

**H.R. 1045: THE DISTRICT OF COLUMBIA BUDGET
AUTONOMY ACT OF 2009**

**H.R. 960: THE DISTRICT OF COLUMBIA LEGISLATIVE
AUTONOMY ACT OF 2009**

**UNITED STATES HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES
COMMITTEE ON OVERSIGHT AND GOVERNMENT REFORM
SUBCOMMITTEE ON FEDERAL WORKFORCE, POSTAL SERVICE AND THE
DISTRICT OF COLUMBIA**

**THE HONORABLE STEPHEN F. LYNCH, CHAIRMAN
THE HONORABLE JASON CHAFFETZ, RANKING MEMBER**



**TESTIMONY OF ADRIAN M. FENTY
MAYOR
DISTRICT OF COLUMBIA**

WEDNESDAY, NOVEMBER 18, 2009

Introduction

Chairman Lynch, Ranking Member Chaffetz, and distinguished subcommittee members, it is my pleasure to be here today to speak to you about H.R. 1045, the District of Columbia Budget Autonomy Act of 2009 and H.R. 960, the District of Columbia Legislative Autonomy Act of 2009. Both bills, if enacted, would represent an important step forward for the District of Columbia and its residents. To that end, I would like to take a moment to recognize the outstanding work of the District's Representative in the House, Congresswoman Eleanor Holmes Norton, who for years has championed the bills before this subcommittee today and many others designed to grant the District the autonomy it deserves.

These bills simply provide the District the same flexibility and autonomy afforded other jurisdictions across the country, to ensure the efficient and effective delivery of services – a fundamental responsibility of good government.

Budget Autonomy

In 1973, Congress granted the District limited home rule powers and empowered the citizens of the District to elect a mayor and city council. At the same time, however, Congress retained the power to review and approve all District laws including the District's annual budget. This makes the District unique among jurisdictions that perform state-level functions, as the District does, in that Congress approves not only federal funding for the District but also the spending of our local funds – a practice that ultimately hinders good government.

The District Government of today is not the District Government of the 1990s, which saw the creation of the Congressionally-mandated Control Board because of unsound financial practices. Thanks in part to the work of my predecessor, Mayor Anthony Williams, we have come a long way since then and we are not going back. This year, the District submitted to Congress its 14th consecutive balanced budget and we continue to exercise sound financial management practices, a fact validated by the A+ credit rating awarded to our bonds by the nation's rating agencies. I am confident Dr. Gandhi will speak to the significance of that in a few minutes, but I hope my point is clear – the District's fiscal house is in order and the time has come to lessen the burdens imposed by Congressional approval of the District's budget.

Current law subjects the District's budget to the federal appropriations process which requires District agencies to plan their budgets almost a year in advance to allow for Congressional approval. The approval process often causes unnecessary delays in service delivery and prevents the District from responding quickly to changing public needs. As the primary deliverer of services, local governments can only be effective if



they can respond to changing circumstances in a timely and responsive manner. Unfortunately, Congress fails to approve the District's budget on time virtually every year, resulting in a near 3-month delay on average – a period in which critical new investments cannot be made. The District also faces challenges over the course of the fiscal year as any mid-year budget reallocations require an act of Congress. This inevitably disrupts service delivery.

For these reasons, we are asking for the ability to spend locally collected dollars without Congressional approval. This will mean better, more efficient government for the residents of the District and less work for the federal staff who must review our budget every year. I would also like to note that recent history shows that neither Congress nor the White House have made any changes to the actual allocation of local funds in the District budget. Therefore, a change in the current policy not only makes sense but it also comports with current Congressional practices.

Legislative Autonomy

Many of the issues I've raised regarding budget autonomy also apply to the issue of legislative autonomy. Article I, Section 8 of the Constitution allows the House and Senate to examine every piece of legislation passed by the D.C. Council. Depending on the nature of the legislation, we must wait 30 or 60 legislative days for passive Congressional approval before our legislation becomes law. As I said in my testimony on this matter two years ago, this makes me the only chief executive of a city or state in this country for whom the act of signing legislation does not make the legislation final.

It also means the Council of the District of Columbia passes, and I sign, hundreds of bills every year that must await Congressional approval – the vast majority of which are of no interest to Congress whatsoever.

The limited legislative autonomy granted by the bill proposed by Congresswoman Norton would maximize the use of taxpayer dollars, reduce inefficiencies caused by a complicated legislative process required to comply with federal law, and allow the District to realize a greater measure of self-government.

I urge this Congress to take swift action on these two pieces of important legislation.

Thank you for the opportunity to testify today. I'm happy to answer any questions you may have.

