

Committee on House Administration

Member Day Hearing

11/21/2019

Testimony of Rep. Tom Graves

Madam Chairwoman and Ranking Member Davis, thank you hosting today's Member Day hearing. As the Vice Chair of the Select Committee on the Modernization of Congress, I also want to thank you for your partnership and leadership on the Select Committee.

I also want to commend Chairman Kilmer for the work he's done to create an environment of productivity and bipartisanship. When the Select Committee first started, we chose to work together and combine our resources as one team, instead of separating the staff and office space by party line. Thanks to the chairman, this experiment has created a bipartisan bond of trust and collaboration unlike anything I've been a part of in Congress.

Under this unique approach we've been able to pass 29 recommendations. And we're not done yet. Just last week, the House extended the committee through the rest of the 116th Congress. I'm excited to have the opportunity to build on this year's work and dive even deeper into issues affecting the legislative branch.

I want to thank the members of this committee for working with us during this process. You have been great partners. We look forward to partnering with you on efforts to move our bill.

Every recommendation we make aims to strengthen the capacity of the Legislative Branch so that we can better serve all Americans. Our first round of transparency-focused recommendations in May aimed to “open up” Congress for the American people.

Those recommendations included:

- Streamlining the bill-writing process to save time and reduce mistakes.
- Finalizing a new system that allows the public to easily track how amendments change bills, and how bills change current law.
- Making it easier to know who is lobbying Congress and what they’re lobbying for.
- Creating one-click access to a list of agencies and programs that have expired and need Congressional attention.
- Creating one-click access to see how Members of Congress vote in committees.

Increasing accessibility and transparency in Congress promotes more accountability to our constituents, and that’s a good thing.

The second round we developed after talking with current and former Members of Congress, and those familiar with the House’s current technology policy, capabilities and procedures. We want to better serve the American people by improving our effectiveness and ability to deliver modern, 21st century solutions.

There were 24 recommendations in total, which included:

- Reestablishing and restructuring an improved Office of Technology Assessment.

- Improving IT services in the House by reforming House Information Resources (HIR).
- Requiring HIR to prioritize certain technological improvements, reform the approval process for outside technology vendors, allow Member offices to test new technologies.
- Creating one point of contact for technology services for each Member office.
- Creating a customer service portal to improve technology services in the House.
- Leveraging bulk purchasing of the House by removing technology costs out of Member offices' budgets and moving into a centralized account.
- Prioritizing a “rapid response” program at the Congressional Research Service for nonpartisan fact sheets on key issues.
- Developing a constituent engagement and services best practices HUB for Members.

We also recommended that Members of Congress should receive mandatory cybersecurity training. That idea came from our colleague Kathleen Rice from New York, she has a bill that requires this practice. Congressional staff have to undergo cybersecurity training, Members should as well.

Our work is far from over. In September we held a hearing relating to the congressional schedule and calendar, and a hearing to discuss improving civility throughout the halls of Congress. We've had conversations about budget and appropriations reform, congressional mailing standards, and communicating with our constituents.

No idea is too big or too small, and we encourage you to continue sharing your ideas for reform with us. Thanks again for having us here today to share our work.