



Bipartisan Policy Center

Written Testimony of John D. Rackey, Ph.D.
Associate Director of Structural Democracy

Before the House Appropriations Subcommittee
on the Legislative Branch: Public Witness Day

March 11, 2026

Chair Valadao, Ranking Member Espallat, and members of the subcommittee, thank you for the opportunity to provide testimony in support of the fiscal year 2027 legislative branch appropriations bill. My name is J.D. Rackey, and I am the associate director of the Structural Democracy Project at the Bipartisan Policy Center. I previously had the privilege of serving as professional staff with the Select Committee on the Modernization of Congress. My background as a political scientist and experience as a staffer has taught me that Congress can best execute its Article I responsibilities when it adequately invests in its own capacity. With that in mind, I request that funding for the House Modernization Initiatives Account (MIA) be appropriated at the \$10 million level in FY2027, which is a return to the funding level allocated in previous years. Further, I request the inclusion of report language that would create reporting requirements for entities receiving funds from the account. Finally, I request an increase in funding available to congressional committees.

The American people rightly demand efficiency and effectiveness from their government; however, it is important to remember that efficiency can be gained in two ways: by reducing spending *and* through strategic investment. Strategic investment of MIA funds in projects that build the institution's capacity will yield workplace and workforce efficiencies in the legislative branch that will far outweigh the funds spent. The complex nature of public policy problems means that Congress must have the appropriate tools, technology, and staff in

place to intake, process, understand, and evaluate an enormous volume of information to properly grapple with the pressing issues of the day. Investments in congressional capacity move Congress into the modern, digital age and ensure that the institution can adequately respond to an increasingly advanced world.

Continued MIA Accountability

The members and staff of this subcommittee and the Committee on House Administration (CHA) are familiar with how MIA funds have been invested and the improvements those investments have brought to legislative branch operations. However, the people currently working on modernization issues won't always be here—as we know, turnover in the legislative branch is near an all-time high. Outside of this committee and within the House more broadly, there is a limited understanding of the improvements yielded by these investments. Therefore, it is crucial to continue building an ample official record of how modernization funds are used and the ongoing status of those projects. I commend the subcommittee for including information in the FY2025 and FY2026 reports about some of the projects that have been supported by MIA funds and urge you to continue to do so in a robust way.

Requiring recipients of modernization funds to provide status updates to this subcommittee and CHA serves the long-term success of the MIA by creating the infrastructure needed for evidence-based oversight and accountability checks to ensure continued fiscal responsibility. Reporting requirements will also add to the historical record of current modernization efforts so future stewards of the institution will know more about the types of efforts currently underway, which may in turn inform their work.



Congress Needs More Active Committees

Ground-shifting developments have brought declining congressional capacity to the fore. Recent Supreme Court decisions, including *Loper Bright Enterprises v. Raimondo*, have significant implications for the legislative branch that have not yet been addressed. As many scholars of Congress have written (and I agree), the decision now requires Congress to be much more active and detailed in its policymaking. However, Congress currently lacks the necessary expertise and staff capacity to do so. A BPC working group formed after *Loper Bright* identified areas ripe for congressional action in response to this and other recent decisions.¹

I would like to draw your attention to one recommendation from the working group in particular: increased committee capacity. For much of congressional history, committees were the lifeblood of the institution. Woodrow Wilson famously wrote in 1885 that “Congress in its committee rooms is Congress at work.”² Indeed, the development of the committee system is viewed as one of the most important steps towards the development of the institution.³ However, committees have been on a decades-long decline, holding fewer hearings and calling fewer witnesses at those hearings.⁴ That hearings have declined as a venue for gathering information comes as no surprise given the severe number of scheduling conflicts Congress faces with its existing hearing schedule.⁵

¹ See, <https://bipartisanpolicy.org/report/final-report-and-recommendations/>

² Wilson, Woodrow. *Congressional Government: A Study in American Politics*. Houghton, Mifflin, 1885.

³ Polsby, Nelson W. 1968. “The Institutionalization of the U.S. House of Representatives.” *The American Political Science Review* 62, no. 1: 144–68.

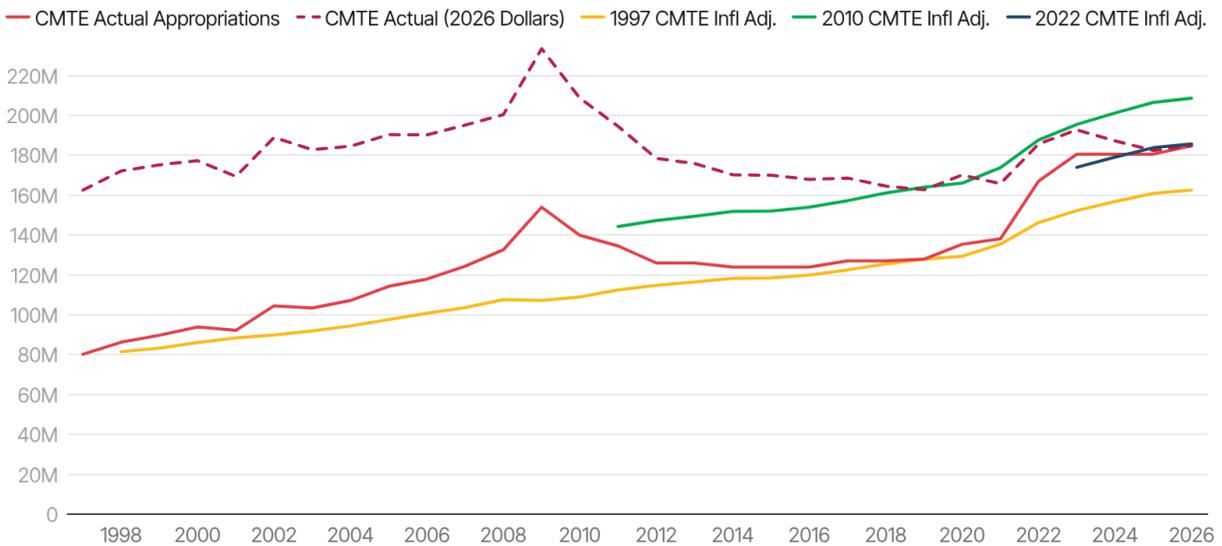
⁴ Lewallen, Jonathan. *Committees and the Decline of Lawmaking in Congress*. University of Michigan Press, 2020.

⁵ Rackey, J.D., Wren Orey, Julianne Lempert, and Lily Kincannon. “[Optimizing the U.S. Congressional Calendar to Boost Legislative Productivity](#).” *Bipartisan Policy Center*. October 15, 2024.



Despite the decline in hearings, committees are the only venue capable of gathering and processing information and distilling it into legislative action as envisioned by the *Loper Bright* decision. As I have previously written, the answer is not to simply have more hearings.⁶ Rather, Congress must build systems that increase committee capacity for gathering and processing information, which includes the ability to hire more expertly trained staff both in counsel and subject matter expert positions. However, as the figure below shows, committee funding has stagnated well below recent funding levels, and even those higher levels of the early 2000s still do not compare to the robust committee operations of previous eras. The current stagnation directly cuts against Congress’s ability to respond to the post-*Loper* policymaking environment.

Appropriations for House Committees



Note: Actual Appropriations data obtained via Congress.gov, totals include all Standing, Special, and Select committees, except Appropriations. Additional analysis and visualization compiled by J.D. Rackey.



⁶ Rackey, John D. and Lauren C. Bell. “Government by Committee: (Re)centering Congressional Committees in the Policy Process.” In “Congress after Chevron: Legislative Responses to Changing Deference Doctrines.” *Foundation for American Innovation* and *The C. Boyden Gray Center*. November 20, 2024.



Conclusion

Over the past seven years, the modernization movement has made tremendous progress in making Congress more effective, efficient, and transparent on behalf of the American people. On a bipartisan basis, those inside and outside the institution have routinely praised House modernization efforts as an example of Congress functioning as it should: hearing from experts, debating and formulating policy solutions, and following through on implementation. This subcommittee's continued investment in modernization initiatives is part of what has led to such success. The House Modernization Initiatives Account should continue to be funded at a robust level so that the House can continue to execute on the promise of the Modernization Committee's recommendations. Including reporting requirements will bring greater transparency and accountability into the process, help ensure taxpayer dollars are spent responsibly, and contribute to building a public record of the successes and advancements that the current modernization effort has brought to Congress, ultimately allowing it to better deliver for the American people.

Recent Supreme Court decisions and other developments in interbranch relations demand that Congress embrace robust and deliberative legislative and oversight practices.⁷ A corresponding increase for committee funding above current trends will provide ample leeway for Congress to more adequately respond to these decisions.

Thank you for the opportunity to provide this testimony.

⁷ Rackey, J.D. and Michael Thorning. "[Congress at a Crossroads: Questioning the Current and Future State of the Legislative Branch.](#)" *Bipartisan Policy Center*. March 9, 2026.

