

Statement for Rep. Derek Kilmer (WA-06)

House Committee on Appropriations, Subcommittee on the Legislative Branch

Member Day, April 17, 2024

Thank you, Chairman Valadao, Ranking Member Espaillat, and Members of the Legislative Branch Subcommittee for the opportunity to testify today at Member Day—and to you Mr. Chairman, congratulations on your gavel and new role leading the subcommittee.

As I am sure some of you may have guessed, I am here today to talk about modernizing Congress. In the 116th and 117th Congresses the Select Committee on the Modernization of Congress, also known as the “Fix Congress Committee”, was tasked with developing bipartisan recommendations designed to make Congress more effective, efficient, and transparent. We looked at everything from Congressional capacity, to outdated technology, to rising polarization to figure out how to build a better institution that is more responsive to the needs of the American people. In total, the Select Committee made 202 recommendations. At this point, about half have been partially or fully implemented. The House Administration Committee’s Modernization Subcommittee, where I serve as Ranking Member alongside Chair Stephanie Bice, has been tasked with driving implementation of the remaining open recommendations. I am here to both thank you for your past and continued partnership on modernization issues, and to outline ways the Legislative Branch Subcommittee can continue to help.

First, I want to call attention to the significant work of this subcommittee, in driving the implementation of recommendations. In the FY2023 and FY2024 Legislative Branch appropriations bills, we were able to successfully advance over two dozen Select Committee recommendations. This includes the establishment of the new Intern Resource Office that will officially open this summer, to provide streamlined training to interns and intern coordinators

alike—this one is especially meaningful to me, as—I won’t say how long ago—I was a former House intern myself. Past bills from this subcommittee also included language to ensure managers on Capitol Hill have access to supervisor training, funding and language to provide members with a transition aide to help new members hit the ground running at the start of their term; as well as language to create bipartisan staff collaboration spaces on campus, where staff can now meet together to work on and negotiate policy.

Additionally, the Modernization Initiatives Account (MIA) was created in FY2021 to support the Select Committee’s work, and it has and will continue to fund implementation of Select Committee recommendations. So far, this funding has supported the introduction of new e-discovery software for use in Congressional oversight, a flag tracker portal to ease management of constituent flag orders, a tool to allow electronic voting in committees to save time and reduce errors, the development of a legislative and support agency staff directory so offices don’t spend their limited MRA funds to get data Congress already owns, and the “Deconflict” tool—where committees can see when their Members are slated to be somewhere else—or in my case today—3 other places—at once, to help improve scheduling and attendance at committee proceedings, and more. Additional projects underway, include completion of the lobbyist disclosure modernization project by the Clerk, to make it easier to know who is lobbying Congress and on what; a tool to allow collaborative drafting of legislation between several Member offices, the Senate, committee staff, and stakeholders; a tool to streamline and reduce errors when staff obtain and register bill cosponsors; a committee portal to serve as a one-stop shop for committee information; and a tool to allow Member offices to anonymize casework data to identify trends impacting constituents across different Congressional districts, that can inform subsequent Congressional action. Simply put, the Modernization Initiatives Account

helps fund Select Committee recommendations designed to solve problems, and over time, save this institution money by reducing turnover and allowing us to complete higher volumes of work better. I urge you to continue funding this critical account.

Through the Modernization Initiatives Account and related report language requests I will make to this Subcommittee, I am hopeful we can fully implement additional open Select Committee recommendations in FY2025. This includes recommendations for the Congressional Leadership Academy and Congressional Staff Academy to offer voluntary training to members and staff to promote civility, collaboration, and leadership skills; for the House to start a formal mentorship program for matching more experienced staff with less experienced staff; the development of a tool to improve offices' management of constituent tour requests; getting our offices better industry-leading correspondence technology tools so we can respond to constituents in a more thorough and timely fashion; for the House to offer a voluntary seminar for new members to build on New Member Orientation and provide follow-up opportunity for new members to ask questions and provide input after having served in Congress for several months; and for the House to have a public-facing interactive platform for constituents to offer opinions and feedback on pending legislation.

I can't think of a better way to finish my final term in Congress than by bringing these recommendations home, and by extension, making this institution work better for my constituents and for all Americans. I greatly appreciate your leadership, partnership, and your consideration of these requests, and I am happy to provide additional information as you review them. Thank you again for the opportunity to testify before the subcommittee today.