

Congress of the United States

House of Representatives

COMMITTEE ON OVERSIGHT AND ACCOUNTABILITY

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Ranking Member Jamie Raskin **Committee on Oversight and Accountability** **Hearing on “Overdue Oversight of the Capital City: Part I”** **March 29, 2023**

Good morning. There are two problems in America that we can solve and that should unify the American people: one, the problem of gun violence and related forms of criminal violence and two, the problem of disenfranchisement and unresolved struggles for political democracy and equal rights in the country.

No one is in favor of lethal gun violence and everyone should be in favor of full democratic inclusion and participation.

And yet, rather than working together to solve these two problems, some of our colleagues would simply use the existence of one problem to block the solution of the other, while doing nothing to address either one of them.

When a mass shooter guns down three children and three adults as happened on Monday in Nashville, Tennessee, or a mass murderer assassinates ten people at a supermarket in Buffalo, New York, or a racist killer massacres 23 people and wounds 22 others at a Walmart in El Paso, Texas, or a gunman murders a D.C. Metro transit employee trying to protect riders from the armed attacker as happened in D.C. last month, these acts of deranged criminal violence should be a spur to immediate nationwide bipartisan action to pass a universal violent criminal background check on the sale of all firearms and to ban military-style weapons of war on the streets, in the schools and churches, and in the supermarkets and shopping malls of America.

How do we know this will work? Well, America has the laxest, loosest, most permissive and liberal gun laws in the world and we have a rate of gun violence unseen in the rest of the industrialized world. Firearm homicide rates are 13 times greater here than in France and 22 times greater than Europe as a whole. We are the only industrialized nation where gun violence is the leading cause of death for children. If we took the actions our counterparts have from Canada to the UK to Japan to Australia, we would dramatically lower the rates of gun violence in America. The states with the strictest gun laws have the lowest rates of gun homicide, and the states with the loosest gun laws have the highest rates of gun homicide.

But, alas, our GOP Colleagues simply throw up their hands, bewail and bemoan the existence of “evil” in the world, as if we were theologians rather than public officials, and say there is nothing, just nothing that we can do to stop criminal gun violence. Our Colleague Congressman Tim Burchett is a genuinely decent and beloved man around here, but he just gave voice to this pervasive and shocking sense of capitulation of our Republican Colleagues to the monstrous problem of criminal gun violence.

After Monday’s mass shooting at a Christian School in Nashville, he said, “It’s a horrible, horrible situation and we’re not going to fix it.” He said, “Criminals are gonna be criminals.”

But even worse than this fatalistic surrender to criminal violence in America is the decision today to use the stubborn pervasiveness of such criminal violence everywhere in America as an excuse to deny people in one community their basic rights as Americans to participate in representative government on an equal basis. This is precisely what's happening in this hearing.

The more than 700,000 U.S. citizens living in Washington, D.C. pay more taxes per capita than the residents of each of the 50 states. They have fought in the American Revolution and in every foreign war. They are draftable. They are subject to all the laws of the country.

They have had no voting representation in the U.S. House or the U.S. Senate since 1801 when the Organic Act took effect, although they won the right to participate in presidential elections with the 23rd Amendment in 1961.

But they're disenfranchised in Congress and they're fighting a crime problem that all Americans are fighting everywhere.

Yet, when violent insurrectionists came to this chamber on January 6, 2021, the people of Washington as Capitol officers and MPD officers and staffers and citizens rallied to the defense of the Republic and the very Congress that they have no voting representation in. If anyone had an authentic political grievance against the Union, it was them, but they stood up to defend the Congress and the Vice President against a violent mob of rebels- without-a-cause and rebels-without-a-clue who savagely attacked our police officers. And now the very same Members who have come together today to denounce crime in Washington and the response of the D.C. government are, astonishingly, visiting violent criminals in the D.C. jail and praising them as heroes and political prisoners, as if they were visiting Nelson Mandela or Alexei Navalny. What an obscenity and disgrace to this institution.

In any event, the people of Washington never attacked our body or our officers. They are demanding change the right way. They organized a Statehood Constitutional Convention and a statehood referendum in 2016 and petitioned us for admission to the Union. The House of Representatives voted in both the 116th and 117th Congresses to grant their admissions. The Senate failed to act both times.

Their petition is so much in the mainstream of American history. Statehood admission has been a driving force behind the growth of American democracy from a Union of 13 states into a Union of 50 states.

74 of 100 Senators today represent people in states that were not in the original compact of 13. The vast majority of Members of the House—307 Members—represent people living in states that were admitted by Congress rather than people living in one of the original 13 states that ratified the Constitution, who are represented by 128 Representatives—I happen to be one of those but all of us have equal votes regardless of whether we were one of the first or one of the most recent.

In the process of state admissions, which is a decision left up to Congress under Article IV of the Constitution, all kinds of objections have been raised.

It was said Utah was too Mormon, New Mexico too Catholic. Other candidates for statehood were thought too poor, too big, too small. Hawaii and Alaska were non-contiguous, obviously too far away. Texas was its own country and where does it say we can admit a whole country as a state? Representatives complained that too many people in Arizona spoke Spanish and Senator Beveridge, Chairman of the Committee on Territories, said they were likely to be traitors and un-American. Louisiana was way too French for many Members of Congress. And one of the main criticisms has been that this or that community was too wild, too criminal, too ruffian. And, of course, beneath the surface there has always been the quicksand of racial, ethnic, and religious animosity and hatred.

But the amazing and redeeming fact of America has been that, ultimately, all of these irrational, non-constitutional and arbitrary objections have been swept away in favor of the great democratic imperative embodied in the first three beautiful words of the Constitution: We the People. And the Declaration of Independence set forth the beautiful self-evident truths that have guided us.

All Americans are born equal; all of us have unalienable rights including the rights to life, liberty and the pursuit of happiness; government exists legitimately only resting on the consent of the governed; and no people should be governed or taxed without their own direct representation.

This hearing, called to malign the people of the District of Columbia and their leaders for criminal violence our colleagues will do nothing to stop, should instead be a hearing to examine and move statehood for the people of Washington, D.C. in the 118th Congress.

I know there will be lots of criticisms leveled against this or that provision of D.C. law, this or that budgetary allocation or policy decision. But all of that is quite beside the point.

The people of Washington are an independent, self-governing community who want their statehood. You no more have to agree with every law or government decision in Washington, D.C. than you have to agree with every law or government decision in Louisiana or California or Massachusetts or Texas or Alaska or Hawaii.

In democracy, people have the right to make their own decisions and even the right sometimes to make their own mistakes. Is there a state in the Union that has not made policy mistakes? I am certain there is not a Member of this Committee who would want every law and policy of your state or localities to be examined and reviewed by the representatives of every other states whenever they think it's in their political interest to do that.

Have our colleagues so given up on the possibility of us making real progress on reducing gun violence in America that they would prefer to turn the Congress of the United States into a 535-person city council, the largest city council on Earth, to bedevil and harass the people of Washington, D.C.? Let them have their equal rights. Let them have their democracy.

I thank all our witnesses for being here today.

I also thank the people of the District of Columbia for your patience and determination as we work to secure statehood.

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