

Statement of John Yarmuth
Ranking Democrat, House Budget Committee
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12:45 p.m.
1310 Longworth House Office Building

Review of the Use of Committee Funds of the 115th Congress

Thank you, Chairman Harper and Ranking Member Brady, for providing this opportunity to testify about the Budget Committee's use of funds in the 115th Congress.

I am also pleased to be here alongside our Chairman, Mrs. Black. We are both testifying before the House Administration Committee for the first time as the new Chairman and Ranking Member and we do so with the commitment to carry on the tradition of running the Budget Committee's operations in a bipartisan manner.

While we may not see eye to eye on the overall budget priorities of the country, we are, however, in agreement on the funding distribution of the Committee's budget. As in previous years, in the 115th Congress the majority will make one-third of the funding and resources available to the minority for personnel. The majority budget will continue to cover costs of equipment for both staffs, providing the same quality and services for both majority and minority.

I would like to note that over the last year, the minority budget had lower expenditures than normal. However, that was a one-time anomaly. There were a number of staff who left during the year and weren't replaced, including the staff director and a senior analyst. My predecessor, Mr. Van Hollen, who was running for the Senate and not returning to the Committee, decided to hold off filling those positions to give the incoming ranking member the opportunity to make those personnel decisions. Over the last few weeks, I have filled all of our vacant positions and the minority staff is now at full strength.

That being said, there is not a lot of flexibility in the minority budget, which essentially covers staff salaries. Funding has been frozen at the same level for the last three years and we are now operating at 18 percent below what the minority budget was in 2010. While we have been able to manage within these funding levels and expect to during this Congress, we can't absorb any further cuts without doing damage to our mission. As we look to the future, continuing to freeze resources over the longer term is not sustainable, particularly if the growth rate in private sector wages increases and draws talented people away from government service. We have highly experienced analysts on the staff who are experts in a wide range of public policy areas. If we want to retain them and attract new people who are skilled, motivated, and experienced, we have to pay competitive salaries.

I also have concerns beyond staff salaries. The Committee's commitment to save money in the current fiscal climate means we are keeping equipment longer. The Committee's computer server is beyond its original warranty as are most of the computers. While I am in favor of getting the most out of the equipment we buy, there is a point where it becomes counterproductive, and worse, makes our information systems vulnerable to cyber attack. New computers and equipment will be needed in the near future.

We owe it to the American taxpayer that we spend their money as efficiently as possible and we will continue to look for ways to do more with less. But, we must recognize there is a limit. And, as the urgency to deal with our long-term budget challenges builds, we will need the best possible analysis and advice from Budget Committee staff. We will need to attract and retain first-rate analysts and provide them the necessary support they need to perform at the highest levels. I hope that our budget allocation will reflect these important goals.