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Mike Mansfield 1903-2001

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Statement of Senator Mike Mansfield (D. Montana)

Congressional Representation for the District of Columbia

Mr. Chairman, it is a pleasure to appear before the Subcommittee on Constitutional Amendments in behalf of S. J. Res. 31, a joint resolution providing for an amendment to the Constitution of the United States providing representation in the Congress for the District of Columbia. I am delighted to be co-sponsor of this measure with the able and distinguished Minority Leader, Senator Dirksen.

We propose in S. J. Res. 31 to take the first step necessary in giving long overdue recognition to the populace of the District. This is the first step, but not the final one. This is the Constitutional amendment required, leaving to Congress the decision as to the extent of representation.

In the late 1960s and after almost two hundred years of our democratic society, it is almost inconceivable that any portion of the United States should be without representation in the Congress of the United States. The District of Columbia has nearly a million residents, a population exceeding that of eleven states. The residents of the District have a very high average per capita income and assume their appropriate share of the
Federal income tax burden. The District, however, does not have a voice in the affairs of our Federal government. Considering all the units of our United States, the District of Columbia should be more concerned about the affairs of the Federal government because of Uncle Sam's very direct involvement in the District's affairs.

Washington, D. C., our Nation's Capital, is a vital city, it is a major center of commerce, industry and government. It is no longer the sleepy little city on the Potomac River where the Congress met for two or three months each year. The business of government has become complex, it is a 365 days a year business. It is the home of some of the most talented and capable people in the world. There is a very active business community, constantly expanding. Washington is the home of several fine universities and colleges. The academic and artistic community generates nationwide and worldwide attention. There is so much of importance here in the District of Columbia, yet its residents do not have the right to representation in Congress. This is a blight on our constitutional form of government. The last Presidential Election was the first time that the residents of Washington, D. C., had an opportunity to vote for President and Vice President. The District is now entering into a new process of local government; a mayor-council
form of administration which has every prospect of succeeding. The time is now at hand to complete the job of revitalizing the government of our Nation's Capital and give it true and appropriate representation in the Congress.

Mr. Chairman, several months ago the Attorney General, Ramsey Clark, summarized the situation when he stated, "District residents carry all the burdens of citizenship. They should share its rights."

I see absolutely no reason why the people living in the District of Columbia should continue to be denied a voice in the affairs of the legislative branch of the Federal government. S. J. Res. 31 provides for the Constitutional amendment, clearing the way for Congressional approval on a basis similar to that used in admitting the two newest states to our Union, Hawaii and Alaska. These two States have made a fine contribution to the legislative process at the Federal level and I am certain that the District of Columbia will do the same. It is long overdue.