

STATEMENT OF
THE HONORABLE VICENTE GONZALEZ
BEFORE THE SELECT COMMITTEE ON THE MODERNIZATION OF CONGRESS
ON
MEMBER DAY
12 MARCH 2019

Chairman Kilmer and Vice Chairman Graves, thank you for this opportunity to speak.

I would like to suggest limited online voting for Members of Congress on roll call votes to both ease pressure and boost the productivity of Congress. The suggestions I am making are akin to when the House switched from paper ballots to voting cards.

Countries like Australia, Japan, and Russia have begun implementing even more complex systems for their elections.¹²³ West Virginia even has a limited system in place for the service men and women in our Armed Forces.⁴ I am suggesting we modernize just Congress using preexisting available technologies.

Our primary responsibilities are to uphold the Constitution and represent our constituents to the best of our abilities. We cast votes on the House Floor and participate in the legislative processes here in Washington nearly every week. At the same time, we must balance our activities in the nation's capital with our obligations back home.

Members of Congress should not be forced to decide between attending a funeral in their district and voting on the Floor. Members should not have to be forced to leave a community in crisis to come in and vote on the Floor. I understand that making tough choices is part of the job, but I know that I am not alone in looking for ways to use the tools we have at our fingertips to alleviate some of that pressure to be in two places at once.

I am suggesting we implement these modernizations through an app on our official devices that would use 2 or 3 factor authentications in order to securely verify the vote of each member. Be it a fingerprint, face scan, or an RSA token, the technology exists.

The House took 1210 roll call votes during the 115th Congress, and I am suggesting members would be limited to using this method of voting 25-50 times a Congress.⁵ That would have been 2-4% of votes in the 115th and an even smaller percentage in other sessions of Congress.⁶ I would hope this system could both improve Congressional efficiency and get members closer to a 100% attendance rate. To my knowledge, only 3 representatives made 100% of the votes across all of the 115th Congress.⁷⁸

¹<https://www.japantimes.co.jp/news/2018/09/02/national/politics-diplomacy/new-online-voting-system-introduced-city-tsukuba/#.XILBtChKiUm>

²<https://cointelegraph.com/news/moscow-government-plans-to-use-blockchain-tech-in-e-voting-for-parliamentary-election>

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https://www.aph.gov.au/About_Parliament/Parliamentary_Departments/Parliamentary_Library/pubs/BriefingBook4Sp/ElectronicVoting

⁴<https://sos.wv.gov/elections/Pages/MobileVote.aspx>

⁵<https://www.congress.gov/roll-call-votes>

⁶<https://www.congress.gov/roll-call-votes>

⁷<https://www.govtrack.us/congress/members/report-cards/2017/house/missed-votes>

⁸<https://www.govtrack.us/congress/members/report-cards/2018/house/missed-votes>

Foreign countries are interested in using a sophisticated blockchain technology for their parliamentary elections.⁹¹⁰ I am proposing something much simpler than that. Some places in the United States trust smart phone applications for things like parole and house arrest.¹¹

I believe we have the resources to securely implement my proposed changes. We already receive official devices with a suite of approved applications, therefore it would not be a stretch to add one for this limited remote voting. Multi-factors of authentication break down into three things: something you have, something you are, and something you know.

The “have” could be a specific device, the phone or tablet we would be voting from, or number generated by a digital security token, not unlike the type our staffs use to remotely login. It could also be our voting cards we already use to vote on the floor. The “are” could be a fingerprint or picture to verify the member’s identity. Lastly, the know could be our password associated with our House IDs.

States like Massachusetts have proposed general remote voting and even remote voting from committee rooms.¹² I believe both of which could be implemented and make us more efficient, but for now I am proposing limited use for members. We could use things like the Congressional App Challenge to build a baseline to work from or things like the Department of Defense’s bug bounty program to identify vulnerabilities in the system and work to reduce risk.¹³

This Select Committee was convened to modernize Congress, and I believe we have a perfect opportunity to be ahead of the curve for once by using secure, pre-existing technology and resources.

⁹ <https://cointelegraph.com/news/moscow-government-plans-to-use-blockchain-tech-in-e-voting-for-parliamentary-election>

¹⁰ <https://cointelegraph.com/news/moscow-government-plans-to-use-blockchain-tech-in-e-voting-for-parliamentary-election>

¹¹ <https://gcn.com/articles/2018/03/19/virtual-integrated-mobile-office.aspx>

¹² <https://malegislature.gov/Bills/191/H2019/Amendments/House>

¹³ <https://dod.defense.gov/News/News-Releases/News-Release-View/Article/1671231/departments-of-defense-expands-hack-the-pentagon-crowdsourced-digital-defense-pr/>