

## **Heightened Conversations: Impacts of Building Heights in Capital Cities**

**March 5, 2013**

**National Archives – William McGowan Theater**

### **Congressman Darrell Issa (Introduced by NCPC Chairman L. Preston Bryant)**

Before we start our panel, which will be moderated by Gary Hack, in my opening remarks I made reference to Congressman Issa, from California who chairs the House Committee on Oversight and Government Reform, which is the House Committee that has principal jurisdiction, if you will, over the District of Columbia.

Congressman Issa has just joined us. As I invite him up here to say a few words, I just want to say that Congressman Issa has shown great interest, which hasn't always been the case, but has shown great interest in the partnership between the federal government and the District government.

He has had a terrific dialogue with Mayor Gray, he works in partnership and closely collaborates with DC's representative in Congress, and he was most keen that we undertake this study on the Height Act, the century-old Height Act to see how we might adapt Washington to an increasingly modern city.

We hope to, at the end of the study, to report back to Congressman Issa, as I said earlier, in the Fall. So with that, a few words from Congressman Issa. We would greatly appreciate before we start our panel discussion.

**CONGRESSMAN ISSA:** It only takes six or seven people and one camera to get a congressman up to the podium.

If someone's still working this, would you go back about six slides to that rooftop in Holland that was shown? Yeah, oh, he has his own...? There you go. You mean I can do it?

The vision that we asked for the study on, and the reason that, as you will, the largest tenant in this city, the federal government, that I care about this, is our roof line doesn't even look this good.

If you're on the tallest building or up the tallest buildings and you look out, like so many cities, you see a set of regulations, that created, if you will, a ground level look, that's one way, and a roof top level that is less than optimized.

So, quite frankly, I was honored to be here for the previous speaker because, he touched on it. The Height Act discussion and this study is not about how high you go, it's how well you go high.

The goal that I think our committee, which ultimately would oversee any legislation, that the changes, the rules under which you're governed wants to try to, in an intelligent way, give you the opportunity to do better and to do more.

But quite frankly I don't think that the world's greatest city, the city with the greatest number of museums, the city that more people think of as the center of democracy, I don't think it's about densely we pack. But it will be about whether or not we take what we have and improve it.

So I pushed forward my ranking member then and my ranking member now, Mr. Cummings. He has been supportive. This isn't a partisan issue.

Eleanor Holmes Norton, who serves me on the committee, has been supportive that we have blighted areas that are far outside, if you will, the splendor of the center of the city, and we need to work on those, and she cares about it every day, and I do too.

But we also have, can we do better in someday looking out and saying "My goodness, we've optimized every existing building through regulatory, if you will, opportunity and architectural opportunity."

Whatever we do in congress, and looking at the leaders of the city, all we want to do is create a framework in which the city can oversee it's best and most beautiful use of the federal city of the largest and most powerful nation on earth.

It's important. It's important enough for all of you to be participating here tonight. I'm honored to be able to speak for a moment. But we look at this study and our committee as a partnership where we want to modernize an act, free the city to do better.

We believe that the kind of thing I heard just a few minutes ago, where we're not talking about how high, but we're discussing height for "What do we do with that top floor that often is the ugliest part of the building?"

Do we have some sections in which we do make some variances in historic heights? And what do we do candidly with a lot of legacy that we have? Smaller buildings, some of them that have to be maintained, other buildings that may have to be encapsulated into greater structures.

I don't expect to be here for a long time, but I expect this city to be here for centuries to come. So thank you just for giving me an opportunity to talk about why this is so important, and I look forward to the panel. Thank you.