

The Honorable Rodney Davis  
Testimony Before the  
House Subcommittee on Legislative Branch Appropriations  
March 4, 2020

Chairman Ryan and Ranking Member Herrera Beutler, thank you for the opportunity to testify before you today on the most important, bipartisan piece of legislation that will likely come before us during the remainder of 2020. Funding the legislative branch is critical to fulfilling every aspect of how we, as Representatives, serve our constituents, and no topic transcends party lines more.

For over a quarter century, the First Branch has suffered from an atrophy of authorities. Under the hopeful banner of saving taxpayer money and retaining a small but effective government, our predecessors, peers and we, ourselves have severely limited our resources - handicapping our ability to govern. However, at the same time, the executive branch continues to expand. It is our duty to see that *The People's House* is the flagship of American democracy.

In my over twenty years in Congress, first as a staffer and now as a Member, I've seen, in some cases, our institution weaken. This experience has made congressional reform to be one of my greatest priorities in both my roles as Ranking Member on the Committee of House Administration and as a member of the bipartisan Select Committee on the Modernization of Congress. Today more than ever, Members feel our lack of resources in all aspects of our job, from not being able to hire and retain the few talented staff we are allowed to keep, to not being able to adopt modern technologies to best serve our constituents and to not being able to conduct effective oversight of the expansive executive branch.

Corporations [spend more](#) to affect our decisions through lobbying efforts than we are able to spend on our own efforts in keeping Congress a modern, efficient and effective branch of government.

In looking at our budgets over the last decade, the numbers illustrate the uphill battle we are forcing ourselves to fight in order to keep our constitutional authorities. Out of the entire federal discretionary budget that Congress oversees and authorizes, less than 0.4% of it supports the Legislative Branch. Think about that – less than two percent of our nation's resources are being invested in the body who oversees and governs the other 99.6%.

Unfortunately, the situation is worse than I've already expressed, for out of those slim resources I mentioned, only a fraction goes toward Congress itself. Instead, we allocate the small sums we have to our support agencies – almost like we fear investing in ourselves.

Over the past ten years, from Fiscal Year 2010 to 2020, Member Representational Allowances - which allow us to hire staff, maintain a working office, and update our technology and legislative resources - have been cut by \$45 million (6.8%). That's just for personal offices - overall committee funding and resources have been cut by over \$62.9 million (32%).

We have, however, approved the following budget increases in the past 10 years:

- A 21.7% (\$9.78 million) increase for the Congressional Budget Office

- A 113% (\$10.7 million) to the Sergeant at Arms
- A 17.4% (\$22.8 million) increase for the CAO
- A \$57.9 million (10%) increase for the Government Accountability Office
- A \$125.1 million increase (37%) for the Capitol Police, and a
- A 62.6% (\$279 million) increase for the Library of Congress

We, as Members of Congress, are unsurprisingly frustrated with our lack of authority and ability to govern effectively, and yet we are to blame, as we continue to deplete the resources of our own chamber. We cut back our piece of less than 0.4% of the pie, even as we allocate the money to other bodies within our branch. Don't misunderstand me: our support agencies are vital, completing necessary and important work, but the House of Representatives is a vital body as well – one starving for more resources.

We have a duty to represent our constituents to the best of our ability, which is why I'm here today to help illuminate these commonsense solutions proposed by our peers on the Select Committee on the Modernization of Congress. Brainstormed, researched, and written in a bipartisan manner, there have been over 45 recommendations to fix Congress - all passed by the Select Committee to address the greatest challenges we face internally, which go beyond increasing funds. These proposals dive into how we can use that funding increase most effectively.

I respectfully ask for your consideration and support of the following recommendations that can be implemented in 2021 to kickstart the "come-back" of our branch and the modernization of our essential but outdated institution.

First and foremost, we must focus on our staff. We know better than most Americans how mission critical our staff are to our institution's health. When it comes to attracting, hiring and maintaining excellence and diversity, we are deeply familiar with the continual struggle of ensuring our employees are properly compensated and valued. To retain a modern workforce, we must provide modern benefits, including a Human Resource Office. It is shocking that the House does not have an adequate HR for staff and office management to consult, we all should be deeply concerned by that. From offering overviews of benefits, to sharing best practices, and providing one-on-one professional development assistance, the creation of a one-stop-shop HR office is undeniably a legacy asking to be funded. Such an entity could help our institution adopt even more staff-centric policies, such as: bi-monthly pay, raising office staff capacity to create more professional development opportunities, and increase staff compensation. Investing in these resources should be a no-brainer.

The second priority is Congress's technology. My good friend and Chairman of the Select Committee on the Modernization of Congress, Derek Kilmer, often quotes Rep. Cathy McMorris Rogers, who stated that "Congress is an 18<sup>th</sup> century institution, with 20<sup>th</sup> century technology, dealing with 21<sup>st</sup> century problems." Many of our processes are not only out of date, but they are handicapping our ability to serve our constituents. The clunky-ness of inherited, outdated devices, accompanied with antiquated protocols only highlight the inefficiencies that our staff must deal with daily, costing both valuable time and money that should be going to better serve the American people.

Since sequestration, this subcommittee appropriated an increase of over 35 percent to the Chief Administrative Office to modernize many aspects of House information technology and overall technology resources. While we have witnessed improvements, such as moving our processes to the

cloud and adopting Office 360 Suite, our offices are still struggling to be as flexible and adaptive as needed to roll out innovative, groundbreaking technology - technology that has been and is currently being implemented in the private sector across the globe.

If we want to rise to that level, we need to open the door to more outside vendors' technology. By making the House a more attractive client for tech innovators to do business, Members can better mold their services to their constituents by beta testing new technologies, adopting new apps and programmatic solutions, and overall modernizing how Congress serves its customers from the inside out. The CAO's funding should focus towards these efforts, and this institution needs to recognize that instead of re-inventing the wheel, we can innovate simply by buying what is already in the marketplace and giving Members the resources to invest in new technology. A laudable first step would be to procure an outside vendor to provide closed captioning services for all congressional broadcasts, in order to serve a greater portion of our constituents. While other major news broadcasts have closed captioning, Congressional broadcasts airing on CSPAN likely do not. Americans deserve complete transparency from the work of their government, and closed captioning is a fundamental service that would be relatively simple to supply.

Clearly, we have a long way to go to modernize Congress, and as myself and my colleagues have learned on the Select Committee, there is no magic formula to bring us into the 21<sup>st</sup> century. However, giving our Members and Committees more resources to strengthen their offices and better serve their constituents is a clear and necessary first step. Congress is an institution unlike any other, yet we aren't so unique that this common adage doesn't ring true: "you get what you pay for." For decades, we haven't paid to upkeep our house, and the longer we wait, the harder the remodel will be. In order to better serve our constituents and fulfill our duties in Congress, we must pull ourselves out of our tired practices, where we constantly drain our own resources while boosting those around us. It is time to become the innovative, lively, efficient body the American People deserve. Investment in a Human Resources department, in our staff, in our technology, and in modernizing our processes, is an investment in this great nation. It is an investment that will benefit countless future generations, but it requires us to start making changes now.

I want to thank you for your continued support of the Select Committee on the Modernization of Congress and our legislative branch as a whole. I look forward to working with you and the full Appropriations Committee to rebuild our branch to become the flagship of our country once again.