

Representative David Trone (MD-06)
Testimony
Select Committee on the Modernization of Congress

Chairman Kilmer, Ranking Member Graves, Members of the Select Committee - thank you for the opportunity to testify here today.

I'd like to speak to you about two issues that I believe will improve the functioning of the House of Representatives and strengthen our ability to exercise our Article One responsibilities:

- First, we should expand opportunities for young Americans to gain valuable work experience through paid internships.
- Second, we should open the doors of the House to the latest technology and brilliant technological minds.

First, I'd like to discuss paid internships. I come from the business world. In my business, we called our employees team members because that's what they were - part of the team. One thing I learned in business is that you should pay your team members well. Whether it be C-Suite Executive or a summer intern - everybody deserves to make a fair wage.

When starting my Congressional Office, one of the most important things to me was to create a strong, paid internship program. As a person who grew up on a farm that went bankrupt, I am fully aware of the financial constraints an individual or family might be facing. Taking an unpaid position growing up would have been out of the question for me. That is why we must make sure that we as a body are not discriminating against individuals because of their socioeconomic status or financial means. We must ensure the pipeline to Congress is robust and reflects the diversity of all of our districts. While I am grateful the House Appropriations Committee has provided some funding for paid internships this year, I urge this Committee to support additional funding for paid internships not just on Capitol Hill but in District Offices as well.

Second, I believe Congress is making it harder to represent our constituents and exercise our Article One responsibilities by not investing in the latest technology. As I mentioned, I come from the private sector, where investing in technology is a key to success. If customers want to buy your product online, you find a way to make that happen. And, if you don't, your business fails.

Congress is no different, except in this case our constituents are the customers -- the people we serve. Congress isn't meeting the needs of our constituents. If you need proof, look no further than our dismal approval rating. Therefore, I would urge this Committee to explore creating a Congressional version of the United States Digital Service, which deploys technology experts to bring private sector best practices to the federal government.

For example, right now, these dedicated Americans are making it easier for veterans to upgrade their discharge status and modernizing our paper-based immigration system. Imagine what we could accomplish with a team of technology experts dedicated to bringing these same efficiencies to Congress:

- We could create an online portal for constituents who have pending casework with a Member of Congress. This portal would allow constituents to see the status of the case in real time.

- We could make it easier for Americans to contact their Member of Congress through whatever means is most convenient. Members should be able to hear from their constituents via texting and social media just like emails and phone calls – and yes, faxes.
- And, we could democratize our committee hearings by allowing Americans in real-time to comment and weigh in on the issues being considered by the committee. So much of the great work of our committees goes unnoticed because it's hard for everyday Americans to engage.

These are just a few ideas a Digital Service could pursue.

Thank you for the opportunity to share these thoughts with you today. You are engaging in important work, and I would like to be a partner with you in this effort.