

Rep. Seth Moulton Testimony for House Admin Committee Member Hearing 11/21

Working in Congress seems like going back in time compared to my previous positions in the private sector. The Select Committee on the Modernization of Congress has done great work to address big-picture problems that affect the efficiency and effectiveness of Congress as an institution. However, there are several smaller problems that are easy to address and could make a huge impact on the day-to-day Congress' operation. These ideas will rarely rise to the Member level, but they all embody an undue amount of staff time and could be addressed administratively.

First, the Committee should consider creating an online system for adding cosponsors to bills and adding signatories to letters. Interns and staff members spend an unnecessary amount of time physically delivering cosponsor forms to the cloakroom, which is staff time that could be spent adding value to their offices. This would also improve the appropriations process if the two were linked, allowing offices to keep track of their priority rankings as they go, especially if the online form for prioritizing appropriations requests was more intuitive and easier to edit. There are outside groups currently working on technology that plugs directly into Microsoft Teams, which the House already adopted; the House just needs to allow the change in process.

Another potential efficiency is to centralize the digital processes for the tour and flag request systems. Congressional offices serve as the middlemen for both tour and flag requests, acting as a liaison of information without actually having any control over either process. While offering these services serves as one form of constituent relations, the convoluted systems make it extremely difficult to be effective. Staffers often deal with long back-and-forth exchanges to schedule a single tour, such as emailing lengthy forms and Excel documents with Social Security information between constituents and tour offices. Depending on the tour sites offered by the Member office, staffers can work with up to ten different offices that all have entirely different processes. While Congress cannot change the tour booking process for other offices, it can create a system that collects all of the necessary information required by each tour site in one place. And with flags, we can streamline the process by allowing each step to be completed online. At minimum, we should allow for online transparency in the process that occurs between the Flag Office and House Supply Office if the two cannot be consolidated. For example, it would be useful to see the exact status of where a flag is in the process to make it easier to troubleshoot issues when they arise.

Booking rooms for events and signing up for mandatory staff training on the Hill is also more complicated than it could be. The House, Senate, CVC, LOC, and Committees all have different processes that are difficult to find and execute. Staffers would benefit from a streamlined process that allows you to view all available rooms for a certain time slot online. Congressional staffers' priority should be policy-making, not event planning. Similarly, each of the four mandatory trainings for staff have separate website locations, passwords, and rules. A one-stop portal for both event spaces and mandatory trainings would save time for Member office staff and for those constantly tracking down Congressional staff for not completing their trainings. With both options, even simply consolidating the list of resources in a single place on HouseNet would be beneficial.

Finally, creating a universal onboarding process for new staff members on the above processes and others would help new staff get up to speed faster than relying on different points of contact depending on the Member office. Each of these suggestions would significantly cut down on inefficient use of staff time. As an institution that is frequently criticized for using its time inefficiently, Congress should empower staffers to be as effective as possible.