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Good Afternoon Chair Kilmer and Ranking Member Timmons,

It is an honor to come before you today to discuss ways to innovate and improve how Congress functions. I fear that our constituents are losing optimism that their democracy can really work for them. To that end, doing everything in our power to make Congress function more efficiently and be more responsive to those we represent is essential.

As a former history teacher, studying how the arc of democracy is directly intertwined with the well-being of the populous is sobering, but makes our grand national experiment all the more worth fighting for. I've spent my career, spanning four decades in public service, introducing and championing for legislation that expands peoples access to the voting booths, heightens their knowledge of our governmental systems and responds to the concerns of the most vulnerable.

In 2008, I introduced a bill, House Joint Resolution 99, that would increase House of Representatives terms from two years to four, and stagger them so every election year, half of the House would be up for reelection. At first glance this might seem like self-serving job security, but the goal is to change the current culture where campaigning almost a full-time activity.

While I don't expect sympathy, the toll that running for election immediately upon election takes on a lawmaker is not just exhaustion and time. Focus, ability to understand the job and be responsive, to grow a deep knowledge not just of the issues that matter to me, my constituents and my staff but on how the complex inner workings of Congress can be used to serve the people who put their trust and faith in us. These are all things that take time, time that we simply don't have.

Both Democrats and Republicans alike are told by their caucuses to being dialing for dollars even before their freshman orientation is complete. The "permanent campaign" is the reality of

daily life. We have little to no time to demonstrate the long-term merits of decisions that defy the passions of the moment. Every deviation from the sentiments of our constituents—including often necessary cooperation across party lines—can be fodder for our would-be opponents. Our current system intensifies polarization and magnifies the instability we have recently come to know so well.

At least two modern day Presidents felt this way as well. In his memoirs, former President Dwight Eisenhower said that "By the end of four years [in office] I had become convinced that the term of members of the House of Representatives is too short."

In his 1966 State of the Union address, President Lyndon Johnson went further, calling for a constitutional amendment providing a four-year House term that would give newly elected members a chance to learn their craft and allow more time for governing rather than campaigning.

History teaches us that settling on a two-year term for the People's House was a compromise between factions that called for one- or three-year terms and to help justify the longer terms of Senators, after the Federalists were attacked for "creating an 'aristocratic' chamber in Congress to represent state interests." On this process, President Johnson quipped, "Thus there was little magic in the number two, even in the year of its adoption. I am convinced there is even less magic today, and that the question of tenure should be reexamined in the light of our needs in the twentieth century." And the same holds true today in the twenty-first century, fifty-six years and a lot of Congressional gridlock later.

Hamilton and Madison vigorously fought for a term longer than one year, advocating that a two-year term was a good balance, long enough to allow first-term House members to attain knowledge and experience in office, while also short enough to allow them to be accountable to their constituents through frequent-enough elections. In Federalist #53 they declare that liberty is not confined to a "single point of time" rejecting the idea that elections must take place annually in order to minimize the risk of tyranny. At the time, travel to and from the Capitol was a major concern, leaving little to no time to legislate in one year. Although travel that would take weeks or even months by horse has now been reduced to less than a day by air travel, the trappings of our modern world still impact House members. Congress works in fits and starts, traversing home on weekends and every few weeks for district work periods. But in an age of mass

communications, social media and twenty-four-hour news, frequent elections are no longer necessary to determine the public will. The legislators of Jefferson's day could campaign at leisure between brief sessions; today Members of the House must steal time from loaded schedules in the DC to campaign strenuously in our districts.

Then there is efficiency. Technology and the speed with which we can potentially legislate has not led to a Congress known for its alacrity and responsiveness. Instead, we are bogged down. In the first Congress, 142 bills were introduced, resulting in 108 public laws. In the 88th (Johnson's time) Congress, 14,022 bills were introduced in the House, of which 1,267 were enacted into public law. In the 116<sup>th</sup> 11,488 introduced in the House, 344 enacted into public law- 81 of which were non-legislative, honorary dedications.


Said President Johnson, "For this public servant--part judge and author of laws, part leader of his people, part mediator between the executive branch and those he represents--is scarcely permitted to take his seat in the historic Hall of the House, when he must begin once more to make his case to his constituency.

The Congressman's effectiveness as a legislator is reduced by this. His district's right to be fully represented in Congress is diminished by this. The nation's need to be led by its best qualified men, giving their full attention to issues on which our security and progress depend, is ignored by this."

At the end of the day, House members are running for office every day leaving less time to actually benefit the constituents we swore an oath to serve. A Constitutional Amendment to extend house terms to four years and stagger their elections could create a body of competent legislators who can attain experience, promote the will of their constituents, and set aside time to campaign every few years.

Thank you for your time today and I look forward to your questions.

Sincerely,



John B. Larson  
Member of Congress