Congressman Daniel Webster Testimony
Select Committee on the Modernization of Congress Member Day Hearing
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A good widget maker, when producing flawed widgets, is going to make a change. But what if the change the maker selected was offering additional colors, new packaging, and special pricing? Or employing new marketing techniques like Facebook, Twitter, and Instagram?

While well intentioned, none of these improvements will fix the flawed product.

It is the process by which the widgets are made that is flawed. If the process is flawed, the product will be flawed. The only way to improve the product is to fix the process.

The process for producing policy in Congress is flawed. The process itself kills policy ideas through truncated rules and procedural decisions that limit discussion.

As a result, Congress is passing flawed public policy. The only way to make good public policy is to fix the process.

This requires transforming the way Congress does business. It requires ending a process that is based on traditional "pyramid of power." It requires replacing the power-based system with a process that is focused on principles.

- Power focuses on self-preservation; principle focuses on making ideas successful.
- Power tends to protect itself merely to maintain its own status and control. Principle gives up power for the sake of the highest good and to create the best public policy.
- Power demands to be heard; principle earns the right to be heard.
- Power focuses on rights; principle focuses on responsibility.
- One of the most significant contrasts between power and principle is how it treats policy.
- Power tends to view an idea based on the position, loyalty, rank, or seniority of the sponsor. Principle focuses solely on the merits of the idea itself.

Here's three changes that would move us to a more member-driven, principle-based process:

1. Deal with the most important issues first. Congress allocates annual funding for government programs, the "appropriations process," in 12 separate bills, but it is common under both parties to roll all 12 bills into one and call for a vote as the deadline approaches. I advocate for completing this process on-time and in daylight, giving members, acting on behalf of their constituents, an opportunity to set priorities for government.

2. Renew, reform or consolidate expired or expiring programs. After programs sunset, a myriad continue to receive annual funding almost on an automatic basis. In order to better serve the American people and bring transparency to the annual funding process, committees should be tasked with creating a three-year schedule to review, update and reauthorize these programs.

3. Allow members to legislate. Stick to a deliberative, but reasonable process of hearing bills that actually follows the House Rules. Each congressional district contains the same number of Americans.
Each representative ought to be empowered to represent the specific needs of their district. Not every bill or amendment will be successful, though every member will have the opportunity to gain support for their ideas from their colleagues.

This is our moment. Power and principle cannot coexist. Which will it be: Flawed widgets or solid principles?