



DC Residents Protest on Emancipation Day

By Jessica Gresko, Associated Press News Service, April 15, 2011

WASHINGTON (AP) – Protesters used the anniversary of the day President Abraham Lincoln freed slaves in Washington 149 years ago to call for freedom for the city from congressional oversight.

About 60 protesters gathered Friday on Capitol Hill to object to the fact Congress oversees the District of Columbia’s budget and laws and that residents pay federal taxes but do not have a full voting member of Congress.

“It is time for us to be emancipated from the shackles of bondage that we experience every day in this city,” Mayor Vincent Gray told the group before the protest.

Government offices in the District of Columbia were closed Friday in celebration of Emancipation Day, April 16, 1862, when Lincoln signed an act freeing some 3,100 slaves in D.C. The 16th president signed the Emancipation Proclamation freeing all slaves in the South just over eight months later.

On Friday, the group of protesters also noted that it was April 15, the traditional deadline to file federal taxes, and that Washington’s some 600,000 residents pay federal taxes but do not get a vote in Congress in return. As part of the protest, the group stood in front of a Senate office building wearing T-shirts reading “Taxation Without Representation” and chanting “Free DC!” and “Emancipation!”

Three men were arrested during the protest after they sat in the roadway and blocked traffic. One of the men arrested was **Michael D. Brown**, one of the city’s two so-called “shadow senators,” a position elected by city residents that doesn’t come with any clout on Capitol Hill.

Washington leaders and residents have long been opposed to Congress’ control over the city, but their anger was renewed this week by a federal budget deal that puts new restrictions on the city. The deal bans the city from spending money to pay for abortions for low-income women and also imposes a school voucher program. Residents and lawmakers have said it was unacceptable that the city was used as a bargaining chip during budget negotiations.

Friday’s demonstration was organized by D.C. Vote, a nonpartisan group that lobbies for more independence for the city and a vote in Congress. The group also organized a rally Monday protesting the budget in which the mayor and 40 others were arrested after sitting down and blocking traffic on Constitution Avenue.