



BIPARTISAN POLICY CENTER

The Honorable Rob Woodall  
Chairman  
Subcommittee on Legislative and Budget Process  
Committee on Rules  
U.S. House of Representatives  
H-312 The Capitol  
Washington, DC 20515-6269

June 25, 2014

Dear Chairman Woodall:

On behalf of the Bipartisan Policy Center's Commission on Political Reform, we respectfully submit for inclusion in the hearing record the following statement to the Subcommittee on Legislative & Budget Process of the House Committee on Rules in support of H.R. 1869, the Biennial Budgeting and Enhanced Oversight Act of 2014. We commend you for moving the process forward with a hearing on the topic of biennial budgeting.

In addition, we submit the Commission's report, *Governing in a Polarized America: A Bipartisan Blueprint to Strengthen our Democracy*, to the record. This bipartisan report includes sixty five recommendations to improve the political process and the nation's ability to govern in a polarized atmosphere.

Thank you for this opportunity for the Commission to lend our support to this important legislation and for the Committee's interest in improving the budget process.

Sincerely,

John C. Fortier, PhD  
Co-Director  
Commission on Political Reform

Michele Nellenbach  
Co-Director  
Commission on Political Reform



BIPARTISAN POLICY CENTER

STATEMENT OF THE COMMISSION ON POLITICAL REFORM  
BIPARTISAN POLICY CENTER  
BEFORE THE SUBCOMMITTEE  
ON LEGISLATIVE & BUDGET PROCESS  
HOUSE COMMITTEE ON RULES  
HEARING ON H.R. 1869, THE BIENNIAL BUDGETING  
& ENHANCED OVERSIGHT ACT OF 2014

June 25, 2014

Mr. Chairman and Members of the Subcommittee:

Thank you for this opportunity to offer our views on H.R. 1869, the Biennial Budgeting and Enhanced Oversight Act of 2014. We want to commend the House Committee on the Budget for reporting this important legislation and this committee on continuing the process by holding this hearing. We are pleased to lend our wholehearted support for this legislation.

The Commission on Political Reform of the Bipartisan Policy Center, comprised of 29 commissioners from all walks of life, has been holding a series of National Conversations on American Unity across the nation over the past 18 months to investigate the causes and consequences of America's partisan political divide with the aim of recommending specific reforms to improve the political process through a truly bipartisan reform agenda.

Our work culminated yesterday (June 24) with the release of our final report, "Governing in a Polarized America: A Bipartisan Blueprint to Strengthen our Democracy." It includes more than 60 recommendations that will enable our political system to work in a more effective manner. We have looked specifically at how we might improve our electoral processes, the processes by which the Congress legislates and manages its own affairs, and the ability of Americans to better engage with the country's civic life through public service.

Our 19 recommendations on Congress do not focus so much on the need for changes in specific rules and procedures of the House and Senate as they do on the need for a shift in the current culture of Congress that tends to place more emphasis on campaigning for reelection than on governing the nation.

We recognize that the reelection imperative is one of the essential goals of Members, but that they are also interested in influencing public policy and building respect and influence within the institution. The perception of our commissioners and other outside observers is that Congress is overly consumed with the reelection goal at the expense of effective

policymaking and that perception only diminishes the respect and influence the legislative branch enjoys among the electorate, as poll after poll attests.

Much is said both inside and outside the Congress about the need for a return to the regular order --of restoring the deliberative processes that once governed committees in assessing the nature of problems confronting the country and then developing rational and thoughtful solutions based on a consensus-building approach.

One of the most important of our 19 recommendations relating to Congress is that it change to a process of biennial budgets and appropriations to allow the necessary time and space to carry out its policymaking and oversight functions through the authorizing committees. Too often authorizers are given short shrift by being squeezed out between adopting budget resolutions and passing appropriations bills. By putting the spending cart before the policy horse, Congress has turned the regular order on its head.

Combined with our other central recommendation of adhering to five-day workweeks, synchronized between the House and Senate, with three weeks in Washington followed by one-week district work periods, we feel biennial budgeting will go a long way in restoring policy committees to their rightful role in the legislative branch as well as in giving the appropriations committees more time to oversee how our money is being spent and to better plan and allocate resources for the future.

Reinvigorated policy and spending committees will give individual Members more opportunities for influencing policy and funding priorities. We think that will strike a more appropriate balance among Members' individual goals as well as between the branches as Congress's powers and capabilities are strengthened vis-à-vis the executive branch.

In summary, we think the stature and image of Congress can be improved without sacrificing the political differences between the parties if Members are given a clearer stake in making a difference for the country through their legislative efforts in committee and on the floor. Biennial budgeting is one important way to provide the time and creative space for that to happen. We therefore strongly urge this committee to report this legislation and help make it one of the stellar achievements of the 113th Congress.

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Please direct questions to Commission on Political Reform Co-Directors:

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