



House 75 freshman Democrats, the Democratic Caucus voted 146-122 to remove the committee assignment power from the Ways and Means Committee where it had been lodged since 1911 and to give the power to assign Democrats to House committees to the party's Steering and Policy Committee, a 24-member committee was composed of the Speaker, the Democratic floor leader, the caucus chairman, 12 regionally elected members and nine members appointed by the speaker.

- The change also enhanced the Steering Committee's power by giving it the authority to recommend committee chairmen to the caucus.
- The Democratic Caucus also voted to make all subcommittee chairmen on the Appropriations Committee subject to confirmation by the caucus.
- Perhaps most importantly, the Caucus voted to give members of each committee the power to determine the number of its subcommittees.
- This was a significant change because previously some committee chairmen arbitrarily created and extinguished subcommittees without consulting committee members.
- The House also changed its rules to require that committees with more than 20 members establish at least four substantive subcommittees and an oversight committee, or require the substantive subcommittees to do the oversight work.
- The Democrats also specified that beginning in 1975 no member could become a member of a second subcommittee on any full committee until every member of the full committee had chosen one subcommittee position, a change that opened up better slots for junior members.
- The Democratic Caucus also changed the rules to make all committee chairman subject to election by secret-ballot.
- The Caucus also changed rules to allow the Speaker to nominate all Democratic members of the Rules Committee, subject to ratification by the caucus.
- The Democratic Caucus also mandated a change in House rules to require that all conference meetings be open to the public.

- Finally, the Democratic Caucus voted to abolish the House Internal Security Committee—until 1969 infamously known as the House “Un-American Activities Committee” and transfer its jurisdiction to the House Judiciary Committee.
- These changes improved the operation of the House to the benefit of the American people.
- But Mr. Chairman, much has changed since the landmark reforms of 1975.
- In 1975, email and the internet did not exist; nor did CNN, MSNBC, Fox News, or the 24-hour news cycle.
- There was no Twitter, Facebook, Instagram, Snapchat, or any other social media; indeed, fax machines had yet to be invented.
- All of this is to say, that we are overdue for some much needed reform and that is why I commend each of you for the important work you are undertaking.
- In my remaining time, I would just like to recommend to the Select Committee several changes that I believe Members will find very helpful.
- First, I recommend that the House consider establishing a Human Resources Department or Office of Personnel, which would act as the central clearinghouse for all applicants for employment in the House.
- Similar to what has long been the established practice in the Executive Branch, the Human Resources Department would be the central repository of employment announcements, application submissions, and responsible for conducting background and reference checks, all of which would free up Members to concentrate on the legislative and policy goals of their constituents.
- Second, I believe that reform of the Members Representational Account or MRA is long overdue.
- Specifically, I recommend as a first step that a comprehensive study be undertaken to evaluate the efficacy of the existing MRA system and recommend needed reforms.

- In my experience, I believe the MRA funding level is woefully inadequate and should be increased by at least 15-25 percent and indexed for inflation.
- Also, it is my view that Members should have more flexibility and control over the allocation and distribution of MRA funds; members should not be bound by arbitrary limits on the number of personnel that can or must be hired.
- Mr. Chairman, given the importance to Members of communicating with their constituents year round in person and through written communication and social media, it would be extremely helpful for the Franking Commission to provide basic guidance (e.g. “5 basic rules”) so all Members can know what is and is not permissible under the rules.
- With regarding to franking regulations, I strongly believe that Members should be permitted greater flexibility in design, use of photographs and images, and text so long as the non-political purpose of the communication is preserved.
- Mr. Chairman, as a senior member of the Homeland Security Committee and one who was here in the Capitol on September 11, 2001, I urge the select committee to recommend that it be standard practice that all Members received a comprehensive security briefing at the beginning of each Congress.
- Finally, I suggest for your consideration eliminating the House rule or practice that requires bills and resolution to have a single sponsor.
- I believe we should follow the Senate practice of allowing multiple sponsors of legislation (e.g., “Goldwater-Nichols” Department of Defense Reorganization Act of 1986; “McCain-Feingold” Bipartisan Campaign Reform Act of 2002; “Kennedy-Kassebaum” Health Insurance Portability and Accountability Act of 1996) and provide an important incentive for members to work across the aisle and find bipartisan solutions that will work and address the pressing priorities of the American people.
- Thank you, Mr. Chairman; I am happy to answer any questions you may have.