

Ranking Member Eliot L. Engel  
Statement before the Committee on House Administration  
March 5, 2013

Chairman Miller, Ranking Member Brady, thank you for inviting me to testify today. I'd also like to thank my Chairman, Ed Royce, for working with me in a bipartisan manner. Ed and I have already established a very good relationship, and I look forward to working with him as a friend and partner in the weeks and months ahead.

I've always believed that foreign policy should be as bipartisan as possible, and we're working together to address a huge number of important and complicated issues, ranging from the Iranian and North Korean nuclear programs, to the civil war in Syria, the conflict in Mali, Chinese hacking of our computer networks, the transition in Afghanistan, and the list goes on.

I think we, and our staffs, can get a lot done for the good of the country and the world. But our ability to do that will be severely undermined if we have to absorb yet another round of significant cuts to the Committee budget.

Already, in the past two years, we've faced budget cuts of 5% and 6.4%. In each of those years, the Democratic staff was forced to take significant pay cuts. We also have three vacant staff slots that we aren't able to fill.

With a further budget cut of 11%, staff would be forced to take yet another substantial salary reduction – even larger than those from the past two years. This will hurt morale, cause experienced staff to leave for the private sector, and make it harder to attract new talent.

But even more important, further cuts will make it virtually impossible for the Committee to conduct effective oversight of the State Department, USAID and other federal agencies under our jurisdiction.

Among other things, these cuts would undermine our ability to ensure that every reasonable step has been taken to guarantee the safety and security of our diplomats.

At the end of the day, this lack of oversight will end up costing the taxpayers much more than they will save with any additional reductions to our budget.

Mr. Chairman, I think sequestration is bad policy. I voted against it, and I continue to believe that indiscriminate, across-the-board cuts are a terrible and counterproductive way to deal with our fiscal situation.

I understand the need to tighten our belts, just like millions of Americans have been forced to do. Over the past two years, our committee has done that – we've cut through the fat and even the muscle, and now we're down to the bone.

At this point, we're well beyond the point at which we can do more with less. Now we'll just have to do less with less. And I would argue that's bad for US foreign policy and the prosperity and security of the American people.

Thank you again for inviting me to testify.