

Modernization of Congress Remarks

- Chairman Kilmer and Vice Chairman Graves, thank you for holding this hearing today.
- I have been a public servant for 40 years, both in the California State Legislature and here in Congress.
- I believe in responsible leadership.
- Leadership that moves our nation forward and lives up to our shared values of freedom, pluralism, and opportunity.
- Each of us comes here to with a desire to help people.
- But lately – and I don't need to tell all of you this – our collective work, this House of Representatives, hasn't been delivering.
- Our procedures are cumbersome, the tone is acrimonious, and the short-term goal of scoring political points crowds out our true mission of creating long term, thoughtful policy.
- We lurch from self-created crisis to self-created crisis.

- The American people are frustrated and so are many of us.
- With that, I would like to offer a couple suggestions to may help us improve this institution and ultimately better serve our fellow Americans.

- Budget Process
 - There is no question our budget process is broken.
 - We go from Omnibus to CR to CR to CR to shut down, back to Omnibus.
 - It has been years since we processed our budget and appropriations in regular order.
 - Beyond being ineffective, our budget process is also leading us down a dangerous path of increased deficits and exploding debt.
 - Our budget should reflect our national priorities and that requires difficult choices.
 - I think we need to find a way to unify our authorizations and appropriations process.

- We shouldn't be able to create programs and then not fund them.
- Similarly, we shouldn't be able to fund programs that aren't authorized.
- Pay-Go helps, but isn't sufficient.
- This is problematic for two reasons:
 - First, we end up authorizing much more than we can afford.
 - The programs are too often built without realistic budget tradeoffs.
 - Second, it creates unrealistic expectations.
 - Our communities think we are making specific commitments to programs they care about just too see them go unfulfilled.
- Long-term thinking
 - Second, I think we need to rethink our rules to encourage long-term thinking and policy making.

- Right now, short term political gotchas are getting in the way of our serious work.
 - We should look our budget windows to better take into account the long-term costs and benefits.
 - Additionally, our oversight has become too personal and not enough about whether the programs are achieving their goals and helping our constituents.
 - We need to do more program specific hearings with sub-cabinet officials and try to get away from so much political theater.
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- Finally, when I speak to those who served here in the 70's and 80's, they talk about a more collaborative atmosphere with stronger personal relationships between members.
 - Today, partisanship has narrowed our thinking and pitted us against one another.
 - We need to find a way to do better.

- In 1994, Republicans ran against the excesses of Washington.
- Too quickly they copied the Democrats bad habits.
- Now, we Democrats are back in control of the House.
- To keep our promise of making the federal government be more responsive – and not get caught in political bickering -- we need serious reform.
- This committee has a one in a generation opportunity to do big things, and not just nibbling around the edges.
- Thank you very much and I appreciate your consideration.