

**FEBRUARY 15, 2017**

**STATEMENT OF CHAIRMAN PETE SESSIONS BEFORE THE  
COMMITTEE ON HOUSE ADMINISTRATION  
REGARDING THE COMMITTEE ON RULES' 115TH CONGRESS BUDGET  
REQUEST**

Thank you Chairman Harper, Ranking Member Brady, and Members of the Committee on House Administration. 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 the One Hundred Fifteenth Congress.

We greatly appreciate your thoughtful and thorough process to ensure that committees have the resources they need to do the work of the American people. The Rules Committee's primary mission is to ensure that the House can consider critical legislation that touches nearly every other committee in any given year—this is true in Republican and Democratic majorities.

Where other committees have weeks and months to prepare their work product, the Rules Committee's agenda is measured in days, hours, and minutes. Currently we are small, we are flexible, and we deliver on our objectives. We do it with the smallest budget of any committee in Congress.

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

**THE REAL IMPACT TO THE RULES COMMITTEE**

Insufficient resources can have very real effects for all committees. For other committees insufficient funding can result in fewer oversight hearings; smaller, less responsive committee staffs; and longer delays in filing reports. Many of those committees can look to tailor their workload to the available resources. In contrast, the Committee on Rules has no ability to turn down work in response to insufficient resources. When the House is considering legislation, the Rules Committee must be open for business. Preparing legislation for the floor has certain fixed costs; if the Rules 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. Insufficient funding would mean longer lead times and a greater expense to the House as a whole, when the Rules Committee could produce the same product more quickly and less expensively. As I stated earlier, the Rules

Committee will deliver on its responsibilities, but proper funding will give the Committee the financial resources to complete those duties in the most efficient and cost effective manner possible.

***The Impact on Automation and Document Production.*** The Committee has invested heavily in its custom automated workflow system (called CORED) over the last decade, as well as maintained organizational discipline in technology advancement planning and execution. Our budget request includes significant funding for our technology contractors to maintain current systems and would give us the financial flexibility to make improvements when the needs arise.

The Rules Committee is often required 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, as well as heavily dependent on technology resources that are specific to the Committee. To lessen the possibility of failed technology impacting our mission, we regularly update and replace our computers, copiers, printers as well as engage with outside contractors to ensure that all of our equipment and automated systems are operating at peak efficiency.

Unlike larger committees where the effects of a device malfunction or automated system failure are confined to that committee, 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 or system 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.

Ultimately, insufficient funding to the Rules Committee's staffing and technology produces a greater, more expensive, overall risk to the House for possible delays in the schedule and the costs associated with those delays.

***The Impact on Transparency.*** In the 114th Congress, the Rules Committee partnered with the Office of the Clerk and the Government Printing Office to increase the number of House prepared documents that are available to the Public in "xml" format. The xml format is the current gold standard in machine readability and functionality. While it is my intent to eventually hand over operational control of this project to the Government Publishing Office, we are again requesting funds to continue our progress on this front in the 115<sup>th</sup> Congress. Our requested increase for the 115th Congress includes a continuation of publishing the House Rules in xml, as well as additional publications that may be identified.

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 does not have the capabilities to deliver the kind of information that the public has come to expect. 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. Insufficient funding would compromise maintenance, proper staffing, upkeep, and development of these public resources.

If the Rules Committee does not receive adequate funding, we will only be able to fund basic maintenance work on the website and other technology based transparency initiatives. Without continued funding we will be unable to advance any changes needed to reduce Committee costs or make other improvements for Members or the public in the interest of transparency.

#### EFFECT ON THE MINORITY

During the 112<sup>th</sup> Congress the Rules Committee gave the Minority full control over its one-third of the budget. This arrangement has worked well over the course of the 112<sup>th</sup>, 113<sup>th</sup>, and 114<sup>th</sup> Congresses, and it is a tradition that I intend to continue.

The effects of any cut on the Minority will be immediate and substantial. The Majority's budget and staff is small; the Minority's is smaller. Any cut could mean that they would be forced to choose between layoffs and furloughs or purchasing office supplies for basic office functionality. Also because the Minority staff is so small, they have no dedicated IT personnel and contract out that function. Any funding cut could prohibit them from continuing 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 House of Representatives institution suffers.

I am asking you to fund the Rules Committee at \$3,030,281 in annual budget authority for base committee operations for each session of the 115th Congress. The base budget we are presenting reflects a 5% increase over the 114th Congress, calendar year 2016, authorized level for base committee needs. We propose this level to maintain a minimal level of flexibility in spending,

funding for one field hearing, and allow the Committee to maintain staff at a level that matches the functional needs of the Committee.

Additionally, the Committee is requesting an additional \$100,000 per funding year, which would be used exclusively to assist with the implementation of a new House rule that requires the production of comparative prints for unreported bills—similar to the current “Ramseyer” requirement for reported bills. This increase in funding would only be used, if necessary, in support of this project and would not be used to fund any base committee operations for the majority or the minority. This additional project would increase our total request to \$3,130,281 per calendar year.

We have the smallest budget of any committee. While a five percent increase in the funding of the Rules Committee would have little effect on the House Committees overall financial picture, even a “modest” decrease in funding would have disproportionately large implications. Our Committee’s responsibility is the timely delivery of business to the floor, maintaining the Speaker’s commitment to transparency in the legislative process, and the fair and efficient handling of Member requests.

We strive for better governance with a Committee and House that deliver better work product in a faster and more cost effective manner. Our purpose and responsibilities will not go away, but improperly funding them at the more cost effective Committee level will only move the financial burden to the House level where focused cost saving and efficiencies will be lost.

Mr. Chairman, 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.