

Rep. Mike Gallagher (WI-08) Testimony Before the House Committee on Oversight and Government Reform

Chairman Cummings, Ranking Member Jordan, thank you for the opportunity to address this committee today about H.R. 765—the Serve the People, Not the Swamp Act. This bill contains three simple reforms that get Congress working again and incentivize members to better deliver for their constituents. These reforms are straightforward and common-sense. They reflect the northeast Wisconsin wisdom that you don't need 700-page bills to reform this institution to more effectively serve the American people. While I do not claim that this legislation contains all the answers, I do believe that it represents a positive step forward to reclaim the Framers' vision of our government. These reforms would help us live up to the expectations of our constituents and unite across partisan lines.

The first section of this legislation would end Congressional recesses until Congress passes a budget resolution that results in a balanced federal budget by the end of its window. It would also keep Congress in session in August until it passes all of the annual appropriations bills. These reforms would prevent legislators from kicking the budget can down the road each year and would help stop Congress from governing by crisis. Let's be clear: the current budget process is broken. Our inability to pass a budget—let alone one that stabilizes our spending—makes no sense to the people who elected us. They deserve better.

The second reform contained in this bill is a five-year ban on lobbying by high-ranking executive branch officials and Members of Congress. Throughout my time here in Washington, I have come to see that the people are not the problem with Congress. In fact, despite our differences, most Members are smart, hardworking, and here for the right reasons. This is also true of most senior-level executive branch appointees. Surely, we are all capable of going home

and embarking on another career after our time in office. We could start a business, become a professor, or manage a charitable organization. Why do so many of our colleagues choose to lobby once they move on, and what kinds of perverse incentives are imparted on us during our time in office by the prospects of a lobbying job when we leave? The American people did not elect us to serve as the latest example of the “revolving-door” between government and special interests. Government service should be just that: service. It should not be a path to a more lucrative profession.

Finally, my legislation would terminate Congressional pensions under the Federal Employees Retirement System. Again, this is a reform designed to better align the incentives of Congress with those of our constituents and get Congress working for the public. Across northeast Wisconsin, there are countless public servants who have earned their pensions: our veterans, our teachers, our police officers and firefighters. Surely, Members of Congress do not belong in this group. We do not deserve special treatment, and serving the public should not be a job we aim to stay in forever to collect a taxpayer-funded pension or to cash in for a cushy lobbying job. Our personal wellbeing should instead be connected with the wellbeing of our constituents.

While I know some of these reforms will draw disagreement, I hope they will begin a larger discussion about bipartisan steps we can take to reform this institution and better align the incentives of our elected officials. We owe it to our constituents and taxpayers across this nation to serve the people, not the swamp.

Thank you.

Staff POC: Mike Jacobs, x67383