in Congress. The district has a population of 700.000, enough support for statehood by residents (86%), and enough to fulfill the requirements of statehood, which means D.C. provides all of the vitalities of being a state according to the procedures established by the United States Senate Committee on Internal Affairs and Insular Affairs in 1953. On the other hand, D.C. cannot develop as a world-known district due to the government's hands being tied against the crimes, with no power to interfere with criminal issues. This issue induces hesitation in new investors in the district. For better representation, a lower crime ratio, and a more equal US, D.C. should be declared as a state.

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