Vocal politician seeks to have vote

Representative speaks about dissatisfaction with the system

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DAILY EGYPTIAN

U.S. Rep. Eleanor Holmes Norton has served nine terms in Congress but has never voted.

Norton, whom many might recognize from her four appearances on "The Colbert Report," explained to an audience of roughly 90 in the School of Law Auditorium Monday that while she can vote at the committee level, she is not allowed to vote on the floor because she does not represent a state.

"The people in District of Columbia have been left out in the wilderness of voting rights," Norton said.

Norton resides in Washington, D.C., and represents the 600,000 people in the district whose voting rights are limited. She spoke of her recent efforts to give district residents a voting member of Congress as part of the Hiram H. Lesar Distinguished Lecture Series.

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> — Rep. Eleanor Holmes Norton Washington, D.C.

Norton can still vote like any other House member at the committee level. Norton is an advocate of full congressional voting representation and full democracy for citizens in the district.

Norton said the main excuse used by the government for withholding voting rights from the citizens is that the district is not a state — even though 500 provisions in U.S. code treat the district as a state. Congress has had authority to treat the district as a state since 1805. She also noted that in previous wars, the residents of the district consistently suffered more casualties than a number of states combined.

Because the district is not a state, perhaps citizens should mention that when asked about paying state taxes, Norton said jokingly.

As a great-granddaughter of a slave, Norton said current voting affairs in the district are derived from slavery and the southern Democrats who were the "artists of segregation." She said America's history in voting has evolved from being racially unequal to blind partisanship.

"(Norton) is like an inspiration," said Derrick Williams, a graduate student from Birmingham, Ala., studying speech communications. "It's a really important topic relevant to college citizens."

Norton is chair of the House Transportation Subcommittee on Economic Development, Emergency Management and Public Buildings. She was the first woman to chair the Equal Employment Opportunity Commission and, although unable to vote, she has been a member of the committee to help reorganize Congress.

"I think (the district) should have a voice and have full representation," said Dianne Meeks, member of the SIU Foundation Board of Directors.

Before becoming a member of Congress, Holmes was a law professor at Georgetown University and continues to teach a course every year.

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The SIU School of Law welcomed speaker Eleanor Holmes Norton, a U.S. representative from the District of Columbia, to speak as part of the annual Lesar Lecture series. Norton spoke of recent legislation to allow Washington, D.C., residents the right the vote and stopped to sign an autograph for Terrace Williams, 9, after the speech.