

April 15, 2021

Chair Kilmer, Vice Chair Timmons, and Members of the Select Committee,

Thank you for allowing me to testify before the Select Committee on the Modernization of Congress today. Like everyone here, I am extremely frustrated by the current dysfunction in Washington and in Congress. Washington cannot remain enveloped in endless battles of political brinkmanship. Somewhere along the way, politicians replaced debate with ultimatums, disagreement with hyperbole, and opponent with enemy and this collective mindset has hindered Congress's ability to move forward together as a nation.

I believe there are common sense measures Congress can take to make the House of Representatives and the Senate a more functional body and therefore more beholden to the American people.

Article One of the United States Constitution establishes the Legislative Branch and grants all legislative powers to Congress. Congress encompasses 535 members who are all sent to Washington to represent the voice of their constituency. We need to restore the intent of Article One by promoting more interaction amongst individual Members of Congress while taking away decades worth of built-up control from Party Leaders whose amassed power adds to the current dysfunction and debilitating gridlock. In Austin, they have a local and consent calendar which allows member driven common sense bills to move through the process without hoping to be swallowed as an amendment on a monster bill that most members don't read.

Simple Bills: One way in which this could be achieved would be to require committees to mark-up legislation that has reached 4/5 cosponsorship of the member on their committee within 40 legislative days. Under this proposal, committees of non-primary referral could discharge such measure in lieu of a markup. Furthermore, upon favorable markup or discharge in all committees of referral, the bill would be expedited to the House floor for consideration under suspension of the rules, requiring a 2/3 vote within 60 calendar days. Most state legislatures have a way to fast track simple bills. There are many ways to do this, the core focus is a fast track for simple bills.

Security: Additionally, during this time of heightened political tensions, the safety of Members and staff have too frequently been tested and found themselves in perilous situations. As we have all witnessed and experienced, these dangerous encounters are not exclusive to the Capitol but are also happening outside Washington and in our Districts. Members of Congress and staff should be equipped with appropriate training and equipment to meet the levels of threats against this body. Threats to elected Members of Congress are real. We need to do more to protect them.

Classified Materials: Lastly, serving in the Military and now in Congress, it is clear many Members of Congress don't understand how to handle and fail to grasp the gravity of classified material. Worse, these critical tools have become tools used to achieve political objectives. Accordingly, the intelligence community no longer believes Members of Congress can be entrusted with classified information and as a result, the substance and quality of data provided to Members of Congress has declined. While their apprehension is not unfounded, Members of Congress are not receiving the adequate intelligence needed to make fully informed decisions on behalf of the American people.

Further education and training is needed to improve each Member's understanding of how intelligence is obtained, the associated risks of gathering intelligence, and the potential consequences of compromised intelligence. By implementing required training for Members of Congress on the handling and protocols of classified materials, we can strengthen the relationship between Congress and the intelligence community, therefore improving the ability of legislators to create sound policy.

We must put party differences aside and fix the process to uphold the integrity of the Constitution instead of the typical Washington dysfunction. Washington use to work. Other legislative bodies work. It doesn't have to be this broken. A functional Congress is not a want to have, it is a must have if we want to pass on a free, prosperous, and secure nation to our children. By modernizing Congress through common sense bipartisan measures we can change the way Washington operates. Thank you.