

**Statement for Rep. Derek Kilmer (WA-6)**  
**House Committee on Appropriations**  
**Member Day, June 9, 2021**

Chair DeLauro and Ranking Member Granger, thank you for hosting today's Member Day hearing. Ensuring that the House of Representatives is equipped to uphold its Article One responsibilities is important and challenging work and I thank you for your leadership.

I am here today to talk about the work of the Select Committee on the Modernization of Congress, which I chair alongside Vice Chair William Timmons. The Select Committee's guiding principle is to make Congress work better for the American people. This simple but profound goal guides all of our work; it helps us identify institutional problems and develop helpful solutions.

During the 116<sup>th</sup> Congress, the Select Committee unanimously passed almost 100 recommendations to improve the way Congress works. About one-third of those recommendations were included in legislation that passed the House last March.

Today Vice Chair Timmons and I want to highlight some of the Select Committee's recommendations that we think deserve funding. Investing in these recommendations would improve the efficiency and effectiveness of the legislative branch so that we can better serve the American people.

Select Committee Members believe that Congress is stronger when Members find ways to work together to solve problems. Relationship building is key to successful collaboration and the more opportunities Members have to get to know one another, the better. In this spirit, the Select Committee requests funding for the Committee on House Administration to institute biennial bipartisan retreats for Members

and their families at the start of each Congress. This would help promote productive engagement across the aisle and ultimately encourage better policy making.

The Select Committee has and will continue to focus on building staff capacity. That means figuring out what Congress needs to do to attract – and hold onto – a diverse and talented workforce. The Committee held 4 hearings on these issues in the 116<sup>th</sup> Congress and kicked off the 117<sup>th</sup> with a series of 3 hearings devoted to staff recruitment, retention, and diversity.

We know that staff deserve better benefits, more training opportunities, and a healthy work/life balance. We also know that offering competitive salaries is essentially the only way to prevent staff from leaving Capitol Hill for private sector or executive branch jobs. This ongoing “brain drain” leaves Congress reliant on lobbyists for policy expertise and that’s not the system the Framers intended.

One important way to address these issues is to address the vehicle by which Members pay staff – the Member Representational Allowance, or MRA. The Select Committee recommends report language directing a thorough and updated evaluation of the MRA formula – including a consideration of staff pay – that provides a modernized and data-driven means of determining the MRA.

The Select Committee also requests funding to remove constituent communications costs from the MRA and create a shared account for Member communications. This will help free up additional funds that Members could use to increase staff salaries.

These are some examples of important steps Congress can take to begin the long-overdue process of investing in the amazing staff who help us carry out our representational and legislative responsibilities.

These requests are also consistent with additional efforts underway in the House to increase staff pay and benefits.

Making Congress work better for the American people is a worthwhile investment. On behalf of the Select Committee on Modernization, I appreciate your consideration of these requests and am happy to provide additional information to support your work.

Thank you for the opportunity to speak before the committee today.