

TESTIMONY OF
U.S. REPRESENTATIVE BRIAN FITZPATRICK. (PA-01)

HOUSE SELECT COMMITTEE FOR THE MODERNIZATION OF CONGRESS

PUBLIC WITNESS HEARING
MARCH 11, 2019

Chairman Kilmer, Ranking Member Graves, members of the Committee, thank you for holding today's hearing to discover how we can work together to ensure Congress is working effectively for the American people. As you know, you are charged with recommending ways the House can improve and reform its internal operations from technology and staffing to, in my opinion, one of the most important areas: procedure.

As vice-chair of the Problem Solvers Caucus, I'm committed to making government work so we can deliver solutions to the issues our constituents are facing. As the People's House, we must reflect the will of the people – and the people want to see their government work. Right now, partisan politics has brought the gears of government to a halt and largely removed the ability for rank and file Members to advance common-sense and bipartisan ideas unless a select few have signed off.

Our Founding Fathers never intended for the House to function in this way. The founding principle of our Republic is a government by the People, of the People, and for the People – that doesn't mean a select few decide what is considered on the floor of the People's House.

Last year, the Problem Solvers Caucus released "Break the Gridlock," a proposal which is intended to reduce the effect of partisan politics on the policy-making process and encourage bipartisan consensus building. The proposal aims to move power from a few Members in party leadership to rank and file members.

The Problem Solvers Caucus was able to implement some of our rule changes at the start of this Congress, but many were not included in the final rules package. I believe this Committee should include in its final report updates to the House Rules which would allow consensus building and encourage bipartisan cooperation.

The United States is a diverse country - each district with its own unique people, issues, and economy. There should be an opportunity for each member to move forward district specific priorities, so they can help those they represent.

Each session, all Members should be granted a markup on at least one piece of legislation that has a cosponsor from the opposite party and is referred to a Committee they serve on. Members serve on committees which have jurisdiction over issues among the most important to their district, therefore legislation referred to the Committee they serve on should have a significant impact on that Member's district. Allowing those bills to be evaluated by the Committee will help move legislation which might otherwise be overlooked by the chairs of the committees.

And when legislation is passed out of a Committee, the whole House should have the opportunity to consider it. Unless a majority of the Rules Committee votes against advancing the legislation, Committee-passed legislation should go to the House floor for consideration.

And when legislation comes to the floor, members should be allowed to put forward amendments to be considered by the whole House. This will allow each Member to put forward their ideas, and if a majority of Members agree, the legislation will be improved with their amendments. For a bill to be considered on the House floor under a closed rule there should be a requirement for a three-fifths supermajority of those present and voting for passage and consideration. If three-fifths of Members do not agree to a closed rule, then the legislation should be considered under an open or structured rule.

These are just a few of the changes to the House rules which would help this body more effectively serve the People we were elected to represent. I hope that this Committee will consider all member input and put forward plans which will help us function in a more bipartisan and effective manner which restores Americans' faith in Congress and all of our government institutions.

Thank you for holding this hearing, I look forward to working with you and reading your final report.