

Statement from Rep. Kathy Manning
The Select Committee on the Modernization of Congress
Member Day Hearing

Chair Kilmer and Ranking Member Timmons, thank you for this opportunity to provide my thoughts on steps we can take to modernize the operations of the U.S. House of Representatives so that we can better carry out our responsibilities while endeavoring to meet the needs of the American people.

To promote a more modern and efficient Congress, I support the creation of an electronic voting system that would allow Members to vote remotely during Committee proceedings. This would allow Members to participate more fully in committee proceedings, would inject efficiency into system by eliminating the need for Members to walk back and forth to vote multiple times during committee proceedings, and would make the voting process faster.

Additionally, I support the continuing the ability of Members of Congress to participate in committee proceedings remotely, even after the pandemic has ended. Allowing Members to participate both in-person and remotely will allow Members greater efficiency and flexibility in scheduling meetings with constituents and other stakeholders, especially during busy times of years when there are frequent meetings.

Also, I suggest the installation of video conference systems in the self-schedule rooms. Video-conferencing, whether through Zoom or Microsoft Teams, is now commonplace and will continue to be a useful tool well beyond the current limits on in-person meetings. Installing the necessary technology and equipment in the self-schedule rooms means that we will be able to meet simultaneously with visitors who are in-person and those who must participate remotely due to personal health care or other reasons.

To improve House procedures, I recommend the creation of two new systems. First, I recommend the House create an internal system to allow House staffers to view Floor vote tallies and how each Member is voting in real time. Currently, staff can only view the tallies via the House's closed-circuit television channel, but they cannot view how Members have voted until hours and sometimes days later. Knowing how each Member voted is especially important during vote series that include numerous amendments which may influence decisions on final passage and for the purposes of accurate record-keeping and press.

Currently, Members of Congress have no way of knowing when they have been added as a cosponsor to a piece of legislation unless they repeatedly and manually check every bill that has been introduced. This presents challenges when Members believe they have cosponsored legislation, but the sponsor has not added them and when sponsors accidentally add the wrong cosponsors. Instead, I suggest that each Member be able to designate staff who will receive immediate updates each time that Member is added as a cosponsor to legislation.

To address administrative efficiencies, I propose the House create a new system for processing individual office expenses, such as subscriptions to newspapers. While some vendors will

submit invoices, others will not. For example, to subscribe to the New York Times, either a staffer or a Member must agree to the subscription terms, incur the costs through a personal credit/debit cards, and then later submit for reimbursement. If a staffer handles the subscriptions for an office and then departs the House for a job elsewhere, that person could be on the hook for the costs through the term of the subscription. Alternately staff can complete the Staff Purchase Card Participation Form to receive a Citibank card to purchase subscriptions. However, the Staff Purchase Card is linked to the credit of whichever staffer applied for it, creating an inappropriate link between workplace expenses and personal finances. Both options, using personal funds then later submitting for reimbursement and using the Staff Purchase Card, impose on the personal finances and credit of the staff in ways that go beyond acceptable work responsibilities. Instead, I suggest the House consider alternate options that separate the personal finances of the staff from their work responsibilities while also protecting House resources and ensuring all expenses are legitimate.

While I am happy to provide my constituents with the ability to purchase American flags through my website, I suggest a new system that streamlines the payment methods so that individual Members are no longer processing checks from constituents. Having one system by which all constituents pay for their flags would eliminate inefficiencies and ensure greater privacy for the payment information of our constituents while still allowing them to purchase flags, both those that have been flown over the Capitol and those that have not.

Thank you for your consideration of my views. I appreciate having the opportunity to share my suggestions with you and look forward to working with you in the 117th Congress.