

D.C. Statehood and Susan E. Rice

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For several years, David Leonhardt has been making a case in *The New York Times*, for Washington, D.C., to become a state. In [A Step Toward 51](#), he lets Susan E. Rice make his case, referring to the article, [Washington, D.C., Deserves Statehood](#), also in *The Times*. Ms. Rice was “the national security adviser from 2013 to 2017 and a former United States ambassador to the United Nations.” She was raised and resides in D.C., where a large majority of the residents want statehood. Statehood would provide full voting representation for the residents. It would also counter-balance the prevailing Whiteness of small states, with a significantly Black small state.

Leonhardt also points to an opposing article, [The Constitution says no to DC Statehood](#), by Jeff Jacoby in the *Boston Globe*. Having read the Constitution carefully, I agree with Jacoby that making D.C. a state is prohibited. The actual plan would shrink the District to a few essential blocks, and make a state of the rest. However, unless repealed, Amendment 23 would give three votes in the Electoral College to the few remaining residents. The [District of Columbia Voting Rights Amendment](#) would have provided full representation in the House and Senate, but it expired in 1985, with only 16 of the required 38 states ratifying it. Nationwide, most voters do not want D.C. to be fully represented, let alone be a state.

D.C. statehood would surely be challenged in the courts, and likely defeated there. Republicans would deride the effort as a partisan Democratic ploy to gain two seats in the Senate, which it surely is for many supporters. We Democrats should not waste our political capital on D.C. statehood, which is so unpopular nationwide; it would weaken federal control over this resource.

When I read that Joe Biden was seriously considering Ms. Rice for his running mate, at first I was pleased. She held serious positions under President Barack Obama, and she worked with then Vice-President Biden. Then I read Rice’s article, which I consider both poorly-judged and lacking a national perspective. According to the polls, the presidency is Joe Biden’s to lose. Please, Joe,

Reject Susan E. Rice as the candidate for Vice-President!

Ms. Rice has made a statement that is clearly important to her. She should bear the political costs of that statement now, so that the party and the country do not bear those costs in the future. The people of this country have correctly and emphatically rejected full voting rights for D.C. The attempt to make D.C. a state is a ploy to thwart the will of the people. As a candidate for Vice President, this matter would become an attack vector for Republicans. This stance should disqualify Ms. Rice as a potential candidate.

The correct approach is to propose an amendment that specifies less, not a mere bill that specifies more. I am strongly in favor this modification of the failed D.C. Voting Rights Amendment:

For purposes of representation in the House of Representatives, the District constituting the seat of government of the United States shall be treated as though it were a State.

In practice, this would mean one voting representative, no senators, and no need to repeal Amendment 23. I am sure a strong majority of the country agrees with me that D.C. should not gain senators.

There is precedent for removing territory from D.C. In the lead-up to the Civil War, the portion of D.C. south of the Potomac was returned to Virginia. Non-essential portions of the current D.C. could be returned to Maryland (Congress, Maryland and D.C. voters permitting), letting residents in the returned area vote in Maryland. This would not require an amendment. D.C. voters might not approve a break-up, and Congress definitely should not.

Yet another constitutional amendment might permit residents of D.C. to vote for and be represented by Maryland senators. There does not seem to be much in this for Maryland, despite its surrounding D.C. on three sides.

In addition to being morally and politically wrong, *there would surely be unintended consequences to making D.C. a state.* There are things Congress can do with respect to the District (or another territory), but cannot do with respect to a state. Please, let us have no more attempts to make D.C. a state.