

★ DEFEND ★ AMERICAN DEMOCRACY

THE CONSERVATIVE CASE FOR STATEHOOD

Over the past several decades, the idea of statehood and voting representation for the residents of Washington, D.C., has enjoyed support from people on both sides of the aisle. It is only in recent years that the movement for full enfranchisement for the residents of the nation's capital has become partisan. Below is a selection of conservative voices – including former Vice President Mike Pence and Republican party platforms from the second half of the 20th century – that have expressed support for statehood and/or voting representation for D.C. residents, underscoring the widespread belief in the moral imperative for the statehood movement.



Former Vice President Mike Pence

In 2007, then-Rep. Mike Pence (R-IN) gave a [floor speech](#) in support of the D.C. House Voting Rights Act, saying the following:

“Madam Speaker, I come to the House today to express my support for the District of Columbia House Voting Rights Act of 2007.

I believe after much consideration that this legislation is a constitutional remedy to a historic wrong. Now, while many have focused on the political consequences of such a move, I believe the only question for a Member of Congress on such matters is this: What does justice demand and what does the Constitution permit this Congress to do about it?

The fact that more than half a million Americans live in the District of Columbia and are denied a single voting representative in Congress is clearly a historic wrong, and justice demands that it be addressed...

Former Arizona Senator and Republican Nominee for President Barry Goldwater

Goldwater, a five-term senator from Arizona and the father of the modern conservative political movement, supported D.C. statehood during his time in office. In 1978, the D.C. Voting Rights Amendment was introduced as a proposed constitutional amendment that would have given the District full Congressional representation and Electoral College votes – representation just short of statehood. The amendment passed the House by a 289–127 vote and the Senate by a 67–32 vote, with Senator Goldwater voting in the affirmative.

In April 2021, Former Arizona Senator Dennis DeConcini – who served alongside Goldwater for ten years – wrote an [opinion piece](#) calling for D.C. statehood. In it, he recounts his and Goldwater's shared support for D.C. statehood:

“We believed [D.C.'s fiscal weak position] simply did not outweigh the residents' most basic rights as Americans.

D.C., then as now, had no voting representation in the House or Senate. Most D.C. residents, then as now, were people of color. Congress also, then as now, could override their local laws and budgets. That struck us both as wrong, and Goldwater thought that, in 1978, fixing it was overdue.

DeConcini recounts Goldwater's speech during the 1978 Senate debate explaining his vote in favor of the amendment:

“ *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... It is the right thing to do.*

Former South Carolina Senator Strom Thurmond

Along with Senator Goldwater, Senator Thurmond – famous for being the third-longest serving senator in Senate history and infamous for his 24-hour-long filibuster of the 1957 Civil Rights Act – also voted in favor of the 1978 D.C. Voting Rights Amendment. Beyond just voting for the bill, Thurmond is [credited](#) with securing multiple Republican co-sponsors for the bill. During the Senate debate on the 1978 bill, Thurmond declared:

“ *It is just not fair, that in the year 1978, more than 700,000 American citizens do not have the right to elect representatives to Congress. No one in 1790, when the District was created, could have imagined the rapid growth and changes that were to take place in the District of Columbia ... The residents of the District of Columbia deserve the right to (full) representation in Congress if for no other reason than simple fairness.*

Former Missouri Republican Congressman Tom Coleman

Coleman wrote an [opinion piece](#) in USA Today in May 2021 highlighting the fact that representation for D.C. used to be a bipartisan issue – one that he, along with dozens of other Republican congresspeople, supported.

Discussing the 1978 effort to pass a constitutional amendment for D.C. voting representation, Coleman wrote:

“ *For many of us Republicans running for reelection, the vote was not politically convenient: We knew there could be political blowback from our constituents since it was certain our vote would result in the addition of three Democratic members of Congress – one in the House and two in the Senate. But the question was a moral one, pitting political expediency against a straightforward question of equality: Could we, the public servants charged with representing Americans in Congress, deny that same representation to our fellow citizens?*

Former George H.W. Bush Administration Solicitor General Ken Starr

In 2007, as the [D.C. House Voting Rights Act of 2007](#) was being introduced into the House, Starr weighed into the debate making the case in favor of House representation. According to the [Washington Post](#):

“ *Starr notes that the Constitution is silent on the matter of whether D.C. residents may vote... [and] that Congress routinely regulates the flow of commerce between the District and the states, and that power is also expressly reserved in the Constitution for Congress to act on commerce 'among the several states.' That means Congress can also decide that the best way to govern the District is for Washingtonians to have the same voting rights as other taxpaying Americans.*

The [Washington Post](#) continued to say that Starr wrote:

“ *...Article I [of the Constitution] creates the republican form of the national government, and Article IV guarantees that form to its people, regardless of whether they reside in a District or a State.*

Republican Party Platforms

Between 1956–1964 and 1968–1976, the Republican party platforms advocated for increased representation for D.C. residents, ranging from self-government to voting representation in Congress. An excerpt of the [1972](#) platform, calling for voting representation and self-government, is below:

“

We remain committed to a comprehensive program of human rights, social betterment and political participation for the people of the District of Columbia. We will build on our strong record in this area—a record which includes cutting the District of Columbia crime rate in half, aggressive support for a balanced transportation system in metropolitan Washington, initiation of a Bicentennial program and celebration in the national capital region, and support for the first Congressional Delegate in nearly a century. We support voting representation for the District of Columbia in the United States Congress and will work for a system of self-government for the city which takes fair account of the needs and interests of both the Federal Government and the citizens of the District of Columbia.

The [1976](#) platform similarly supported self-determination, full representation in the House and Senate, and home rule over local matters:

“

We again...support giving the District of Columbia voting representation in the United States Senate and House of Representatives and full home rule over those matters that are purely local.

Former George W. Bush Administration Assistant Attorney General Viet Dinh

In 2014, Dinh wrote a [statement](#) for the Senate Homeland Security and Governmental Affairs Committee that supported the constitutionality of the D.C. statehood bill. He said that:

“

Courts would likely decline to adjudicate any constitutional challenge to the Act and, in all events, would likely hold that the Act is constitutional.

In his [2014](#) statement, Dinh explains that Congress is permitted to admit states through simple legislation, and highlights that this in fact is the process by which all states – except for the original thirteen colonies – have been admitted.

Dinh did not see the 23rd Amendment as an obstacle to admitting Washington, D.C., into the union through simple legislation, [saying](#) that “*the Constitution is not violated anytime the factual assumptions underlying a provision change.*”

Dinh, according to the Washington Post, called the lack of voting rights in Washington, D.C., a “[historical accident](#).”

Former Virginia Republican Congressman Tom Davis

In 2006, Davis wrote [a piece](#) originally published on Human Events, a conservative political news site, rebuking his fellow House members for not supporting the effort to grant D.C. residents direct representation.

In [2021](#), he said that he believed the reason Republicans were against statehood was partisan:

“

It's hard to argue with a straight face that people that fought and died in a half a dozen wars and pay federal income tax shouldn't have federal representation...If they were voting Republican, they'd be there in a heartbeat.