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WHAT’S THE BIG IDEA? INNOVATIVE
APPROACHES TO FIXING CONGRESS
Thursday, July 28, 2022
House of Representatives,
Select Committee on the Modernization of Congress,
Washington, D.C.

The committee met, pursuant to call, at 9:01 a.m., in Room 2118, Rayburn House Office Building, Hon. Derek Kilmer [chairman of the committee] presiding.

Present: Representatives Kilmer, Williams, Timmons, and Latta.

The Chairman. Okay. The committee will come to order.

Without objection, the chair is authorized to declare a recess of the committee at any time. And I now recognize myself for 5 minutes for an opening statement.

No pressure on any of our witnesses today, but I have been looking forward to this hearing for about 3 years. When this committee was first formed in 2019, we were given one year to do our work, and I wanted to make sure that we found a way to showcase some out‑of‑the‑box approaches to fixing Congress, and the plan was to do a big ideas hearing at the end of the year. But as the end of the year approached, the committee received an extension through 2020, so we decided to push the big ideas hearing back. Then a few months into 2020, COVID came along and upended everything. Big ideas was put on hold while the committee focused its attention on pressing issues like continuity of congressional operations and remote work procedures. Fortunately, the committee was once again extended, this time through the end of the 117th Congress. So here we are at long last.

I share that background because I want to make clear that this hearing has been part of the committee's plan since day one. So let me explain.

A big part of making Congress work better for the American people involves focusing on tangible solutions. We have so far held 37 public hearings and passed 171 recommendations aimed at doing just that. The committee's structure requires bipartisan agreement, and we have worked hard to find common ground on some tough issues.

But in addition to focusing on what seems doable, we need to think big. We should be open to creative problem‑solving and considering ideas that fall outside of our comfort zones.

I say this because Congress is not a static institution. The legislative branch is supposed to reflect the diverse use of this country, and as our society and politics evolve, so should our willingness to address the problems that made Congress less effective than it should be. New problems demand new solutions.

Our Founding Fathers designed an amazing system of government that has lasted well over 200 years, but if it were perfect, there would be no need for the 27 constitutional amendments that have been ratified since 1791. None of those amendments would have passed if citizens and policymakers weren't willing to think big and take risks.

So the good news is not all big ideas require constitutional amendments. There are plenty of innovative solutions to the big and small challenges Congress faces. And today we are joined by a panel of big thinkers who are going to share with us their ideas for making Congress work better for the American people.

The committee will use its rules that allow for a more flexible hearing format that encourages discussion and the civil exchange of ideas and opinions. So in accordance with clause 2(j) of House rule XI, we will allow up to 30 minutes of extended questioning per witness and, without objection, time will not be strictly segregated between the witnesses, which will allow for extended back‑and‑forth exchanges between members and the witnesses.

Vice Chair Timmons and I will manage the time to ensure that every member has equal opportunity to participate and, additionally, members who wish to claim their individual 5 minutes to question each witness pursuant to clause 2(j)(2) of rule XI will be permitted to do so following the period of extended questioning.

All right. With that, I would like to invite Vice Chair Timmons to share some opening marks as well.

[The statement of Chairman Kilmer follows:]

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Mr. Timmons. Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

I am really looking forward to today's discussion on out‑of‑the‑box approaches to improving how Congress works for the American people. As you mentioned, this has been on the agenda for quite awhile, so I am really glad we are finally getting to it. We have got 6 months left, and we are hoping to get some more done.

And allow me to, again, quote the chairman who often likes to say, There are no bad ideas in the ideas room. It is entirely in the spirit that we invite our witnesses here today. A lot of the work on this committee has rightly been focused on improving the nuts‑and‑bolts operations of Congress. As we have seen, there is a lot of work to be done there. However, I appreciate that we can also spend time today exploring bigger, bolder ideas for reforming Congress for the benefit of the American people.

Before I move on, I want to thank the witnesses for joining us. I know this committee has heard from several of you before on other issues, and we appreciate the work and thought all of you continue to put into improving the institution.

Today we are going to hear about five very different ideas for fixing Congress. Some of them, such as extending the size of the House or extending House terms, asked us to grapple with some of the same arguments the Founders did. And I will say here, as a conservative, I believe the Founders knew exactly what they were doing. Our system of self‑government, of constitutional checks and balances, and federalism is the best the world has ever seen. And I think we must tread very carefully when examining any ideas that might require amending the Constitution.

At the same time, our committee has always been well served by our willingness to explore every idea presented to us for strengthening Congress, which the Founders saw as the first among coequal branches, so that we can improve the way we serve the American people. If we are going to assess what is best for the future of our public, we should first do a better job understanding where the system we have today came from. I am hopeful our witnesses will be able to provide helpful historical context on the Founders' vision to inform our discussions.

I also note that another topic we will be discussing today, AI and machine learning, in the legislative process is a big idea that is something we should prepare for. As they say, the future is now, and we should do everything we can to prepare and ensure Congress is at the forefront of technology and civic spaces. I would particularly like to talk about the calendar and the schedule and how machine learning and AI can solve the problems we have been grappling with for the last couple of years.

Really appreciate you all being here. Look forward to the conversation.

With that, Mr. Chairman, I yield back.

[The statement of Mr. Timmons follows:]

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The Chairman. Thank you.

Well, I now would like to welcome our five expert witnesses, including one of our colleagues. Because we have a bigger panel than usual, I will ask witnesses to keep their oral remarks to about 3 minutes, and then we will have plenty of time to discuss all of the testimony once we move to a period of extended questions.

Witnesses are reminded your written statements will be made part of the record.

Let's kick things off with Lee Drutman. Dr. Drutman is a senior fellow at New America studying political reform. He is also a lecturer at the Johns Hopkins University and regular contributor to 538. Prior to New America, he was a senior fellow at the Sunlight Foundation. He's the author of "Breaking the Two‑Party Doom Loop: The Case for Multiparty Democracy in America." He earned his bachelor's in political science from Brown and his Ph.D. in political science from the University of Cal, Berkeley.

Dr. Drutman, you are now recognized for 3 minutes.
**STATEMENTS OF DR. LEE DRUTMAN, SENIOR FELLOW, NEW AMERICA, WASHINGTON, DC; DR. DANIELLE ALLEN, JAMES BRYANT CONANT UNIVERSITY PROFESSOR, HARVARD UNIVERSITY, CAMBRIDGE, MA; MR. JOE MARIANI, RESEARCH MANAGER, DELOITTE CENTER FOR GOVERNMENT INSIGHTS, CHICAGO, IL; DR. KEVIN KOSAR, SENIOR FELLOW, AMERICAN ENTERPRISE INSTITUTE, WASHINGTON, DC; AND THE HONORABLE JOHN B. LARSON, MEMBER OF CONGRESS, WASHINGTON, D.C.**

**STATEMENT OF LEE DRUTMAN**

Mr. Drutman. Well, thank you.

What a great honor to be here. Chairman Kilmer, Vice Chair Timmons, and members of the Select Committee on the Modernization of Congress, I really appreciate this opportunity to participate in the big ideas hearing.

So one big idea is increasing the size of the House of Representatives and making it bigger. Well, maybe it is not that big of an idea actually, since it is something that we did in this country for the first 120 years. So let's get into that history.

In 1790, when the U.S. House of Representatives first met, there were only 65 members, each with approximately 30,000 constituents. Of course, the U.S. had only 13 States, and the country was much smaller populationwise. But because this was to be the people's House, framers envisioned Representatives with close connections to their constituents and districts small enough to make that representation meaningful.

Now, obviously, the country has grown considerably since then, and as the country grew for the first 120 years, after each Census, Congress added more seats to reflect the growing population. But after the last expansion in 1911, the House settled on 435, no good reason there, other than they couldn't agree how to add more seats during what was a somewhat divisive and polarized time.

Now, as you obviously know, since 1911, the population of the country has more than tripled, and with women's suffrage and the enfranchisement of African Americans, the eligible voting population has increased more than sixfold. But that number 435 hasn't budged. The average number of constituents per district today is 760,000, so it is hard to feel heard when you are one in three‑fourths of a million.

Now, we know that the larger the district, the more distant constituents feel from their Representatives, and vice versus. Distance breeds distrust and frustration and inadequate representation. It is not the way the framers intended the House to operate, and it is just bad for our form of representative, republican democracy.

The American Academy of Arts and Science report that I coauthored ‑‑ nicely printed here, of course ‑‑ is part of the Our Common Purpose Project, which I am submitting for the record, recommends increasing the House by 150 members to a total of 585. This would correspond to the number of seats that have shifted between the States even as their population has grown since that 435 cap was stuck upon. And this doesn't have to happen right now. Probably the ideal timing would be after the 2030 Census, and then once instituted, the number would continue to expand as the population grows.

So in addition to bringing constituents and Representatives closer to each other, an expansion, I think, would have some other benefits. One is it would bring new faces and new ideas to Washington. Incumbency reelection rates are extremely high. I guess your constituents love you all, and I can't blame them. But, you know, over time, that can make Washington start to feel a little too Washington and keeping some fresh perspectives out. So the people's House should be close to the people.

All this could shake things up a bit for sure, but given how stuck and dysfunctional things seem to be right now, a little shakeup might be good. It could bring some new energy, some new creativity to Congress, and even help short‑circuit some of the destructive hyperpartisan polarizations really undermining our system of government.

And on that front, I do think pairing an increased House with another of the Academy's recommendations, proportional multimember districts would go a long way, because with proportional multimember districts, you would have much more diversity of perspectives in Congress and it would really expand beyond the highly polarized binaries of solid Republican and solid Democratic districts, and that would create, I think, even more possibilities for new creative problem‑solving and I think also a more committee‑oriented Congress.

You know, more broadly, as a scholar of political science and history, I see that this decade ahead is actually likely to be a real moment of transformative change in our democracy, because, I mean, I think it is clear that the status quo is broken. And, you know, there are those who want to burn it all to the ground, but, you know, I at least, and I think you all, want to restore and renew the promise of liberal, republican democracy in America. And, you know, I am 100 percent convinced that we are going to need some big, bold ideas to make that work and to innovate and modernize towards a brighter future for this country.

So I look forward to working with you all to achieve some of these innovations.

[The statement of Mr. Drutman follows:]

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The Chairman. Thank you, Dr. Drutman.

Our next witness is Danielle Allen. Dr. Allen is a professor and director of the Center for Ethics at Harvard University. She is a political theorist who studies democratic theory, political sociology, and the history of political thought. She is widely known for her work on justice and citizenship in ancient Athens and modern America and is a member of the American Academy of Arts and Sciences. She is the author of, among other things, "From Voice to Influence: Understanding Citizenship in the Digital Age." Dr. Allen earned her first Ph.D. in classics from the University of Cambridge and her second Ph.D. in government from Harvard University.

Doctor, doctor, you are now recognized for 3 minutes.
**STATEMENT OF DANIELLE ALLEN**

Ms. Allen. Also known as square. That is what you get for that, doctor, doctor.

Good morning, Chair Kilmer. Thank you for the invitation. Vice Chair Timmons, Representative Latta, it is an honor to be with all of you, and thank you so much for your commitment to self‑government.

You have heard my background. I have also had the honor of being a co‑chair for the American Academy of Arts and Sciences Commission on the practice of democratic citizenship, but I want to share a little bit more about myself for context, where my views come from.

I grew up in southern California in a family that prized civic engagement. On my mom's side, my great‑grandparents helped fight for women's right to vote, and my great‑grandmother was president of the League of Women Voters in Michigan in the thirties. And on my dad's side, my granddad helped found one of the first NAACP chapters in northern Florida.

So as a matter of both family inheritance and personal conviction, I bring a deep belief to this hearing in the value to all people of the chance to participate in self‑government as free and equal citizens.

I speak, therefore, from personal conviction but also speak today on behalf of the Academy's commission. The American Academy of Arts and Sciences was founded in 1780, before the Constitution and by the same people who led the Revolution. It was founded to secure for the new Nation the knowledge, resources needed for the daring experiment in self‑government.

In 2018, the Academy convened a bipartisan commission to address the widespread sense that our constitutional democracy is in crisis. In 2020, we issued our report, Our Common Purpose. You have heard about it, a fair bit of it. And the report makes the case that improvement of civic culture and of political institutions must go hand‑in‑hand if we are going to secure the health of our constitutional democracy.

So my core message is that tweaking how Congress operates is not enough to restore the strength of the first branch of government. A healthy Congress can grow only out of the soil of a healthy civic culture. So investment in our civic well‑being through civic infrastructure is investment in the health of Congress.

Civic infrastructure consists of the local places, programs, and people that encourage all residents of municipalities and regions to interact, find common ground, and solve problems together. We currently underinvest in this infrastructure, and underinvestment shows up in isolation, disengagement, mistrust, and contention, instead of participation and collaboration.

Against this backdrop, residents in local communities, just like my great‑grandparents and grandparents, are seeking to turn the tide. In Inman, South Carolina, local government, business people, and community residents have collaborated on a revitalized downtown with a new public library and physical infrastructure to better support connections among residents and visitors.

In Lexington, Kentucky, the nonprofit CivicLex builds civic health through accessible coverage of local government meetings and programs for residents and relationship‑building activities and resident engagement in local government.

The Citizens Campaign from New Jersey educates local residents in techniques of no‑blame problem‑solving, and participants form civic trusts, as they call them, nonpartisan, community‑based civic associations that search for successful policies that work in other communities that might be adopted in their own. Local communities need a vote of confidence from national investment.

In our report, we recommended the creation of a trust for civic infrastructure, a new national organization for grant making, knowledge sharing, public education, and research and evaluation to strengthen civic capacity and connectivity in local communities. A pilot trust is currently forming with private support, but the scope and scale of needed investments means civic infrastructure should also be a priority for the national budget.

Future members of your body need a chance to learn the practices of democratic citizenship in rich schools of democracy at the local level. When local communities know how to bridge divides and engage residents in productive collaborations, we will be on our way to securing a healthy political culture nationally. This will improve your working conditions.

Only with innovation can we pass on to future generations our valuable inheritance of constitutional democracy in better shape than we currently find it.

So, again, we thank you for your willingness to renovate our constitutional democracy.

[The statement of Ms. Allen follows:]

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The Chairman. Thank you, Dr. Allen.

Our next witness is Joe Mariani. Did I get that right?

All right. Mr. Mariani is the technology and innovation leader at the Center for Government Insights at Deloitte Services LP. His research focuses on the intersection of culture and innovation in both commercial businesses and government organizations. Previously, he worked as a science teacher at St. Anselm's Abbey School, and served as an intelligence officer with the U.S. Marine Corps. Mr. Mariani earned his bachelor of arts in philosophy from the University of Chicago and his master's of arts from Dartmouth College.

Mr. Mariani, you are now recognized for 3 minutes.
**STATEMENT OF JOE MARIANI**

Mr. Mariani. Thank you, Chair Kilmer, Vice Chair Timmons, members of the committee. Thank you for the opportunity to testify today.

As you heard, I am Joe Mariani, and I lead research into emerging technologies for Deloitte Center for Government Insights. And I have come to that role with a broad range of experience, from Marine Corps intelligence officer to high school science teacher, from consultant to the government to commercial technology researcher. So today's task of kind of mining the breadth of industry and academia for the big ideas that can help transform government is exactly what gets me out of bed in the morning.

So for the past 5 years, we have been looking at the potential impact artificial intelligence, or AI, could have on government, and from that research we have identified two ways that we think could help transform the legislative process.

The first is AI as microscope; that is, using AI to assess the impact of existing legislation. So machine learning or ML models can accurately find patterns in data without having to specify ahead of time what those patterns should be. So just as a microscope can look at a leaf, for example, and find structures and patterns invisible to the human eye, these machine learning models can look at programs and find patterns in their outcomes that may be invisible to humans just because of the size, scope, or even age of the data. So, for example, machine learning models have found that patterns in government R&D investment during World War II have impacted the location of innovation hubs even to today. And you can use these machine learning models on more recent policy problems as well.

In Allegheny County, Pennsylvania, researchers have used machine learning models to help understand which interventions are most effective at reducing infant mortality. And it is that ability of machine learning models to predict policy outcomes that kind of begs the next question, which is, you know, what if we did something differently? What would change?

And answering that question is exactly our second use of AI, AI as simulator. So creating an AI simulator for problems can help policymakers test different approaches in much the same way that a flight simulator allows pilots to test different ways of flying an entirely new airplane.

So researchers in Ireland have recently taken advantage of this to simulate parts of their economy, so they use data from patents, knowledge flows, other economic trends to simulate how individual companies and investors might react to different policies. So, for example, the researchers could examine if different tax incentives or funding methods would support the creation of new high‑tech small businesses in certain specific parts of the country.

And using AI in this way to simulate the complex systems that Congress deals with every day can actually improve the quality of debate and do so in three key ways. First, it can articulate the often unspoken assumptions and values that we all bring to these issues; second, it can uncover the drivers of particular problems; and, third, it can help us understand which interventions will be the most effective and at what cost.

Ultimately, these simulations can help members agree on what they disagree on. In fact, there is even evidence that just experimenting with these models alone can help drive consensus on emotionally charged issues.

Now, using AI in the legislative processes is certainly going to uncover some unique challenges. New skills, new security requirements, new business processes will likely be required. But examples already at work in other industries show that with the right human machine teaming, AI can help provide common foundation for debate, encourage consensus, and produce meaningful results for the American people.

Thank you. I look forward to your questions.

[The statement of Mr. Mariani follows:]

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The Chairman. Thanks, Mr. Mariani.

Next up we have got Kevin Kosar. Dr. Kosar is a senior fellow at American Enterprise Institute, where he studies the U.S. Congress, the administrative state, and election reform. Prior to AEI, he was the vice president of research partnerships at the R Street Institute and was the cofounder of the Legislative Branch Capacity Working Group. He also served for more than a decade as an analyst with the Congressional Research Service. He is the coauthor of the book "Congress Overwhelmed: The Decline of Congressional Capacity and Prospects for Reform." Dr. Kosar earned his bachelor of arts in political science from Ohio State University and his master of arts and Ph.D. in politics from New York University.

Dr. Kosar, welcome back. You are now recognized for 3 minutes.
**STATEMENT OF KEVIN KOSAR**

Mr. Kosar. All right. Thank you much, Chairman Kilmer, Vice Chairman Timmons, and members of the select committee, for having me here.

And I also appreciated the setup you gave my topic in your introduction. You referenced rule XI clause 2(j)(2). Kind of gets to my point. And I think it is also interesting that this room is located right next to the Energy Committee's room, and above that is a portrait of the late John Dingell, who had many famous quips. One of them was that, you know, you can write the bill, but if I write the rules, I will win. But being John Dingell, of course, the language was much more salty.

The importance of rules for the legislative process and the fact that rules on the waiving of the rules ultimately can be very determinative outputs is, you know, little appreciated I think outside of Capitol Hill. It is only when you get here and you start seeing how the wheels turn that you realize how impactful they are.

So, yes, I am here to ‑‑ I was called here to talk about excessive complexity of House rules for moving legislation. You know, your staff had flagged a committee I had written for The Hill wherein I decried excessive complexity, particularly citing the process by which the debt limit was raised by something like $400 billion or more, which was baffling to even long‑term Congress watchers who follow this stuff. So if it is baffling to us, I mean, my goodness, how can anybody else in this country understand what occurred.

Now, I want to say, of course, you know, there is nothing inherently wrong with complex rules. I mean, you are dealing with humans who are interacting in, you know, a legislative chamber. There are a lot of things that can go wrong, and so, of course, you want to create rules and try to have them work towards a productive end. But I think what we have seen is, over time, that the number of rules have built up, and this is not a phenomenon unique to Congress. All organizations often face this blight.

I mean, we often decry red tape in government agencies. What is red tape? Well, it is a surfeit of rules. It is rules being layered on and aggregating year after year after year and ultimately creating an incoherent jumble which is exceedingly difficult to navigate and often can make it difficult for the organization to do what is expected of it.

You know, ultimately, the rules governing any human actions within an institution need to serve the ultimate objectives of the institution. They should embody the shared values of the institution, and they should be readily understandable by participants in the enterprise. And I think ‑‑ you know, I am not a rules' nerd. There are those over at the Congressional Research Service where I used to work who are totally nerd out on the specifics of nerds. But just as somebody who has been watching Congress for 20 years in this town, it feels to me that there are clear signs that the rules have grown overly complex.

You know, the committee here has previously conducted a deep dive on the budget process, which is just ‑‑ you know, that is one slice of legislative process which is rife with arcana ‑‑ paygo, 302(b) allocations ‑‑ and it goes on and on and on. You know, there are whole fields of expertise nerds who devote their lives to studying budget process and just budget process because it is that complex. And then you consider that is just part of the whole. I mean, my goodness, how is a legislator supposed to operate in this environment?

The rules ‑‑ setting aside the budget rules, the rules governing legislative process are prolix, to put it mildly. You know, they begin on page 345 of the House Rules and Manual, and they conclude some 700 pages later. The manual holds rules, you know, 130 devoted to committee procedures, like you cited; 56 pages address motions and amendments; 86 pages relate to the aforementioned budget process, and so forth.

You know, as a point of contrast, the great State of Ohio, its legislative rule book has only 200 pages, and not all 200 are devoted to rules of moving legislation. They are devoted to other stuff, you know, member conduct and such things.

Do we really need that many rules here compared to the State of Ohio or perhaps other States? I think it is a fair question to ask.

And I think, you know, when you talk about rules piling up, they ultimately are going to come with a cost. Not least, as alluded to, the more rules an organization has, the fewer people who can stand up. And, of course, that is going to create power imbalances. You know, I have referenced the iron law of oligarchy. There is always somebody at the top of the organization who knows more things than other people and, therefore, is able to get their way. Well, that is kind of inherently problematic if taken to extremes for a representative legislature where you are all supposed to be equal and you all have constituencies and States to take care of.

You know, when ‑‑ I conducted a study with Timothy LaPira, a professor, and Lee Drutman, and we surveyed congressional staff some years ago. We saw some clear evidence that even staff, whose job it is to help you guys do your work, were struggling to understand the rules. And we weren't asking arcana. We were asking some pretty straightforward stuff, and the percentage of folks who understood it wasn't especially high.

Another cost of the complexity of rules is that, you know, regular order starts to erode. No longer can you, you know, do the schoolhouse rock thing where you say, okay, I will introduce a bill. It is going to get referred to committee or multiple committees. There will be a committee process. A bill will emerge from it. It is going to calendar, go to the floor, et cetera. No, not so much. It doesn't work like that. It is exceedingly complex.

And as you all know and have experienced frequently, you know, if something does get out of committee, all the rules get waived. Suddenly it goes into Rules Committee land where special rules are written, and the thing is handled in ways that are often surprising and confusing, and it is bundled up with other stuff.

So, you know, I suggest that, you know, it sounds pretty rich, but select ‑‑ one thing I suggested is the select committee considers establishing a select committee to study the rules in a bipartisan way and think about ways of simplifying them and making them better in value, embody the values that you all want for the institution, one of which I think is legislator participation in a meaningful way.

It won't be easy. Rules tend to change slowly here, and the process for changing them inevitably is a majority vote by the majority party at the start of each Congress, and so that naturally drifts the rules towards being increasingly partisan and arcane. But if nothing is done, then the institution is going to continue to get bogged down in the equivalent of red tape.

With that, thank you.

[The statement of Mr. Kosar follows:]

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The Chairman. Thanks, Dr. Kosar.

And our final witness, last but not least, is our colleague, Representative John Larson. Mr. Larson has represented Connecticut's First District since 1999. He serves on the House Committee on Ways and Means, was the chair of the Subcommittee on Social Security. Mr. Larson is also the former vice chair and chair of the House Democratic Caucus.

Mr. Larson, welcome. You are now recognized.
**STATEMENT OF THE HON. JOHN B. LARSON, A REPRESENTATIVE IN CONGRESS FROM THE STATE OF CONNECTICUT**

Mr. Larson. Well, thank you, Mr. Chairman and Mr. Timmons, Mr. Latta. Great to be here.

And I applaud you for the big ideas that are coming forward, and I think they are essential to a democracy. There are many that I would like to explore, and I apologize I got here a little late, because I am very interested in the testimony.

And what Kevin was just alluding to, I think part of the problem, whether it is a Member or staff, is getting acclimated to Congress, especially for the first time, even if you have had State legislative background or interests and you may understand or have a grasp of the legislative process. But it is different here, and it is compounded by the distance that a number of people have to travel.

Not everybody has a short trip like you do, Representative Kilmer, but it is ‑‑ and the stress that that creates both on the individual and, I dare say, families as well. We could spend the day talking about the impact on spouses and families and how little Congress does with regard to that, to the ongoing, I think, atrocity that people have to sleep in their own buildings because of the cost of living here, and they sleep in the House and shower down in the locker room, you know, contrary to what public opinion is about what happens to congressional Members.

So some time ago ‑‑ and I think I was on House Administration at the time ‑‑ I had introduced a bill that said one of the ways that we could correct this was to have 4‑year terms for Members of Congress, not dissimilar to what the Senate does; have 4‑year terms and then stagger those terms so that there still would be an election cycle every 2 years, but only half of the 435 Members would be up for election. Why? So that you would have an opportunity, first and foremost, to learn and acclimate with regard to the practice.

Two former Presidents, President Eisenhower and President Johnson, both felt and were astounded at the enormous amount of pressure that is placed on a Member in the House of Representatives. And as all of you know too well, you no sooner get here, and the first thing you are doing, even before you are sworn in, is down at your respective DCCC or the Republican Committee to Reelect raising money. And everyone that you meet in the first days that you are here will all tell you the same thing: What you have got to do is make sure that you go down and raise money.

So the brief acclimation that people have, and most of it off campus at ‑‑ I remember the trip up to Harvard where we had ‑‑ you know, we spent maybe a day‑and‑a‑half, I just think it requires far more time than that and that people ought to be allotted the time to make sure that they and their families get to adjust to the very rigorous schedule that Congress has.

Most people do not understand that the day isn't done for a Member of Congress after voting is through. For a number of people when they are here, the fundraising continues, and there is always your constituent work back in your district as well. It is a 24/7 job. And to have that election cycle every 2 years only compounds the problem.

Our colleagues in the Senate, as you all know, you know, have 6‑year terms, and they are staggered so that only a third of the body is up. Why shouldn't the House have a similar system, keeping with the tradition of having election every 2 years, but only half the body? And after the first election, it would work, you know, odd or even numbers, however it would be determined by the House. People would then have that opportunity and I believe, therefore, able to focus more clearly on the task in front of them and to familiarize themselves with the process, including, as Kevin said, their staffs as well having that opportunity to fully appreciate, understand both their colleagues, the process, and fundamentally how a bill really becomes law up here.

And, with that, Mr. Chairman, I yield back, and I am happy to answer any questions, especially from the person voted the handsomest man in Congress. I don't know how many people know that, but I just wanted that for the record.

[The statement of Mr. Larson follows:]

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The Chairman. I am really bringing my A game.

Thank you, Chairman Larson.

I now want to recognize myself and Vice Chair Timmons to begin a period of extended questioning of the witnesses. Any member who wishes to speak should just signal their request to either me or Vice Chair Timmons.

I want to start actually with Dr. Drutman. So I just want to think through kind of what the pros and cons of adding more members to the House are. So last hearing, we focused on constituent services, and I think it is probably undeniably so that your capacity to do casework and to address constituent concerns is probably easier with a smaller district. You know, at the same time, over the course of the hearings that we have had, it is striking how many witnesses that we have had who have spoken about the importance of relationships within the legislative body, and I can see probably some downside if you substantially increase the size. It is already hard to have relationships with 400 and ‑‑ you know, if you include the delegates, 440 others other than yourself. You know, that is tricky.

And so I am just curious if you can talk a little bit about what is achieved by increasing the number of members and, you know, if you have got a sense of the puts and the takes.

Mr. Drutman. Yeah. Well, like everything, there is pros and cons. So, certainly, it does bring members closer to their constituents if the districts are smaller. I think it has the potential to make Congress more representative of the people as a whole if there are more members. But, you know, it does ‑‑ it is more members for you all to interact with.

I mean, I guess the question is at ‑‑ you know, if you go the proposal that we have put forward in this report, is to add 150 members, so to go from 435 to 585. So that is, you know, more people to get to know, but, you know, I think Con ‑‑ I mean, I think the House has gotten to a point where it is just hard to get to know everybody, especially if you are only here for, you know, for 2 years potentially and then you are ‑‑ because I know most people are here for longer, but constantly running for reelection.

So in terms of members getting to know each other, I think to your point, Congressman Larson, if people spent less time having to go into their fundraising dens and more time just hanging out, if folks were here more and not just flying in on Tuesday and flying out on Thursday and, you know, folks actually brought their families here and spent more time here, that would help.

But, you know, I mean, there is certainly a tradeoff. With size, it is harder to, you know, get to know everybody. But, on the other hand, you know, when was the last time the House deliberated as a whole? So I think ‑‑

The Chairman. I was even just thinking about like in committees, right? Already it is a little bit tricky in committees. And we are lucky we have 12 people on this committee, so our capacity to actually have dialogue is all right. You know, if you look behind you, the Armed Services Committee, really big. Right?

Mr. Drutman. Right. So, I mean, one thing to think about is also the committee structure, right? I mean, Kevin is talking about the complexity. And, you know, there is some things a committee has done with simplification, but there is a lot of things that Congress has called on to legislate on and think about and oversee. And I think if you had a larger Congress, you might have the potential for more committees and subcommittees, that there just has to be a level of specialization among Members of Congress, you know, that it is really hard to be a generalist given all of the things that you need to be thinking about.

So having a larger member ‑‑ having more members might allow for more potential for people to really focus on particular subcommittees, which, you know, where you could develop some real expertise. Like, there is a certain amount you have just got to trust each other and delegate to each other to really solve some very hard and tricky problems.

The Chairman. Dr. Allen, did you want to weigh in on this?

Ms. Allen. A small footnote. My understanding is that both the U.K. Parliament and the German Bundestag are larger than our Congress. Their populations are smaller, of course. So I think it would be very productive if your committee were to reach out to them and ask that question about what it means to operate in a body of that scale.

The Chairman. Go on, Dr. Kosar.

Mr. Kosar. They are both about 700 members.

Just to riff off Lee's point, with respect to oversight, I mean, 435 members who have to oversee, you know, $6 trillion worth of spending, there is approximately 180 executive agencies. You know, as the executive branch has grown in size and complexity, the number of Members of Congress has not, and the size of staff has actually declined since the 1980s in the House. And so you just think about the information of symmetries there, you know, obviously, adding more members ‑‑

The Chairman. Yeah. That is fair.

Dr. Drutman ‑‑ and then I want to bring Vice Chair Timmons in the conversation ‑‑ can you speak a little bit about how this would work? You know, how would adding seats to the Chamber and reapportionment work?

And you made kind of passing reference to maybe not using single‑member districts but having a different approach. I was hoping you could say a little bit more about that.

Mr. Drutman. Yeah. So, you know, I think in addition to increasing the size of the House, we ought to think about increasing the size of districts to go from single member to proportional multimember districts, three to five members per district.

And I think one of the challenges in this moment of our politics is, you know, things have become so deeply divided. Hyperpartisan polarization is real. It is a tremendous problem, and there is just a tremendous amount of gamesmanship that is going on in trying to crush the other side.

I mean, I am watching in horror as I see the DCCC putting money to elect the most extreme Republicans. But within the single‑member district with a zero‑sum winner‑take‑all election, you win by disqualifying the other side. And one way to disqualify the other side is to have their side be the most extreme. Now, that is, I think, an incredibly dangerous and dumb game, but it is the logic of our single‑member system and the binary choice that it forces.

Now, imagine, you know, if you have three‑ or five‑member districts, you know, it is not zero‑sum. It is not winner take all anymore. You have a diversity of representatives who represent the larger diversity of that district. I mean, you all represent very diverse districts. And, you know, I mean, you ‑‑ I know you work very hard to try to represent all of your constituents, but ideologically, valueswise, you know, demographically, there is some constituents who it is hard for you all to represent, even if we did increase the size of the house and, thus, reduce the size of the district.

So I think if we had proportional multimember districts where three or five members represented a district and split up the district and represented different constituents and different perspectives, we would have less of this binary zero‑sum that is really destroying the ability of Congress and our government to work. You would see more conservative Democrats, more liberal Republicans, maybe some, you know, new parties, new perspectives represented, and you combine that with increasing the size of the House, I think you create a Congress that is just much more representative of the diversity and pluralism in this country and I think much better able to work out some complex compromises, because everything is not, you know, we have got to crush the other side because they are evil. And that is the mindset that I think is really overwhelming the ability of this Congress to function, and it is terrifying where this is leading, to me.

The Chairman. Vice Chair Timmons.

Did you want to weigh in?

Mr. Larson. Well, I just wanted to make a comment about that. I think the biggest threat that we face in our democratic republic ‑‑ and I apologize for not catching all the testimony. But when Mr. Kosar was talking about the rules, the House has already passed over 400‑plus bills that sit in the Senate, and they haven't voted on a one of them, and that was a practice both under Harry Reid and is still a practice ‑‑ I would say Mitch is far more successful about it.

But for a member of the House, and whether you are a Democrat or a Republican, the committee chairs and that whole process has been neutered by a Senate rule. Nothing in the Constitution that says that you need 60 votes to pass a bill, nothing in the Constitution that says a filibuster is constitutionally authorized. It may be, some would argue, a tradition. But this isn't Mr. Smith goes to Washington. This is people simply in their room saying ‑‑ calling a culture vote, and no House bill moves in the United States Senate.

And you can argue that even the last two bills that the House has voted on from the Senate, major bills, the infrastructure bill and most recently the so‑called gun violence bill, never went through a public hearing in the House, never was vetted, and came from the other body.

And it is alarming how much this has happened and becoming part of the norm, instead of what is called regular order. These things used to be sorted out in what is called a conference committee. There are very few people in Congress today that can even recall what a conference committee is. But that is where the so‑called issue of hyperbipartisanship got resolved within those committees of conference when there was disagreement.

But the House is now at an enormous disadvantage because of a Senate rule. And, frankly, the media pays no attention to it. Seventy percent of the bills that pass the House that sit over in the Senate are bipartisanly passed. So this notion that we are bipartisanly always at one another's throats simply isn't true. On the major issues where there are philosophical, ideological, and regional differences, that has always been the way it has been throughout history, and rightfully so.

But a democratic majority, whether it is Republican or Democrat, needs to govern. And it can't be minority rule and ruled by culture vote, or what they call Rule 22. We are sending over something I would like to submit for the record, an op‑ed on the new catch‑22 is rule 22.

The Chairman. Ba‑dump. Thank you.

Vice Chair Timmons, go ahead.

Mr. Timmons. Thank you. Thank you.

Representative Larson, I actually like your idea about the 4‑year term, and I want to give you something to think about. I don't know the answer to it. How would you deal with redistricting?

Mr. Larson. That is a great question. I mean ‑‑

Mr. Timmons. It gets really tricky.

Mr. Larson. Well, it does, and it depends ‑‑ and, of course, redistricting is something that is left up to the States.

Mr. Timmons. But if half the members have 4‑year terms and they are alternating, then someone would be in the middle of their term poss ‑‑ I mean, I guess you could do it State by State, so certain States would get reelected at ‑‑

Mr. Larson. Right.

Mr. Timmons. Anyway, something to think about.

Mr. Larson. Well, in terms of, yes, what would that mean if you went ‑‑ I get the question. What would it mean if you went, say, odd and even districts? You know, how would that break down in terms of who is up for election in that 2‑year cycle? And ‑‑

Mr. Timmons. When you redraw the lines, it would get really tricky. But something to think about.

I am going to talk about the calendar and the schedule, and you are going to fix this; I feel it. Welcome to the party.

So the variables are this: 435 Members of Congress serve on an average of 5.4 committees and subcommittees. We have 20 standing committees, 5 select committees, around ‑‑ I am just guessing ‑‑ 75 subcommittees. So there is a hundred people that have authority to schedule hearings and markups, and we just run around all the time.

In 2019, we had 65 full days. Generally speaking, we don't have hearings or markups outside of 9 a.m. to 5 p.m., so that is 520 hours. But in those 520 hours, we have to have conference and caucus meetings, constituent meetings, floor votes, committee meetings, subcommittee meetings, and fundraisers.

So we have to be here more. We need more time, but we are only getting ‑‑ like, the best schedule I can come up with, which is not going to get adopted, has 104 days, full days, which is not going to happen. If we get 80, we will be lucky.

Can AI fix this to where we just deconflict it a little bit?

Mr. Mariani. I won't promise that it can fix it. The good news is what you are describing is basically just an optimization problem, right? Like, there is a ton of data, and we need, within these defined parameters, find the optimal solution. And the good news is that is exactly the type of thing that AI is really good at, right? We talk about human machine teaming because AI's strengths are exactly what humans are weak at, and humans' strengths are exactly what AI is weak at.

So this problem that you are speaking of, we have so much data and so many variables and we can't just crunch all those numbers; that is exactly where AI can help. When we start to talk about contextual variability and emotion and value judgments, that is where humans are significantly better. We need to bring them together. But scheduling, AI can help.

Mr. Timmons. The biggest challenge is committee and subcommittee meetings are generally left to the chair, and they don't want to be told what to do. And floor votes are left to the majority leader, and he is not going to listen to anybody. That is what he gets to do.

So can you factor that in? How do you factor in ‑‑ can we do an optimization without being directive? Can we make suggestive optimizations?

Mr. Mariani. Sure, absolutely. And the other way to do it is kind of what ‑‑ that second model that we talked about that is kind of like AI as simulator, you can sort of set the parameters of the system. You know, hey, here are all the rules that are in play, here is kind of what we want to accomplish, and then allow people to kind of play around it. So you could have, you know, different players in that model, the different committee chairs and different other folks that need your time to play around with that. And from that, you can create one, two, three, maybe even a few optimum models that then human judgment can choose between because, say, hey, we don't want to work on Christmas Eve or something. So, yeah, absolutely.

Mr. Timmons. What business would we hire to help with that? I mean, we have been trying to create a committee calendar ‑‑ a unified committee calendar just so people can just see. We are not trying to use AI to fix anything. We just want to make it so you can actually tell what you are doing when you are doing it as opposed to just picking time out of thin air and being like, oh, interesting. You know, 90 percent of the subcommittee actually has another committee meeting at the same time. That is not great. Let's maybe do it an hour later, an hour earlier.

So we can't even figure out a way to get a unified committee calendar, no less optimize it. So do you know anybody that does this?

Mr. Mariani. Yeah. I think the good thing is, you know, these types of optimization problems, you know, kind of as we talked about, they can be found kind of across government, across industry. So there is lots of folks that have expertise in applying these, creating them, and feeding them to the context.

I think to your point, the challenge is, hey, everyone out there has experience adopting AI protocols and using them potentially at scale. How do you then cross that with the unique context of having those technological tools work in Congress?

And I think what we are starting to see is, you know, as we heard from some of the other examples, other legislatures, other parliaments starting to take those first tentative steps and using AI, small scale processes. South Africa has an AI‑enabled personal assistant that gets kind of at what you are talking about. You know, members can ask it questions, and it will automatically respond back about, you know, here is the content in a bill or, hey, here is the time and conference room you need to get to in the next 2 minutes.

So those types of things are already out there, and they are discovering some of those unique challenges of using AI in a legislative context.

Really, I think to your question, the challenge is learning from both, so learning from those examples in industry where they are already doing this stuff, you know, how do you do this at scale, and then learning from those small scale proofs of concept that are out there in, you know, South Africa, the Netherlands, Brazil, about what are the unique requirements to do this in a legislative context.

Mr. Timmons. Thank you.

Yes, ma'am.

Ms. Allen. Again, small footnote. Every college and university has this problem, and we have methods for solving it. So I would recommend calling a major public university and asking them how they ‑‑

Mr. Timmons. Middle schools also do it.

Ms. Allen. True. But the relevant scale, the relevant scale that you need, you know. And, yes, there are optimization tools. So I think you would easily find something usable.

Mr. Timmons. One real quick followup.

Dr. Drutman, ignoring the policy considerations around having another 150 Members of Congress and the staff and all that stuff, my biggest question is just space. Where do they go? Like, we can't put another 150 people on the floor. I mean, I guess we could build another House Office Building.

Mr. Drutman. Yeah. Right. I mean, you have got that parking lot south of ‑‑

Mr. Timmons. Okay.

Mr. Drutman. And some beautiful parks.

Mr. Timmons. It is overwhelming to think about adding another 150 members.

Mr. Drutman. Right. I mean, you know ‑‑ but also, people work from home more now. I mean, it is post‑pandemic, we have sort of figured out remote work a little bit, I mean, not that it can all be remote. But I think you can build another office ‑‑ there is space south of the three existing office buildings. I mean, I hate to lose those beautiful parks, but, you know ‑‑

Mr. Timmons. You know, it is interesting, our first year, one of our early hearings, somebody suggested moving the Capitol to Nebraska. So we could maybe couple moving the Capitol to Nebraska with that. I am just kidding.

Mr. Drutman. I mean, sure. There is plenty of land there. I mean, it would be in the middle of the country.

Mr. Timmons. I think the chairman would appreciate that.

Mr. Drutman. Yes.

Mr. Timmons. But thank you.

I yield back.

The Chairman. Mr. Latta.

Mr. Latta. Well, thanks, Mr. Chairman and Mr. Vice Chairman, for today's hearing, and to our witnesses. And this is kind of ‑‑ it is interesting, the hearing that we are having today.

First of all, people are agreeing with me. First of all, I can make this very simple. You know, we always talk about schedules. We did it in the Ohio legislature. This is not rocket science. On Tuesday, Wednesday, Thursdays when we had session, we started at a certain time in the senate. If they said we are starting at 11:30, start at 11:30. Next day we are going to be in session on the floor at 1 o'clock, we were on the floor. Next day 1:30. The other thing is you weren't allowed to run committee hearings during session. Very simple.

So, you know, I have advocated these things, so it is good to hear these things come up. The other thing that is also good to hear come up I advocated is this. Our committee sizes are too large. And the other thing is that if you go back 50, 60 years ago, members didn't serve on two, three, four committees. They served on one and became experts on that committee.

So, you know, we can simplify things from people always being broken up where they need to be at a certain time by simplifying the process. And so I will just throw my two cents in there real quick.

But, Mr. Kosar, you know, one of the things that I think you mentioned, you know, about the ‑‑ you were talking about the executive branch and how large it has got and Congress hasn't kept up. I think part of the problem is Congress has just abdicated its power to the executive so you don't have to take the blame. You know, it is just like, we have done it, you guys take care of it, and it is out of our hands now. So how do we pull that back in to start saying we are going to start bringing that power back to the House, back to the Senate so that the executive doesn't have it?

Because, again, you know, I can remember as a kid ‑‑ my dad was here from 1959 to 1989, but I can remember driving down Independence Avenue, where these office buildings are today, they were Quonset huts left over from World War II. Look at photographs. That is what we had. It is amazing that this government operated at a much smaller scale than we have today. But how do we bring that back?

Mr. Kosar. Well, as a person on the right, certainly I would suggest that Congress consider doing something to pare back the size of the executive branch. I mean, do we really need all 180 agencies? It has been a long time since I think I have seen any sort of concerted effort to do some sort of, like, let's put together a bipartisan list and let's start zeroing things out. Maybe hold a vote at the start of each Congress and hold hands and jump together. It can be done through a legislative procedure, an expedited one, or something like that. That would put incentives in the right direction and, you know, make the job a little more manageable.

You know, I think that there also is ‑‑ you know, the information asymmetries are so immense. I don't think the House did itself any favors in growing government but then reducing the number of staff over the past 40 years. I think technology can help make up for it. I think this is where AI is very interesting.

You know, when committees get together and study a problem, you know, 3, 4 years later, very few people on the committee are still there, many of the staff have left, and what you have is a bunch of printed hearing volumes. And that knowledge is just fading from memory because you guys are all working on new stuff. And being able to manage that knowledge, especially so new members can come in and get up to speed fast and get a sense of what really, you know, are the options and what should be done, what are the problems, I think that is part of the mix.

The basic incentive, like, you know, James Madison thought that the legislature would be the most powerful entity of all in the three branches. You know, the ability to exercise power, power of the purse, power over the law, he thought that would be absolutely irresistible to members. I think he would be baffled by the fact that members, as you note, frequently just delegate authority. They delegate authority up towards leadership and they delegate authority over towards the executive branch and, therefore, have grown this massive administrative state.

So some of this is going to be an attitudinal change, but I think also the kind of difficulty that the individual member has in exerting his or her will, like, why put in the work to try to reign in an agency or change policy if your bill is not going to get out of committee, if it is not going to get called for a vote, and if the Senate is going to sit on it.

Empowering members to get stuff done I think has to be part of the equation.
RPTR PANGBURN
EDTR ZAMORA
[10:00 a.m.]

Mr. Latta. Let me ‑‑ just a real quick followup for you. You know, you are also talking about, you know, our rules and procedures has gotten pretty well out of hand. Do we just go back to just a manual?

Mr. Kosar. No. I think we have to go a little bit beyond that. I think there are some ‑‑ you know, some of these specializations, I think, are valuable. I think perhaps, you know, when you are talking about a trade treaty or certain other specified areas, having an expedited procedure can be valuable. But, certainly, the whole corpus needs to be paired back. I mean, you have got rules that are on the books, but not even used. Calendar Wednesday has been around for how long? When was the last time it has been a vote? Fifty years ago, but it is in the book, theoretically it can be invoked?

Congress even ‑‑ Don Wolfensberger told me that Congress had picked up a new rule at the start of last January, and regularly it waives the rule.

Mr. Latta. It is a problem.

Mr. Mariani, quick question. I am the rank on Communications Technology, right across here at Energy and Commerce, and we are talking about all the AI, and one of the things ‑‑ of course, we have had a lot of questions about, in the past, about how algorithms are set, especially when we are talking about AI.

How would you make sure that those algorithms are correct, that they are not biased to one side or the other?

Mr. Mariani. Sure, absolutely. And the short answer is, I think, everyone involved at every step of the process has a role in ensuring that those AI models are accurate and equitable. And that starts even before the models are made. It starts with selecting and collating the data to make sure it is accurate and clean, and kind of most important for equity, too, kind of fit for purpose, because you can gather one data set in one context and it can be a representative and, you know, not biased one way or the other. But if you use it to answer a different question in a different context and all of a sudden, it can accidently introduce bias.

Those types of controls and governance processes, then, need to extend into the next phase where you are making the model and using it. And focusing on transparency and those steps is probably the most important so you can identify kind of what are the model weights, what are the variables, what are the assumptions that we are using.

And then even into Members yourself, to make sure that when you are using the outputs, that you have kind of the literacy of how those models work so you can understand kind of their left and right lateral limits, because, you know, AI is a powerful tool, but it is not an infallible oracle. Really, it is just more of a decision aid for yourself, and probably also unique to the legislative context, and also having enough knowledge to be able to communicate to constituents how those models are being used so you can build their trust in confidence in how AI is being used as well.

Mr. Latta. Two more questions, if I could, Mr. Chairman?

Thank you very much.

Dr. Allen, you know, in your testimony, again, you are talking about ‑‑ we always are trying to figure out at home, across the whole country, how to get people back engaged but, you know, a lot of people, they are pulling themselves in. You know, they stay home. They are in front ‑‑ you know, it is just like years ago when ‑‑ I am not going to date myself, but I am going to say this, but when you could go to the corner store and pick up a cassette tape and you are going to take it home and watch a movie. The theaters all said, nobody is ever going to do that. Nobody is ever going to stay home and watch it on their own TV, this movie. Well, they were all proven wrong.

And we see more and more where people now ‑‑ it is always ‑‑ you know, they just keep pulling things back. They are not out there communicating with one other. A lot of neighborhoods, you never see your neighbors until spring. You know, everybody just kind of disappears for 6 months.

So I guess my question is, is that, you know, we want to get people actively involved again in the political process, which our Founders wanted us all to be. How do we get these people reengaged? You know, it is just like disengaging themselves from, you know, their phones. You know, like ‑‑ it is a different piece of legislation, 94 percent of all accidents that occur on the road today are driver error. And most of it ‑‑ I rode with the highway patrol not too long ago in Ohio, and it is because of people playing with their what? Their phones.

So how do we get people reengaged in this?

Ms. Allen. I really appreciate the question. I think we all have direct experiences of the sort of disconnection that people are living with and then the negative psychological and behavioral consequences that flow from that. The good news is that there really are people in communities across the country who know how to pull people back.

At the end of the day, social connection is rewarding, it is empowering, it supports mental health and well‑being. And so when people have an opportunity to participate again, they tend to come back. So they don't just participate once. But in order for that to work, you need those, in effect, civic entrepreneurs who are going to put in the time and energy to build the context, to issue the invitation, to follow up with people and so forth.

And that is what we have historically had a habit of investing in, and that habit has fallen away. So if you look at the sort of earliest history of the country, take Massachusetts in the colonial period, 1600s even, you know, the State government, such as it was, sort of colonial assembly insisted that every town put resources into a school. That was sort of really the beginning of public school, and you can think of that as the first example of civic infrastructure. And the purposes were civic. They, you know, were economic too, but actually civic first.

And then throughout the late 19th century, early 20th century, we had these extraordinary philanthropists. You know, Andrew Carnegie and so forth, who built libraries all over the country, and he was not alone. Our contemporary billionaires do not invest in civic infrastructure in the same kind of way, and that is something that we should all recognize. And even the question of what can Congress do to incentivize private philanthropy back into supporting these local‑level civic entrepreneurs is really important.

So the short message is that people are out there who know how to pull people back into connection, but they are not getting support in the way that they have historically gotten in this country.

Mr. Latta. Thank you.

Mr. Chairman, I know I have gone over my time, but I have so many other questions. But thank you very much for your indulgence.

The Chairman. I wanted to follow up with Mr. Larson. I don't think there is anything magic about 2 years. I think there is a sense, though, that maybe the intent of the Founders was to make sure that we were closer to our constituents, more accountable to our constituents. I imagine that might be a pushback against extending the length of the term. I just want to get your sense of how would you respond to that.

Mr. Larson. Well, actually, you are absolutely right, the Founding Fathers had a major debate over this because they thought it should be 1 year. And the idea was that in a democracy, they wanted to make sure you had one chamber that was close to the people and that the people elected every year. And that is the concept. And I think actually Eisenhower and Johnson used almost the exact same phrase that you did: There is nothing magic about 2 years.

But the idea of staggering them would, I think, also help create competition upstream for those that are in the House but don't have to necessarily give up a seat in order to run for a governorship or run for the United States Senate. But the primary goal here is, I think both Johnson and Eisenhower recognized, people really need to understand the responsibility and role. And to do that in a 2‑year period, obviously it has been done, but when you complicate that with both the need to raise money and the family concerns that that has on spouses and children, it just seems to me to be a far more humane way to go about this business that we are in and allow both for greater understanding, camaraderie, and, I think, a better legislation in the final run.

The Chairman. Dr. Kosar, I want to get your sense ‑‑ I have been struck over the course of this committee's existence that, I guess, by two dynamics related to the rules. One, we have a bunch of rules that we don't actually follow, right? There is just a ton of underbrush, right?

I have been here nearly 10 years. I don't think we have done calendar Wednesday, right? But it is in the rules, right? There is all of these rules that we consistently waive, and Lord knows that the budget and appropriations process, we have ‑‑ in that instance, there is laws that govern that process that by and large we don't follow either.

I guess I am just curious your sense of, has there ‑‑ can you point to an example of either another ‑‑ a parliament or a State legislature that has done this process that you are suggesting that has successfully kind of cleared that underbrush and kind of Control‑Alt‑Delete on the rules and refreshed it?

Mr. Kosar. Unfortunately, no. And I think, you know, in part when you look at State legislatures, I don't think they have had the kind of kudzu problem that the House has had where things have gotten so out of control so rapidly. Their pairings, I think, are more modest, incremental changes, but things didn't get out of control. Things got out of control here, and now we have, you know, each Congress, you know, little tweaks of the rules but no fundamental revisiting, because it is just not part of the process.

But, you know, I certainly would love to see and, again, this may be where our friends at Congressional Research Service or NCSL, National Council of State Legislatures, could partner up to work together, and just lay the House rules next to the rules of four States where we have well‑functioning legislatures and just compare.

The Chairman. Yeah. Well, I also ‑‑ I guess I find myself thinking, your recommendation of whether it be another select committee or continuing the work of this select committee, to do a deeper dive into this. I am just curious how much you think that actually fixes stuff. You know, we had a year of people testifying in front of this committee, well, we should get back to regular order.

And, you know, I came out of a State legislature where every bill was taken up under an open rule, where if you had an amendment that was at all germane to the bill, you could offer it, it would be debated, and it would be voted on.

In my experience in the State legislature, that was abused probably five, maybe six times for gotcha politics. You know, the notion of doing that here is laughable, right? Like, it would be used for gotcha politics at every angle, and that is not a rules problem; that is a culture problem, right?

So I am just curious how much you think we should invest in a deep dive into rules change in light of that dynamic?

Mr. Kosar. Yeah. Yeah. Well, you know, there is a sick kind of relationship between the rules and the behavior. And, you know, there has been this process where, when it comes to the floor, you know, some bad behavior crops up so the rules get tightened more.

The Chairman. Yeah.

Mr. Kosar. Bad behavior springs up elsewhere. I mean, it is almost like dealing with a rebellious child or something like that. Like, I am going to put more rules on you to stop you from doing it, and then the buggers figure out a way to get around it.

The Chairman. Yeah.

Mr. Kosar. You know, they are extremely inventive, and so you just keep ratcheting and ratcheting. And that is the dynamic. And I think, no, it is going to require a larger conversation amongst Members to get people to say, like, do we want to keep living this way? Is this how we want to be legislators, or do we want to change the rules in a way ‑‑ and we had a bit of that in the class of 1974 when they came over and took over Congress. They said we are not playing by these rules. And they just had ‑‑ you had enough of them making a cultural demand change, and the rules were changed so that they could do what they could do.

The Chairman. Dr. Allen, one of the values of my long commute that Mr. Larson mentioned is the ‑‑ a lot of time to read. So I read the Our Common Purpose report. I thought it was really thoughtful. My recollection was chapter four was the civic bridge‑building chapter. And you spoke to this dynamic that part of the division that you see in Congress is driven by division in our communities.

I had this crazy experience this last fall where two things happened. One, we had a series of attacks on religious institutions in Tacoma. There was an Islamic center that got burned to the ground, two Buddhist faith leaders got assaulted outside their temple, and a church got vandalized all within the span of 3 weeks. And in the spirit of something good coming out of something bad, we actually saw an interfaith alliance sort of spring up and say, hey, we are going to pull together. Everybody, get them all in the same room, and say that is not what we are about in this community. And it was actually a really great event.

Afterwards, one of the faith leaders came up to me and said, you know, that was really powerful, but if we are going to do this right, this wouldn't just be a 90‑minute exercise; this would be something that we do on an ongoing basis. And he said, just out of curiosity, any Federal support for something like that? And I said, no, not really.

And then literally a month later, I visited a YMCA in my district, thinking they were going to talk to me about Mike Quigley's bill, the GYMS Act, because gymnasiums are losing money. That is not what they wanted to talk about.

They said, all the polarization, all the talks they see, that you see in Washington, D.C., has shown up in our Y. They said, we have literally had arguments and fights break out over pick your red or blue issue.

And they said it has become so bad we have hired a consultant that is training our staff, training our board in conflict resolution, and we are going to host this ‑‑ as you suggested ‑‑ you know, we are going to host sort of bridge‑building discussions where we get people to talk to each other and listen to each other, rather than have The Jerry Springer Show show up in our YMCA.

And they said, any Federal support for that? And I said, you know, not really. At least not currently.

And, you know, the report that ‑‑ Our Common Purpose report acknowledges that we do support this sort of civic infrastructure investment through the National Endowment for Democracy, but that support is to other countries, to strengthen democracy in other countries.

And so I see ‑‑ I absolutely see value in this. In fact, Vice Chair Timmons and I ‑‑ and we have 10 Democrats and 10 Republicans on a bill to maybe not create a trust, but set up a pilot program that could accept private philanthropy, and to do this grant making to local organizations.

I think the question that most commonly comes up is, one, how do you measure success? And two, why is this an innately Federal obligation. Right? You know, you mentioned that there is philanthropists that are supporting this endeavor already. You know, as I have spoken with colleagues on the floor and said, hey, do you want to sign on to this, probably the most common question I get is, why is this something the Federal Government ought to do?

So can you respond to both of those?

Ms. Allen. Absolutely.

The Chairman. Sorry for the long windup, but I wanted to give you a sense ‑‑ I actually do think you are really on to something because we are seeing it in our communities.

Ms. Allen. No, absolutely. I mean, we are seeing it all over, and I want to lift up your bill. I think it is the Building Civic Bridges Act. I think it is very important, so happy to lend my voice in support of it ‑‑

The Chairman. Thanks.

Ms. Allen. ‑‑ at whatever appropriate points.

But in brief, I mean, I think there is sort of three really important points. And I will admit that as our commission conversations on this started, I was a skeptic about the trust for civic infrastructure for exactly the reason that you just articulated, the question of, well, you know, should the Federal Government be doing this? Should this be really what we do at a local level anyway? And, you know, I changed my view, basically, and I came to change my view for a number of reasons.

The first is just recognizing that our practice of investing in the infrastructure of democracy in other countries came at a time historically when we were really building a strong wall defense against the challenge of communism. And we have to be honest that at this point in time, the greatest challenge for democracy on the globe right now is our weakening democracy. And we need civic strength here at home.

The Chairman. Hear! Hear!

Ms. Allen. We need it as a matter of defending democracy for the globe. So in that regard, the same motivation that led to those national investments in the past pertain, but they pertain here at home.

Now, the challenge, of course, is the question of, you know, once you think the Federal Government should be involved, you sort of worry, well, won't that become very partisan in terms of what kinds of investments there are. And so in that regard, I think, a way to avoid that problem is really to focus on a project of seeking to match other investments that local communities are defining.

So the investments ‑‑ there should be a sort of broad set of principles, design principles for the kinds of investments, but not a kind of blueprint of like here is everything everybody must do, because local communities need to be able to provide definition for that to give us the diversity and flexibility across the country of defining precisely what this infrastructure should look like.

So then what might be some of those broad design principles that Congress might be sort of interested in in sort of matching grant program? One I think is the idea that civic infrastructure should help ensure that self‑government is operational. Okay. And so what does that mean exactly?

I mean, we expect that with more investment of civic infrastructure, you should see higher trust, higher volunteerism, and more effective community problem‑solving. Those are all measurable things. We have some existing data approaches that do measure them. We could improve on them and would need to. And one of the things the trust should do would be to improve precisely the sort of set of indicators being used to measure whether or not self‑government is operational at that local level.

A second design principle is for all. Self‑government for all. We have another challenge, which is that, insofar as our civic infrastructure investments have historically been ‑‑ I refer to the colonial period where sort of States ‑‑ the colonial State of Massachusetts required towns to invest in schools. We had flag schools(ph) and so forth. We have a situation now where well‑resourced communities are able to invest in civic infrastructure, and those with lower property tax bases are just not in the same sort of way.

So there is a need for Congress' investment, again, to sort of elicit investment in those communities where the issue of support is more challenged. But, again, I do think it is really important that this be about drawing out philanthropic dollars as well, ensuring that community foundations are fully activated across the whole of their community.

And then what Congress can also assist in is helping people build bridges across jurisdictional and regional lines, which is a major challenge right now for people who are trying to support investments in this space.

And then the last design principle I would point to is connectedness, another version of bridge building. We have been able for decades to measure increases in residential ideological polarization, worsening dynamics of hypersegregation for low‑income communities of color, and increasing experiences of loneliness and disconnection across demographic groups, and, honestly, we see those data points showing up in also things like mass shootings and so forth.

So this is connected to a lot of big stuff in our society. So just as we can measure all the ways in which those things have been worsened, those ‑‑ reversing those dynamics would be indicators of success for investments in civic infrastructure around that design principle of connectedness.

The Chairman. That is great.

Vice Chair Timmons?

Mr. Timmons. I guess I am going to throw out another big idea and just get you all's feedback on it. I think one of the biggest challenges our society is facing is right here. Technology, interconnectedness, our inability to interact with one another. You know, we often talk about whether the hyperpartisanship in Congress is a Congress problem or a society problem, and it is probably a little bit of both.

But I think one of the biggest challenges is our inability to, I guess, digest information, because you get a lot of information that, previously, humans just wouldn't get because the journalism would weed it out before it got that far, and now you have things being posted on social media anonymously and just by crazy people.

And so how do we grow past the challenges that technology and interconnectedness are creating? Anybody.

Ms. Allen. I am happy to speak to that if ‑‑ so I think your question gets to the deepest issues we are all facing and the question that all of these suggestions relate to, which is, we are facing a crisis of representation, of the activity and practice of representation. And it is not a crisis of any particular individual's making; it is a crisis that at the end of the day has been finally driven all the way home by the invention of social media. And I just want to be very clear about why and how and, therefore, why your committee is so important.

Basically, you know, we all know the Federalist papers, we all know Federalist 10. The argument of Federalist 10 was that the design of the Constitution, among other things, its job was to mitigate the problem of faction. And the answer to how it is supposed to mitigate is delivered in Federalist 10. It is a two‑part answer. We only teach one part of the answer.

We teach the part of the answer that it is about representative government. The notion that you don't have direct democracy; you have representatives who are going to filter and synthesize opinion from around the country.

But there is a second part to Madison's answer, and it was literally that the breadth of the country being a broad republic would make it hard for people with extreme views to find each other and coordinate. Okay?

So geographic dispersal was literally a pillar of the original design. Okay? So Facebook knocked that pillar out from under us.

And so all the work we are trying to do in terms of thinking about the future of Congress is answering the question of how to have effective representation when we no longer have the pillar of geographic dispersal supporting the information ecosystem that supports healthy deliberation.

So, yes, you need rules changes, okay, in order to improve the process of deliberation and recognizing that circumstantial change. Yes, we need a bigger House to be connected to the whole of the country, and, yes, we need investment in civic infrastructure that helps people navigate a completely changed information ecosystem. We need all of these things in order to have a healthy Congress.

Mr. Kosar. Yeah. I mean, I guess a quick kick would be just Members should get off Twitter. But, no, it is a long‑standing problem that, you know, elites in the country have always had a greater voice in the ears of Congress. I mean, this is political science in the forties that complained to the ‑‑ the problem of pluralism is that it always ‑‑ its chorus always sings with an upper‑class tone. So it is imbedded in the system. Some people are going to be better connected, some people are going to have the means to get here and communicate, et cetera, et cetera.

But, certainly, technology has exacerbated it. It has, as you have noted, just to sort of mediate things. And we have also seen since the seventies a massive uptick in the number of interest groups, not‑for‑profit, trade, otherwise here in Washington, D.C. So you guys are getting hit from a million directions with a lot of voices. But interestingly enough, most of those are very self‑interested voices that their views don't necessarily jive with those of the public. But when you are constantly hearing that sort of stuff, it naturally is going to try and pull your brain towards those issues and those solutions and that sort of thing.

So how do you counteract it? It is not easy. I mean, turning off Twitter is one part of it, but you are still going to have people beating their way to your front doors and, you know, trying to come to your fundraisers, and do all sorts of stuff like that.

So we have got to think about new tools for helping you guys better get a sense of the communities and what their views are on other things. One of the interesting experiments that was, you know, being done ‑‑ I heard about a few years ago was this Steve Kull, social scientist, was working on something called "voice of the people," where he would put together these really deep focus groups, on postal reform and other stuff, of regular Americans, and they would come up with solutions about how you could get something done, but they were coming up with solutions that just never got a voice on the Hill.

You all have been stuck in the position of, you know, you go back to your districts, you try to do a town hall, but guess what? Elites will hijack those. You know, interest groups will send people because they want to create a Twitter moment or a YouTube moment, and they wreck that too.

And so, like, it is really a tough position, and I don't know if there are, you know, technological tools that can help you kind of separate the kind of elite noise and get a better sense of what, you know, the average community can make, other than just the shoe leather you all put in so much, but it is a real thing.

The Chairman. Dr. Drutman, I think ‑‑

Mr. Drutman. I just want to address your question as well because it is a crucially important question and, I mean, social media has done a lot of good things in connecting a lot of people and it has also done a lot of bad things in connecting other people, I think. I mean, the business incentives of social media, of course, are to drive what gets the most clicks, what is the most emotional, and that is the stuff that people want to read, which is how terrible the other side is.

There is a lot of confirmation bias, a lot of ‑‑ when you look at studies like why do people share stuff on social media, it is because it makes them feel good. It makes them feel like they are right. They have got it all figured out, and it reinforces the kind of emotional charge that they get by hating on the people that they like to hate on essentially.

And, you know, that is a real problem. But, you know, a lot of these trends of division started before social media. They started with cable news, they started with talk radio, before social media, you know, took over. In fact, it is interesting. I have looked at some studies. It is really older Americans who are most victimized by this, by fake news, because they haven't grown up in this environment of social media and Facebook and where they can really more easily distinguish, and also, they are most set in their views and most likely to believe the worst things about the other side, you know.

So a lot of it is really coming from political leadership and, you know ‑‑ like, it is a reinforcing dynamic because political leaders say, well, I just have to ‑‑ what my angry followers are saying, I should amplify that. As the expression goes, Twitter is not the real world, but it is a representative sample of people who are the most engaged in politics.

Now, one thing that gives me some hope is that, well, social media is obviously everywhere throughout western democracies and the world. Not every country that has social media is as polarized and divided as the U.S. So makes me think that there is something distinct about what is happening in the United States, and I think that distinct thing is the endless demonization of the other side that is coming from leadership and political elites and media elites, and that filters down and that is where most people get their opinions from and then they want to hate on the other side.

Also, the geographical sorting that a lot of the polarizations really that people live in communities that are very solidly "R" or very solidly "D." And when you are surrounded by like‑minded people, you tend to become more extreme. And when people on the other side are far away and distant, they become scarier and it is easier to demagogue and fearmonger about who they really are.

So some of this bridge building is important. People are more polarized in real life, actually, than they are on social media, which is something that I don't think we really appreciate. So, you know, I think social media amplifies a lot of what is happening, but it is not ‑‑ it is an amplifier, not a root cause of a lot of the division.

And, you know, it is true, people's attention spans are shorter, but the belief in conspiracy ‑‑ I published a rather interesting paper recently ‑‑ that belief in conspiracy theories hasn't increased over time; it is just that it is consolidated more on a few that become more amplified.

So, I mean, the lack of people's understanding about politics ‑‑ I mean, this is ‑‑ political scientists have always kind of taught, oh, American people don't know anything about politics. American people are so dumb, right? But like ‑‑ you know, that is not really fair because most people know what they need to know from shortcuts and heuristics, and they depend on political leaders to represent them and help them to figure out what they know. And when political leaders don't do that responsibly, we ‑‑ it is very hard for people who really depend on leadership. Leadership matters.

The Chairman. Go ahead, Mr. Larson, and then Mr. Mariani.

Mr. Larson. Well, I just wanted to ‑‑ these are all good questions, and I am enjoying listening.

But Representative Cole and DeLauro have a bill on history and civics and, frankly, it is not being taught the way it should be within our school systems. Some do it better than others, but across this Nation, the lack of civic understanding and responsibility, which is critical for a republic, isn't taught. And between that and financial literacy, Congress is loathed to mandate educational instruction on the States that is responsibility of the State, but especially in this day and age where you are bombarded with information, and people ‑‑ it is hard to distinguish the difference between the two.

And, frankly, anyone can produce a scientist or an economist or something that supports their point of view and there really isn't a Nation that has been grounded in its civic responsibility.

There is another notion and idea also that we should have to go along with that, what Australia does with 100 percent voting, and having voting as a requirement. And making sure that civic instruction, in order to get out of high school, that you understand how that works and how we apply that.

The Chairman. Go ahead.

Mr. Mariani. I will just strike an optimistic note on the technological side, which is technology certainly has created some of these challenges, but it is ultimately a tool, right? So it is value agnostic. It kind of just does what we tell it. And to Dr. Kosar's point, there are some technology platforms that just by tweaking the rules, you can drive towards consensus. So vTaiwan is a social platform that Taiwanese government uses to drive towards some of these things that consensus on even fraught issues like internet regulation.

But to Dr. Allen's point about, you know, trust in government, you can see one of the things that we have been looking at in our research is, one of the factors that can drive that is this kind of idea of, you know, psychic distance; like, how close you feel to that is kind of how much you trust it. So the public trusts local government more than State, State more than Federal, and so on.

So by creating distance technology, you know, you don't have to go to your county clerk anymore, you don't need to meet in person with your Representative. By creating a distance, it can feed that distrust, but we have also seen the opposite begin to take place.

If you can create a good customer experience for the public, that actually goes a long way. Even if it is a digital customer experience, that goes a long way to building trust. So we have seen this kind of high correlation between the customer experience of government services and public's trust in government.

So if we kind of have the mindset shift that everyone is describing, we can actually use these technological tools to actually build some of the trust that we are all looking for.

The Chairman. Okay. I feel like this was well worth waiting 3 years for this hearing. This was really meaty.

I want to thank our witnesses for their testimony today and thank our committee members who were able to attend. I also want to thank our staff for pulling together another great hearing with such outstanding witnesses. And I want to acknowledge the Armed Services Committee for letting us squat in their room.

Without objection, all members will have 5 legislative days within which to submit additional written questions for the witnesses to the chair which will be forwarded to the witnesses for their response. I ask our witnesses to please respond as promptly as you are able.

Without objection, all members will have 5 legislative days within which to submit extraneous materials to the chair for inclusion in the record.

And, with that, our hearing is adjourned. Thanks, everybody.

[Whereupon, at 10:32 a.m., the committee was adjourned.]