

Committee on Government Reform

Background/History

The Committee on Government Reform has existed in varying forms since 1816. It first appeared as the Committee on Expenditures in the Executive Departments, which was created in 1927 by consolidating the 11 Committees on Expenditures previously spread among the various departments of the government to oversee how taxpayer monies were spent.

The Committee's immediate predecessor, the Committee on Government Operations, was established in 1952. The name change was intended to communicate to the outside world the primary function of the committee: to study "the operations of Government activities at all levels with a view to determining their economy and efficiency." It is the Committee's government-wide oversight jurisdiction that sets it apart from other House committees.

On January 4, 1995, Republicans assumed control of the House of Representatives for the first time in over 40 years. Republicans immediately implemented several internal reforms of the House, including one that applies all of the laws the rest of America lives under to Congress, and another that downsizes the congressional committee system.

Perhaps more than any other committee, the Government Reform Committee embodied the changes that occurred. The Committee's name was changed to highlight the Republican view that the federal government needs to be reformed to ensure accountability.

The Committee on Government Reform is unlike most other committees in that its jurisdiction has grown. While retaining the agenda of the former Committee on Government Operations, the Committee also has the responsibilities of the former Committee on Post Office and Civil Service and the Committee on the District of Columbia. The Committee now has seven subcommittees responsible for the same jurisdiction previously covered by 3 full committees and 14 subcommittees. This consolidation has resulted in hundreds of millions of dollars in budget savings and a nearly 50 percent cut in staff.

The Committee's government-wide oversight jurisdiction and expanded legislative authority make it one of the most influential and powerful committees in the House. The Committee serves as Congress' chief investigative and oversight committee, and is granted broad jurisdiction because of the importance of effective, centralized oversight. Because it authorizes on a few agencies and programs, it is able to review government agencies and programs with an unbiased eye.

Thirty-eight percent of the “Contract With America” moved through the Committee in the 104th Congress under Chairman Bill Clinger. The Committee and its subcommittees conducted 252 hearings during the 105th Congress.

Three pieces of the “Contract With America” legislation that originated in this Committee became law during the 104th Congress: a bill to stop Congress from passing unfunded mandates; line-item veto legislation granting the President authority to strike individual items from tax and spending bills; and a bill reducing the paperwork burden the federal government imposes on governments, individuals, and private businesses.

In addition, the Committee crafted historic legislation authored by then-District of Columbia Subcommittee chairman Tom Davis (the full Committee’s current chairman) to bring the District of Columbia out of its financial crisis.

Also in the 104th Congress, the Committee investigated the improper firings of White House Travel Office employees, and the White House’s controversial handling of FBI files. During the 105th Congress under Chairman Dan Burton, the Committee was charged with investigating millions of dollars in illegal foreign contributions that flowed into Presidential campaigns.

Committee alumni include distinguished, well-known national leaders: Abraham Lincoln, Bob Dole, Denny Hastert, Dick Armev, Donald Rumsfeld, Dan Quayle, Jim Wright and John McCormack, to name a few.

Currently, the Committee is chaired by Congressman Tom Davis. Congressman Henry Waxman serves as the Committee’s Ranking Member.

Chairman Davis has served as a member of the Committee since his freshman term in the 104th Congress, when he began his six-year tenure as Chairman of the Subcommittee on the District of Columbia.

As Chairman of the D.C. Subcommittee, Davis’ first action was to craft a legislative solution to the District’s fiscal woes, the “District of Columbia Financial Responsibility and Management Assistance Act of 1995” (P.L. 104-8). This law created a “Control Board” to eliminate the District’s severe budget deficits and cash shortages, assist the District in restructuring and reforming the delivery of critically dysfunctional city services, and ensure the future economic viability of the District. P.L. 104-8, required the District to produce four consecutive balanced budgets and eliminate the city’s debt before the Control Board’s powers would be returned to elected city officials.

Once the Control Board was established and began to instill much-needed fiscal discipline into the city’s budget process, the Subcommittee pursued the next phase of reforms, the “National Capital Revitalization and Self-Government Improvement Act of 1997” (included in P.L. 105-33). D.C. government agencies were required to develop and implement management reform plans in the areas of asset management, information resources management, personnel, and procurement. This law helped to restructure and

improve the complex relationship between the Federal government and the District of Columbia and included incentives for economic development and private sector job creation.

Seven year later, thanks to vigorous and continuous oversight by the D.C. Subcommittee, the Nation's Capital is in much better financial shape. The District has stronger internal controls and budgeting processes, better monitors for expenditures, and acts in a more fiscally responsible fashion. The District paid off its accumulated debt and submitted four consecutive balanced budgets for Congressional approval. Therefore, the Control Board was dissolved, and the mayor and city council now retain the authority they ceded in 1995. Today, the city's population is stabilizing, the real estate market is up, suburban residents are making more leisure trips into the city, and jobs have increased dramatically.

Under Davis' leadership, the Subcommittee held oversight hearings to examine the status of three of the city's agencies that were in federal court-ordered receivership as the result of on-going lawsuits. This included several hearings examining the troubled D.C. Child and Family Services Agency and the challenges it has faced in ensuring the safety and well-being of children in its care. With the help of Majority Leader Tom DeLay, the Subcommittee helped shine a needed light on an agency that was literally placing the lives of the District's most vulnerable residents at risk.

Other major legislation Davis authored included the bipartisan "D.C. College Access Act of 1999" (P.L. 106-98) to allow recent high school graduates in D.C. to pay in-state tuition at public colleges in Maryland and Virginia. It gives D.C. graduates more choices, and provides an incentive for more families to remain in the nation's capital.

In January 2000, Davis became the Chairman of the newly created Subcommittee on Technology and Procurement Policy, where he worked to ensure the passage of legislation that addresses many of the critical challenges faced by the federal government. This includes:

- H.R. 3844, the Federal Information Security Management Act of 2002 will permanently authorize a government-wide risk-based approach to information security by eliminating the Government Information Security Reform Act's two-year sunset. It will further strengthen Federal information security by requiring compliance with minimum mandatory management controls for securing information and information systems, clarifying and strengthening current management and reporting requirements, and strengthening the role of NIST. This bill was included in the Homeland Security bills passed by the Committee on Government Reform and the House.
- H.R. 3925, the Digital Tech Corps Act of 2002, creates training opportunities in information technology management through the Digital Tech Corps, an exchange of eligible mid-level staff between leading-edge private sector organizations and governmental agencies. The Digital Tech Corps program will invigorate the current

IT workforce and help position the Federal government as a desirable employer in the IT arena.

- H.R. 3947, the Federal Asset Management Reform Act, which is part of the President Bush's management agenda, provides Federal departments and agencies with new authorities and incentives to manage their real and personal property assets, including the use of public-private partnerships, subleases, property exchanges or transfers property with other Federal agencies and agreements with non-Federal entities to exchange or sell property as a means of acquiring replacement property better suited for mission purposes.
- H.R. 2458, the bipartisan "Electronic Government Act of 2002," provides a new framework for managing the Federal government's information resources and increasing the availability of information to citizens through electronic government initiatives.

Additionally, Davis maintained an active hearing schedule examining issues integral to federal government operations, such as improvements in the services acquisition process, outsourcing issues including OMB Circular A-76, the General Services Administration's Federal Technology Schedule and Federal Supply Schedule, federal property management, and telecommuting programs for federal employees. Davis was successful in bringing together unions and government agencies to focus on federal employees' issues, and in particular to seek solutions to the federal government's human capital management crisis. This is the sort of active oversight that reflects the Republican agenda of crafting a more efficient and effective federal government.