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Congress of the United States

House of Representatives

Washington, DC 20515-1501

Statement of Congresswoman Eleanor Holmes Norton
Subcommittee on Health Care, District of Columbia, Census and the National Archives
Hearing on “The District of Columbia’s Fiscal Year 2012 Budget: Ensuring Fiscal
Sustainability”
May 12, 2011

This hearing is unprecedented in recent history. Historically, the Appropriations Committee has held the hearings on the District of Columbia’s local budget, because only that committee has the authority to approve the District’s local budget. In fact, the House Republican majority has spent more time focusing on the local affairs of the District than at any time since the 1973 Home Rule Act. Just last week, Republicans followed up on their prohibition on the city spending its local taxpayer funds on abortions for low-income women in fiscal year 2011 by passing an unprecedented bill, the No Taxpayer Funding for Abortion Act (H.R. 3), now pending in the Senate, to permanently prohibit the District from spending its local funds on abortions and to define the District as part of the federal government for the purposes of abortion. As Republicans have escalated their attacks on the District’s home rule, they have simultaneously denied me the opportunity to defend my district during hearings, a courtesy traditionally afforded to Members. I was denied the opportunity to testify before a House Judiciary subcommittee on H.R. 3, even though my district was uniquely affected, and today, the subcommittee has withdrawn the usual opportunity Members have to offer opening statements, including for me, even though the hearing is devoted exclusively to my district and I serve on the subcommittee.

The timing of this hearing is noteworthy. Last month, as the District of Columbia government faced a shutdown over a federal spending fight, not a single Republican member of the subcommittee lifted a finger to help keep the District government open. In fact, Republicans rejected my amendments at the Rules Committee to allow the District to spend its local funds for the rest of fiscal year 2011, and refused to move my standalone bill giving the District that authority.

The subcommittee needs to hear from the city about the effects of a District government shutdown on residents and services, and the cost to the District of operating under a series of short-term continuing resolutions. My bill for budget autonomy for the District, the District of Columbia Budget Autonomy Act of 2011 (H.R. 345), has been pending before the committee since January. If the subcommittee’s concern is “ensuring fiscal sustainability,” it might begin by reducing the cost to the city of the lengthy, redundant congressional budget process by granting the District autonomy over its local budget, or at least giving the District the ability to spend its local funds for a fiscal year if Congress has not enacted an appropriations bill by the start of that fiscal year, as another of my bills, the District of Columbia Local Funds Continuation Act (H. R. 980), pending before the committee would allow.