

Congressman Ed Perlmutter
Remarks Before the Select Committee
on the Modernization of Congress
March 12, 2019

Good morning Chairman Kilmer, Vice Chairman Graves, and members of the Committee. Thank you for the opportunity to testify today.

The Select Committee on the Modernization of Congress has an important charge to develop ways for Congress to improve how we operate so we can all better serve and deliver results for our constituents. This Committee, which enjoys broad, bipartisan support from members across the country, should put aside partisan differences and focus on what Congress needs to do better. I want to share a few thoughts from my 12 years serving in the House and on several different Committees.

Last fall as this Committee was first envisioned, I urged Speaker Pelosi and Rules Committee Chairman Jim McGovern to pay particular attention to how to improve leadership development for both Members and their staff, so we can better mentor individuals and ensure new leaders are ready to step into the job when needed. That is why I urge you to spend time on your third mandate from the Rules Package to develop recommendations on “policies to develop the next generation of leaders.” This is important, so Members can learn how this place operates and so all Members can be ready to assume a new position such as a Subcommittee or Full Committee Chairperson or Ranking Member, or even as a leader for the Democratic Caucus or Republican Conference. Congress as an institution will do better when knowledge of its operations are not in the minds of an elite few Members, but of the entire legislative body.

Additionally, for a freshman class of more than 90 Members, we need to show these newly elected Members there is upward mobility and a chance for them to take on new leadership roles on Committees and within their Caucus or Conference so we don't lose Members to other opportunities outside of Congress.

I would also recommend the Select Committee look at how Committees are structured, how the staff is hired and managed, and how transitions between the majority and the minority can best serve all Members of the Committees. An inclusive and Member-driven agenda can deliver strong legislation to the full House for its consideration.

Technology is also another important tool Congress must embrace to fully support our constituents. We need to be able to

use transformative technologies, and we also need to have an unbiased place to go for information on tough technological and scientific policy questions we face. This Committee may want to look at modernizing the former Office of Technology Assessment as we tackle 21st Century technological issues.

One last item I want to mention is housing for Members of Congress. I understand first hand how DC is an expensive place to live. To deal with these costs, Members have tried different things, including living in their offices. But that leads to several unusual issues because in very few other settings do people live in their offices. I urge the Committee to find a solution to this issue as well.

Thank you again for the opportunity to testify, and I hope to continue to engage with the Committee as you complete your work over this next year.