

Remarks: Hearing on Modernization of Congress (5 min)

Tuesday, March 12, 2019; 12:05 p.m.

Thank you all for inviting me to be with you today.

We all know that the 116th Congress is historic – 127 women fill the halls of Congress, and the Democratic Caucus the most diverse ever.

Now, as we adjust to being in the majority, it is important that we look at how we can uplift the diverse voices and experiences of members to make up this historic Congress.

I am encouraged that the new Committee on Caucus Procedures is taking steps to ensure that the rules are transparent, fair and consider the philosophical and geographical differences of our Caucus.

Representation matters. I like to believe that there have been three cases of divine intervention in my life. The second was

when I was an undergraduate student and had the chance to sit down and interview Shirley Chisholm for my senior thesis.

Shirley was the first black congresswoman and the first black woman to run for president, and her representation helped other girls like me realize we could walk the halls of Congress, too.

This Congress may be historic, but the numbers are not yet equal. Just 24% of Members are women. And in its entire history, the House has had just 153 elected African-American members.

Seeing trailblazers, the first of their kind to represent their districts in Congress, inspires the next generation to believe “that could be me.” We all saw the powerful impact that Rep. Haaland had last week when she was the first Native American to chair House proceedings during the vote on H.R. 1.

That inspiration is pivotal if we are to continue to create a pipeline of diverse representation and if Members of Congress are to be reflective of those they serve.

So, I urge you to work to uplift the voices and experiences of those serving in our most historic Caucus, especially those who may not have the loudest voice in the room. It is important that we play to our colleagues' strengths and highlight their unique experiences.

And we also need to ensure that we are seeking out input from diverse sources at committee hearings. Our nation's diversity is indisputably one of our greatest assets and is vital to our continued interests at home and abroad.

Ultimately, diversity breeds creativity. Combining diverse skills, perspectives and situations is necessary to effectively meet society's multi-faceted, dynamic challenges.

If we solicit input from witnesses that all look the same, think the same, act the same or come from the same backgrounds, our overall mission ultimately suffers.

So, thank you again, and I look forward to working with you to ensure our Congress and the voices we uplift are reflective of the American people.