

Statement for Rep. Derek Kilmer (WA-6)
House Committee on Appropriations, Subcommittee on the
Legislative Branch
Member Day, May 18, 2022

Chairman Ryan and Ranking Member Herrera Beutler, thank you for hosting today's Member Day hearing and thank you for your leadership.

I am here today to talk about the work of the Select Committee on the Modernization of Congress, which I chair alongside Vice Chair William Timmons. The Select Committee's guiding principle is to make Congress work better for the American people. This simple but profound goal guides all our work on the committee; it helps us identify institutional problems and it helps us develop solutions to those problems.

To date, the Select Committee has issued 142 bipartisan recommendations to make Congress more effective, efficient, and transparent on behalf of the American people. These recommendations address a wide range of topics that include boosting Congressional capacity, encouraging collaboration and civility in the institution, improving staff recruitment and retention, and modernizing technology, among others.

All told, over two-thirds of the Select Committee's recommendations have seen meaningful action toward implementation, with 30 of our recommendations having been fully implemented. The committee's implementation success story is due in large part to the hard work of our numerous partners in the House, including this subcommittee.

I first want to emphasize the important contributions this subcommittee made to modernizing the House workforce. The recent increase in the MRA, enhanced funding to compensate committee

interns, and the establishment of the House Task Force on a Diverse and Talented Workforce are all crucial investments to the capacity of the House. This action and the Speaker's recently announced minimum annual pay will ensure the House remains competitive in hiring and retaining expert staff to better serve the American people.

This subcommittee has also provided funding for a biennial, bipartisan retreat. The Select Committee made the recommendation to hold bipartisan retreats, and we're hopeful that it takes place next Congress and believe it will encourage Members to make connections with their colleagues, create trust and help everyone find common ground.

Today Vice Chair Timmons and I want to highlight some of the ways we believe we can continue to make progress to modernize the House.

First, we support increased funding for the Modernization Initiatives Account, which this subcommittee established last Congress. Previously, the CAO requested \$10 million for this account and since that time the Select Committee has issued nearly 100 new recommendations. Increased funding from the \$2 million appropriated last year would support projects undertaken by the newly established House Digital Service, as well as initiatives by the Clerk's office to establish a database of committee votes and adopt modern tools to help deconflict scheduled committee hearings.

Congress is stronger when Members find ways to work together to solve problems. This subcommittee can support the effectiveness of Congress by continuing to support expanded programming options that foster civility and collaboration through the Congressional Staff Academy and the new Congressional Member Leadership Development Program. Additionally, the Modernization Committee has put forward recommendations for the development of technology tools that would

facilitate members working together on developing policy initiatives together in a collaborative way.

Congress is also stronger when it receives and leverages the best possible information from the invaluable legislative support agencies. We request support to ensure that the products, services, and outreach of these agencies are designed to meet the needs of an evolving Congress. Having the support agencies report regularly to Congress on any challenges they are facing accessing federal data would also give us the opportunity to intervene if appropriate and help them to help us.

I'd also like us to address the physical and digital accessibility barriers that prevent people from having a voice in the legislative process. I'm requesting support for removing accessibility barriers and providing greater information about entrance security procedures for visitors and staff with disabilities as well as the establishment of a designated drop-off and pick-up point.

Finally, I'd like to mention a request I made that reflects the spirit of investing in our staff and thus our capacity. I am requesting that this subcommittee look at the authority of the Student Loan Repayment Program and consider opportunities to open the program to payments of tuition as well as loan repayment. Tuition assistance programs are widely available in the private sector and in federal agencies, and a House program would help us both keep expert staff here longer and develop staff expertise during their House employment.

Making Congress work better for the American people is a worthwhile investment. On behalf of the Select Committee on Modernization, I appreciate your consideration of these requests and am happy to provide additional information to support your work.

Thank you for the opportunity to speak before the subcommittee today.