

PETE SESSIONS, TEXAS
CHAIRMAN

VIRGINIA FOXX, NORTH CAROLINA
ROB BISHOP, UTAH
TOM COLE, OKLAHOMA
ROB WOODALL, GEORGIA
RICHARD B. NUGENT, FLORIDA
DANIEL WEBSTER, FLORIDA
ILEANA ROS-LEHTINEN, FLORIDA
MICHAEL C. BURGESS, TEXAS

HUGH N. HALPERN, STAFF DIRECTOR
(202) 225-9191
www.rules.house.gov



Committee on Rules
U.S. House of Representatives
H-512 The Capitol
Washington, DC 20515-6269

ONE HUNDRED THIRTEENTH CONGRESS

LOUISE M. SLAUGHTER, NEW YORK
RANKING MINORITY MEMBER

JAMES P. McGOVERN, MASSACHUSETTS
ALCEE L. HASTINGS, FLORIDA
JARED POLIS, COLORADO

MILES M. LACKEY, MINORITY STAFF DIRECTOR

MINORITY OFFICE
H-152, THE CAPITOL
(202) 225-9091

March 4, 2013

**STATEMENT OF CHAIRMAN PETE SESSIONS BEFORE THE
COMMITTEE ON HOUSE ADMINISTRATION
REGARDING THE COMMITTEE ON RULES' 2013 BUDGET REQUEST**

Thank you Madam Chair, Ranking Member Brady, and Members of the Committee. I am here today with my Ranking Member, the gentlelady from New York (Mrs. Slaughter) to testify on the Rules Committee's budget request for legislative year of 2013. While this is my second appearance before the Committee, it is my first as chairman of the Rules Committee.

The House has 20 other committees, all of which work on their individual policy areas, and recommend legislation to the House. The Rules Committee stands alone among them as a committee charged with facilitating the consideration of other committees' work. Without the Rules Committee, it would be virtually impossible for the House to consider anything other than the least controversial bill.

Where other committees have weeks and months to prepare their work product, the Rules Committee's agenda is measured in days, hours, and minutes. As a result, we have developed a reputation as the "special forces" of committees: we are small, we are flexible, and we *always* achieve our objectives. And we do it with the second-smallest budget of any committee in Congress.

All of us recognize the incredible fiscal challenges that face the Nation. The Committee — despite its small size and meager budget — has contributed to the effort to reduce our deficit, shouldering a 12.4 percent cut in our authorized level over the 112th Congress. Your committee has asked us to testify about the effects of a further 11 percent cut from our LY2012 authorized level, taking the Committee to an authorized level roughly equivalent to where it was in the 108th Congress. You also asked that we contrast those effects with a more modest cut of one percent from our authorized level, reflecting a small increase in what we spent last year.

I come before the Committee today to tell you that regardless of our budget, we will accomplish our mission. We will do it because we have to; no one else can. However, I also want to tell you that if we suffer further significant cuts, it will have an impact on our work: we will be less flexible, we will be less transparent, and costs that could be borne more effectively by the Rules Committee will instead be shifted to the House and other legislative branch agencies at a much higher cost.

Understanding the very real pressures of our situation, I urge the House Administration Committee to consider providing the Rules Committee with sufficient funding to accomplish our mission in the most cost-effective manner possible. I believe that the Rules Committee's track record is one of providing strong value for an extremely modest investment.

THE REAL IMPACT OF CUTS TO THE RULES COMMITTEE

With the authorizing and appropriations committees, budget cuts have very real effects — fewer oversight hearings; smaller, less responsive committee staffs; and longer delays in filing reports. Those effects come from those committees' ability to tailor their workload to the available resources.

In contrast, the Committee on Rules has no ability to turn down work in response to fewer resources. So long as the House is considering legislation, the Rules Committee must be open for business. Preparing legislation for the floor has certain fixed costs; if the Committee does not have the resources to meet the need, those costs don't disappear — they are just shifted to the House as a whole. That means longer lead times and a greater expense when the Committee could produce the same product more quickly and less expensively.

The Impact on Automation. For instance, the Committee has invested heavily in its custom automated workflow system (called CORED) over the last decade. Our budget request includes significant funding for our contractor to maintain the system and continue to make improvements.

One of the areas where we have made significant strides is producing our resolutions in the legislative branch standard XML format, where they can easily be posted or printed with minimal human intervention. However, while we are close, we have not yet been able to complete the work to do the same thing for committee reports. This means that we provide the Clerk (and ultimately GPO) with a Microsoft Word file and hundreds of pages of hard copy attachments. One or more human beings at GPO must then hand-code our file and merge the attachments to produce a file suitable for posting and printing. GPO then bills the Legislative Branch Printing and Binding fund for the dozens of man-hours associated with that exercise.

However, the Committee started the work last year to be able to produce the entire report in-house. In coordination with our contractor and the Clerk's office, we are working to ensure the ability for CORED to produce a valid XML file that can be merged with files provided by the Office of Legislative Counsel to produce a complete report that is ready for GPO to print and the House to post online. In the last Congress we filed 137 committee reports. If we were able to produce each of those in-house, the House would experience significant savings, better work product, and fewer errors.

If the Rules Committee receives the lower funding level contemplated by the House Administration Committee, we will only be able to fund maintenance work on CORED and the House will continue to bear the higher cost of report production for the Rules Committee.

The Impact on Document Production. In another example, the Committee often has to produce documents for the House under tight deadlines, sometimes well after business hours. As a result, we are heavy users of our printing and copying equipment. The Majority's only high-speed printer and copier is over two years old and has produced well over half a million pages to date. It is a mechanical device, and as it ages, it becomes more prone to malfunction and breakdown. To avoid that possibility and the impact on our mission, we regularly replace our copiers to ensure that all of our equipment is operating at peak efficiency.

Unlike other, larger committees where the effects of a device malfunction are confined to that committee and where they often have backups, a breakdown at the Rules Committee is farther reaching. Because our documents need to be filed with the House on the same legislative day that we meet, the House will remain in session waiting on the Rules Committee's work product. If we have an equipment failure that delays the filing of our report, the House must remain in session and all of the personnel — including police officers, chamber security personnel, clerks, official reporters, and recording studio personnel — must remain on-duty and will be earning overtime. Even a short delay can cost the House tens of thousands of dollars in increased operating expenses.

If the Rules Committee receives the lower funding level contemplated by the House Administration Committee, we will most certainly have to wait until the end of the year to replace our copier, if we can do so at all. Each time we delay maintenance or replacement, we take a risk, one that compounds over time. Ultimately, that risk is borne by the House with delays in the schedule and the costs associated with those delays.

The Impact on Transparency. Lastly, we are about to launch a new website which has been in development for over a year. Our current website averages over 50,000 hits per day, with peak days reaching nearly half a million hits per day.

Because the work done by the Rules Committee is different from that of other committees, the standard committee website designed by the CAO's staff doesn't have the capabilities to deliver the kind of information that the public has come to expect. Additionally, the Committee was told early in the website's development process that the CAO would be unable to dedicate the staff resources to customize the template. Accordingly, we *must* rely on outside contractors for the development and maintenance of our site.

Additionally, development of both CORED and the website were items that we previously funded at the end of each legislative year. The Committee on House Administration has changed the accounting rules, requiring that we make those payments in real-time, rather than pre-funding them from funds remaining at the end of a year.

While we should be able to complete the work to bring our site to launch, if the Rules Committee receives the lower funding level contemplated by the House Administration Committee, we will only be able to fund maintenance work on the website and will be unable to fund the changes necessary to create a mobile site or make other improvements for Members and the public in the interest of transparency.

EFFECT OF BUDGET CUTS ON THE MINORITY

Last Congress, Chairman Dreier took the step of giving the Minority full control over its one-third of the budget. This arrangement has worked well over the course of the 112th Congress, and it is a tradition that I intend to continue.

However, the effects of the 11 percent cut on the Minority will be immediate and substantial. The Majority's staff is small; the Minority's staff is smaller. This cut would mean that they would be forced to choose between layoffs and furloughs or purchasing paper.

For instance, because the Minority staff is so small, they have no dedicated IT personnel and contract out that function. With a cut of this magnitude, they would be unable to continue to contract for technical support and maintenance services, leaving them vulnerable to failures while the Committee is operating.

Every majority needs a fully functioning minority; it's essential for our democracy. A cut of this magnitude would do a disservice to the minority members of the Committee, and the House as a whole.

THE DECISION BEFORE THE COMMITTEE ON HOUSE ADMINISTRATION

While the Committee on Rules is a standing committee, its function is different than any other. Without the Committee on Rules operating at peak efficiency, the entire institution suffers.

The Committee on House Administration is in a difficult position — you have to make cuts, but must do so in a way that will allow the committees and the House as an institution to function. It is not easy.

I am asking you today to consider the effects on the House of substantial cuts to the Committee on Rules' budget. We have the second smallest budget of any committee. While that means the size of the cuts are smaller, their impact is disproportionately larger. Any major cut means that the Committee will have to risk some element of its mission — the timely delivery of business to the floor, the Speaker's commitment to transparency in the legislative process, or the fair and efficient handling of Member requests. By the same token, a small investment in the Rules Committee has little effect on the overall picture of committee budgets.

Over the last 10 years, my predecessors made investments in the Committee to ensure that it can deliver on our mission better, faster, and more cheaply. We are close to realizing the ultimate payoff of those investments. If we are forced to abandon that work, our activity doesn't go away. Rather, we just shift those costs to the House as a whole and at a much higher price than if the Committee handled them.

Madam Chair, I appreciate the willingness of the Committee to listen our concerns, and I stand ready to work with you to ensure that the Rules Committee can continue to deliver on our mission.

I stand ready to answer any questions you may have.