



**HOUSE
BUDGET
REPUBLICANS**

Member Day Hearing

Testimony to the Select Committee on the Modernization of Congress

March 12, 2019

Representative Steve Womack (AR-3)

Chairman Kilmer, Vice Chairman Graves, and Members of the Select Committee, I am pleased to offer some perspectives on the Modernization of Congress, having served as Co-Chairman of the Joint Select Committee on Budget and Appropriations Process Reform (Joint Select Committee) in the 115th Congress. I wish you much success as you begin this endeavor.

I want to briefly reflect upon the work of the Joint Select Committee. The Joint Select Committee was tasked with producing a budget process reform plan in one year, with an equal number of Republicans and Democrats and a supermajority voting threshold. Through patience and deliberation, we ultimately produced a bipartisan, bicameral consensus package of budget process reforms. Although many members of the Joint Select Committee indicated that they had no objection to the underlying reforms, the bill failed to secure the necessary supermajority of votes required under the Joint Select Committee's rules. The Select Committee fostered meaningful bipartisan, bicameral conversations and was successful in elevating the severity of the broken budget process.

As you hear testimony today from Members about how to modernize Congress, it might be useful to consider the importance of budgeting in our proceedings. I would like to point out that the federal budget process is an integral part of the work that we do here in Congress. Everything, regardless of the policy issue or the Committee of jurisdiction, comes back to the federal budget in one way or another, including in our constituent work, floor votes, interactions with the Executive Branch and outside stakeholders. I want to urge all members, especially the members of this Committee, to understand the current federal budget process and challenge all of us to think of ways to make it more efficient and more effective. One question I am often asked is: "Is it the process or the people?" Put another way, if we swap out the personalities in some key leadership roles, will the process improve?

The answer is really both but that should not be an excuse to disregard budget process reform. The current federal budget process was written in the 1970s and updated with very minor revisions on a few occasions. The current process does not match the dynamics of the modern Congress. Does anyone

truly believe that under either party's control of Congress, in our lifetimes, that we expect twelve individual appropriations bills and twelve separate conference reports to pass both the House and Senate? If not, what ideas do we have that would streamline this process, while also preserving the important prerogatives of the appropriations process?

Part of the challenge in ensuring an efficient and effective federal budget process is the people who are involved. Currently, some of the root causes of the broken federal budget process include profound policy disagreements, often over issues that should not be a part of the funding process, and the lack of political will to resolve them. Last year, members of the Joint Select Committee were frustrated with the partisan gridlock that can be inherent in both the budget process and appropriations process. That was why I committed early on to advance *budget process reforms* that did not favor a particular *budget outcome*. I urge the members of this Committee to follow a similar principle – to examine and advance neutral reforms that will not advantage one party or another but would simply ensure this institution functions more effectively.

The most important responsibility that the Constitution grants to Congress is the power of the purse. Under the law, Congress is required to pass a final budget resolution followed by twelve separate appropriations bills that fund the government before the start of the fiscal year, which begins on October 1. The last time Congress followed this process of regular order was for fiscal year 1977. Clearly, this demonstrates the current process is ineffective for a modern Congress.

Finally, I would like to pass along some personal advice from my experience last year. The Members of your committee must dedicate a lot of time to the effort. Since the calendar is not your friend, meet as often as possible. I would meet informally as well. When you think you are bored and tired with each other - meet some more. Meet one on one and meet in small groups. Keep talking and listening to each other. First, identify the problems with which you are frustrated, and then identify the solutions. Defining the problems you are attempting to solve will be helpful, before you jump to drafting

recommendations. The American people expect us to update and modernize this institution so it works better for them. I wish you all the best as you undertake this important work.