



Congresswoman Stephanie Murphy
Testimony as Prepared for Delivery
Select Committee on the Modernization of Congress
March 12, 2019

Chairman Kilmer, Vice-Chairman Graves, and Members of the Committee. Thank you for your service on this important committee and for seeking input from individual members at your first hearing.

Consistent with my belief that Congress would function better if Members of Congress—myself included—were less long-winded, I promise to be concise. I intend to yield back the balance of my time—perhaps the rarest phrase in the congressional lexicon.

I am proud to be a Member of Congress, because it gives me the opportunity to serve this country and to help my constituents.

However, this institution is not held in high esteem by the American people. Its popularity rivals that of rodents and rashes, according to public opinion polls.

Too often, the perception that Congress is broken is matched by reality. This creates a sense of cynicism and pessimism among our citizenry. It causes people, especially younger people, to disengage from the democratic process because they feel disillusioned, even disgusted.

Our democracy is not self-sustaining. It depends on an engaged and informed electorate. It needs honorable people who are inspired to choose the path of public service. That's why it's important for government to repair its reputation.

Let me be clear, however. The most important change we can make in Congress is beyond the power of any committee to propose or impose. It cannot be achieved by tinkering with some arcane congressional rule or procedure.

It's about how we in this institution act and how we treat one another.

This is not a call for members to suppress the vigorous debate we are conducting over principles, policies, and the best direction for this country.

It's simply a request that we treat one another with respect. That we comport ourselves in a way that does not further inflame tensions or sharpen divisions in this country. That we view one other, not as adversaries, but as fellow Americans.

In terms of practices and procedures, I have two broad recommendations that I hope the Committee will consider:

First, Congress has the power of the purse, and it's an awesome responsibility. Without a budget, Congress is like a teenager who's been given a credit card with no limit. If they don't have a budget, they will spend recklessly beyond their means. To re-impose some fiscal discipline, I respectfully ask the Committee to review and adopt the bipartisan recommendations made last Congress by the Joint Select Committee on Budget and Appropriations Process Reform. These include biennial budgeting and an annual hearing on the fiscal state of the nation.

Second, oversight of the executive branch is a key congressional responsibility, and committee staff are instrumental in this role. They are talented and diligent. However, we need to be sure we right-size staffing levels to their oversight responsibilities. How, for example, are several dozen staffers on the armed services or intelligence committees supposed to provide effective oversight of the gigantic defense or intelligence communities? Adding staff would cost money, of course, but that cost could be more than offset through stronger oversight of executive actions, including waste, fraud and abuse.

I thank the Committee for allowing me to testify, and for the time and energy you have dedicated to this noble mission. I yield back the balance of my time.