

## **Rep. Gallagher Testimony Before the Select Committee on Modernization of Congress**

Mr. Chairman, Vice Chair Graves, thank you for allowing me time to testify before this important committee, and for your hard work to make this body run more effectively. While there are a great number of changes we could make to improve the operations of Congress, I want to focus on just one this morning. It would not be a silver-bullet solution to the problems that plague this institution, but it would be a start.

The current division between authorization and appropriations goes back to the days of John Quincy Adams. In recent years it has become a recipe for shutdowns, continuing resolutions, and gigantic omnibus bills. We need a budget process that drives Congress toward compromise rather than polarization, and that encourages consistent legislative work rather than creating periodic crises.

We all agree that our budget process is broken. We are just a few weeks removed from the longest government shutdown in U.S. history—and though this latest shutdown was longer than usual, it is now common for Congress to budget by crisis. Our chaotic budget process and related shutdowns make no sense to the people who elected us. And it doesn't have to be this way. I bet you could have locked any group of 30 people from Northeast Wisconsin in a bar together, and we could have figured out an acceptable solution to the last budget crisis in 35 minutes rather than 35 days.

We have talked about reforming the budget process for years, but it should be clear by now that our inability to follow regular order poses a direct threat to the health of this body and to our nation. When Members of Congress do not feel like they have a say in wielding the legislature's power of the purse, they become less invested in their work, and less likely to defend the powers entrusted to this body.

If the people who are elected to serve in Congress do not have an incentive to defend the powers given to Congress in the Constitution, then it should be no surprise that they will vote to give those powers away. James Madison more eloquently made this same point in Federalist No. 51: "The great security against a gradual concentration of the several powers in the same department, consists in giving to those who administer each department the necessary constitutional means and personal motives to resist encroachments of the others."

Congress is supposed to be the central player under our Constitution. But the barrier between the work of authorizers and appropriators is a major source of congressional weakness. One of the main reasons Congress has lost its central role is because the budget process has severed the power of the purse from the basic legislative work we do every day. We can make that legislative work more meaningful for all members by uniting the authorization and appropriations processes. This would give committees the ability to work on reaching numerous smaller agreements throughout the year rather than waiting for appropriators to agree on a large and unwieldy package that is more likely to end in gridlock.

We should begin by simplifying the committee structure, perhaps by reducing the total number of committees to better correspond with the number of major executive-branch departments and

agencies. Critically, health care could be consolidated into a single House Health Committee, which would be positioned to take a more holistic view of our health-care system. At the same time, in order to jump-start our stalled budgetary and appropriations procedures, the appropriations and authorization functions should be combined, with the duties of the Appropriations reassigned among the standing committees. These committees would both authorize and appropriate funds for the activities of the executive-branch agencies they oversee.

This is only one suggestion for how we might tackle the problem I've outlined today, and I would be curious to hear what the members of the committee suggest to fix our budget process. Whatever the solution, we need to find ways to end Congress's bad habit of governing by crisis. I believe reorganizing our committee structure and budget process would go a long way toward eliminating the structural incentives for maintaining that habit.