



Congressional Interference and the Denial of Democracy in Washington, DC

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Americans living in our nation's capital pay the highest per capita federal income taxes, fight and die in wars and serve on juries but are denied voting representation in Congress. Yet Congress has the final approval of DC's local budget and laws, with full power to override the decisions of the locally elected mayor and council.

When Congress overrules decisions by the local government, it not only assaults American democracy but disregards the critical needs and priorities of DC residents. Often it is DC's most vulnerable populations who face the greatest risks.

Reproductive Rights: From 1988 to 2009, Congress prevented the District (but no state) from using locally-raised tax dollars to cover abortion services through Medicaid. The ban cut off reproductive health services for low-income women. In 2009 this restriction was lifted, but a new Republican majority in the 112th Congress reintroduced the ban in the FY 2011 Continuing Resolution. The ban remains in place, despite two attempts by allies of the District to remove the prohibition.

On May 4, 2011, The House of Representatives passed the "No Taxpayer Funding for Abortion Act" (H.R. 3), which would make the ban permanent and, for the first time, federalize DC's government and funds for the purposes of the bill, overriding the autonomy afforded the District by the Home Rule Act. On January 23, 2012, Rep. Trent Franks (R-AZ) introduced H.R. 3803. This bill would ban nearly all abortions after 20 weeks of pregnancy only in the District of Columbia.

Marriage Equality: Congress prevented DC from spending any funds to implement the Health Care Benefits Expansion Act from 1992-2002, which allowed domestic partners greater rights. In 2009 DC passed a marriage equality law, and on January 18, 2011 The Supreme Court allowed to stand a Court of Appeals ruling upholding marriage equality in the District. Despite these actions, on January 25, 2011 Rep. Jim Jordan (R-OH) threatened to repeal DC's marriage equality law.

HIV/AIDS Prevention Programs: Washington, DC has the nation's highest HIV/AIDS rate, surpassing the recognized "epidemic" threshold. From 1999 to 2007, Congress prohibited DC from using local funds for syringe access programs proven to reduce the spread of HIV/AIDS among intravenous drug users. Since the ban was lifted and syringe access programs were expanded, DC health officials report a 60% drop in the number of newly diagnosed HIV/AIDS cases from injection drug use.

Gun Safety Laws: At the urging of the National Rifle Association, Congress has for years pushed legislation to eviscerate DC's gun laws. These assaults have continued despite a federal court ruling that the District's laws comply with the Supreme Court's 2008 *District of Columbia v. Heller* decision. In 2009, gun legislation proposed to be added to the DC Voting Rights Act killed the bill to give DC a full vote in the House. In 2011 Rep. Mike Ross (D-AR) and Rep. Jim Jordan (R-OH) introduced the same legislation as the "Second Amendment Enforcement Act."

Medical Marijuana: In 1998, two weeks before 69% of DC citizens approved a ballot proposition to legalize medical marijuana, Rep. Bob Barr (R-GA) added a rider to the DC appropriations bill prohibiting DC from using funds to count or certify the vote. Later, Congress went on to prohibit local funding of a medical marijuana program. In 2010, the restriction was lifted, and the DC Council implemented the law. However, with other progressive local laws under attack, DC anticipates congressional interference in this program as well.