

Select Committee on the Modernization of Congress Testimony
Rep. Ken Buck
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Mr. Chairman, I want to thank you for holding this hearing today and for all the work you have done to make this Select Committee a reality. I look forward to seeing our ideas from the Rebuild Congress Initiative and Reformers Caucus come to fruition.

You know, Mr. Chairman, prepping for today's remarks, I thought a lot about a famous scientist who helped change the world. He was once quoted as saying, "insanity is doing the same thing over and over and expecting different results." Well, Mr. Chairman, by Albert Einstein's definition, this body is certifiably insane.

The creation of this bipartisan Select Committee on the Modernization of Congress is something that hasn't occurred since the 1990's. It is a vitally important step to ending the insanity and ensuring this institution is prepared to face the realities of the 21st century.

I would like to highlight a few underlying goals that I believe should be reflected in the proposed reforms that will come out of this Select Committee. I hope to see reforms that remove party fundraising totals from the Steering Committee decision-making process, facilitate enhanced cooperation and build Member relationships by restructuring the weekly schedule, stop the practice of funding unauthorized

programs, and empower individual Members to contribute fully to the legislative and oversight processes.

Too often, Members arrive in Washington expecting to make a difference, but quickly lose faith after realizing that their ability to make a difference is tied to their fundraising prowess. Republicans and Democrats alike are required to raise a certain amount for their respective Party Campaign Committees before the Steering Committee will even consider granting a Member's preferred committee assignments. Chairmanships and "A" Committees require an even greater dedication to fundraising for the party. This should not be the way we do business. Our constituents didn't elect us to raise money, they elected us to solve problems. This practice must stop.

Members also come to Washington expecting is that they will have the opportunity to work with their colleagues to bring about meaningful reforms. They quickly discover that flying in Monday or Tuesday evening and flying out after only two full days of session makes that task almost impossible. Members don't have time to become proficient with their committee responsibilities or build relationships with one another.

If we want to get anything done in Congress, we must build bridges. If we were in Washington for five-day work weeks, Monday through Friday, just like the average American, we would have more time to foster those relationships that us to effectively legislate. It will also give Members more time in committee to learn their roles and build

out their legislative ideas. This might just stop us from the current system where committees are all but bypassed to rush bills to the floor. In such a polarized political climate, this Select Committee must focus on presenting ideas that will help bring us together and solve problems.

This Select Committee must also find a way to deal with how this House spends money. Our nation is \$22 trillion in debt right now, and we can't figure out a way to stop funding unauthorized programs. Our own House rules and the U.S. Constitution both prohibit this practice, but somehow, we just can't stop ourselves.

Did you know that as of July 3, 2018, CBO found that we were funding 1,035 programs that have an expired to the tune of \$318.25 billion? To make this point clearer, a 2017 Forbes Magazine article found that between 1998 and 2015, our government may have spent in upwards of \$21 trillion on unauthorized programs. And that's just at DOD and HUD. Just imagine what we could have done to fix our \$22 trillion debt with that money. We must make tough decisions and find a way to stop this reckless spending on unauthorized programs.

Finally, we should empower individual Members to use their expertise to help craft policy that comes out of the committees on which they serve. By granting Members the opportunity to bear their own expertise on the legislative process, we are thereby granting more adequate representation to the American people. Rank-and-file members should have more opportunities to collaborate and work towards a

legislative agenda together. Once we reform the internal workings of the House, we can restore the legislative branch's role in counterbalancing the other two branches.

As Members of Congress, we are responsible to uphold the Constitution and provide oversight of the Executive Branch. We are responsible for wisely stewarding taxpayer dollars. We are responsible for declaring war and setting war-making objectives. We are responsible for legislating in a fair and transparent way.

Unfortunately, Congress has fallen far short of these mandates, instead functioning closer to the state of insanity Einstein described. With this Select Committee, we have a chance to improve the way Congress functions, not just for our sake, but for our children and grandchildren's sakes. I hope the Select Committee will consider adopting my recommended proposals. Thank you for your consideration.