

Thank you for the invitation to testify. My past work as a professor of American Government whose teaching and research focused on Congress, combined with my 14 plus years in the House, gives me a unique understanding of how the House does and, unfortunately, does not work.

Whenever I am teaching about Congress, I begin by showing the “I’m Just a Bill” Schoolhouse Rock! video – the famous 3-minute cartoon of how a bill becomes a law. “Bill” starts as an idea that comes from a constituent to their representative who writes the bill. “Bill” works his way through the process and eventually becomes a law. Sadly that’s rarely the way Congress works today.

Our Constitution empowered the American people by empowering Congress. But the House is now rigged in a

way that greatly diminishes Members' ability to represent our constituents. As a result, Congress often doesn't work, allowing the president and the courts to grab the power supposed to be held by the American people. If we are to build a better America for future generations this must change.

I am a member of the bipartisan House Problem Solvers Caucus and last year we put together a package of reforms to facilitate consensus-driven governing and foster passage of individual member initiatives. Some of our reforms were adopted in the Rules package for the 116th Congress and I thank Speaker Pelosi and Chairman McGovern for working with us on these changes. As a result of this work, any bill that gains cosponsorship of two-thirds of the House will now get put on a new consensus calendar and bills on this

calendar will be considered on the floor on a regular basis.

In addition, bipartisan initiatives are now encouraged in the Rules Committee through a protocol that gives priority to amendments with at least 20 Democratic and 20 Republican cosponsors.

These reforms were a start. They marked the first time in decades House rules moved toward empowering rank-and-file members. Now I encourage this committee to go further and be bold. So I will start bold. First, make the Rules Committee protocol that prioritizes bipartisan amendments a requirement and put it into the House rules. I'd also encourage lowering the required number of members to 10 or 5 on each side in order to encourage consensus policymaking. While doing this to open the process to minority party input, I'd recommend eliminating the Motion

to Recommit which no longer serves the purpose of giving the minority party an opportunity to shape legislation.

In order to empower rank-and-file members, committees should be empowered. Committees are where members have the most policymaking expertise and where they can have the greatest impact if committees are allowed to do their work. One way to empower committees is to guarantee floor consideration for any bill that passes a committee. In addition, to make sure that all committees with jurisdiction on a bill have their say, a majority vote in committee should be required to waive jurisdiction on a piece of legislation.

As committees are empowered, subcommittees can also have their power increased. Subcommittee chairs and ranking members should have authority to hire staff for that

subcommittee. Knowledge is power, and Members gain knowledge through staff. Giving subcommittee leaders the ability to hire staff would expand the opportunity to shape the House agenda to more members.

The importance of talented staff to every member power cannot be overlooked. Significant cuts to Member Representational Allowances (MRAs) in 2011, 2012, and 2013 have undermined the ability of members to represent their constituents. If a member does not have enough expert staff they lack the ability to develop their own legislation, offer amendments, and make good decisions in representing their constituents. Additionally, we should re-establish the Office of Technology Assessment (OTA) which provided Congress with analysis of scientific and technology issues, but was defunded in 1995.

Finally, many have talked about the lack of collegiality among members because of the lack of opportunities to develop relationships across the aisle. I'd recommend reviving the bipartisan retreat and creating more opportunities for members to travel together or otherwise spend time with colleagues of the other party.

Mr. Chairman, we have very large class of new House members who are eager to have an impact. It has injected a lot of much-needed energy into this body, which is good, because the American people need Congress to work. But unless we institute reforms that open up the policymaking process and empower rank-and-file members, we will simply be spokespeople, not policymakers. We cannot let that

happen. Let's reform this House and give power back to the American people.