



**PARTNERSHIP**  
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Written statement prepared for

**The Select Committee on the Modernization of Congress**

Hearing entitled,

**“Congressional Modernization: A roadmap for the future”**

September 14, 2022

Chair Kilmer, Vice Chair Timmons, and members of the Select Committee on the Modernization of Congress, thank you for the opportunity to appear before you today to discuss the importance of continuing the effort to modernize Congress.

My name is Diane Hill, and I serve as a Senior Manager for Government Affairs at the Partnership for Public Service. The Partnership is a nonpartisan, nonprofit organization dedicated to inspiring public service and increasing the efficiency and effectiveness of the federal government. The Partnership was founded on the premise that any organization's best asset is its people.

I am here today in my role as the coordinator of the Fix Congress Cohort, a group of 45 organizations with diverse expertise who align in a common purpose to strengthen Congress and help make it more effective.

We are a diverse Cohort with a variety of expertise and a range of political leanings, from the left to the right as well as nonpartisan. What you'll be hearing today is not one solution but a framework to continue the modernization work with viable options for you to consider in keeping the modernization effort moving forward and going strong.

We all agree that with 171 recommendations already put forth by the committee, many with unanimous consent, there is much implementation to be done. We propose that the framework to consider for the future of modernization should be two-fold. First, focus primarily on implementation for the next two years. Second, continue efforts to bring the Senate into the modernization work.

With that framework in mind, we make the following recommendations with a notation that recommendations one and two are member-based, only one of which needs to be carried out.

**Recommendation one: Place modernization work in the Committee on House Administration (CHA), either by establishing a new subcommittee or commission.**

The Members of this committee have done incredibly important work for this institution, and it is imperative that the committee's recommendations continue to be implemented after the 117th Congress. Providing a permanent home for the modernization work within the Committee on House Administration (CHA) puts it squarely in a committee that has jurisdiction for most of the recommendations that have already been passed by this committee. The Committee on House Administration is in the best position to ensure that the recommendations set forth by the Modernization Committee are put into practice. If adjustments are needed on the recommendations as they are implemented, CHA has the necessary jurisdiction and tools to make that happen.

We propose the following two options for continuation of the modernization work that would be housed within CHA:

**Option one:** Create a Modernization Subcommittee directly under the Committee on House Administration. To establish a Subcommittee on Modernization, the Chair of the Committee on House Administration would need to take that action as the committee forms early in the next Congress. There is precedent for having such a subcommittee. In the 102nd

Congress (1991-1992), CHA formed a bipartisan subcommittee, the Subcommittee on Administrative Oversight that existed through the 103rd Congress ending in 1994. The Chief Administrative Officer position was created in 1995, which took on much of the Subcommittee on Administrative Oversight's work.<sup>1</sup>

**Option two:** Establish a Modernization Commission, modeled after the Communications Standards Commission, the former Franking Commission. The commission would have six members, split evenly between parties with the Chair being named by the Chair and Ranking Member of the Committee on House Administration with the approval of the Speaker. Unlike the establishment of a Modernization Subcommittee, a Commission could engage members who are interested solely in modernization and are not already on the House Administration Committee. A majority vote would be required to pass recommendations.

Both options have similar advantages and disadvantages, with a few exceptions.

#### *Advantages*

- Provide a permanent home for the modernization work, which is the best way to have long-term success.
- Increase the ability to implement the Modernization Committee's work given CHA's direct jurisdiction over most of the recommendations. CHA has the ability to advance resolutions and has the legislative authority and original jurisdiction to conduct hearings.
- CHA has direct oversight of the relevant congressional entities and can put its directives into immediate effect through letters and oversight. CHA can ensure that recommendations are implemented in a way that is sustainable.
- House Administration staff have the expertise and longstanding commitment to modernization efforts.
- Subcommittee only: A CHA subcommittee on modernization would be able to hold regular public hearings on the implementation of recommendations and be in touch with stakeholders from support offices and agencies to hear updates on initiatives.
- Subcommittee only: A CHA subcommittee on modernization could provide regular and/or annual reports on the status of recommendations and their implementation, helping provide updates to stakeholders.
- Subcommittee only: Members who serve on CHA can have short tenures. This would serve to increase the number of members who gain expertise on the issues that need to be tended when addressing modernization.
- Commission only: The Modernization Commission can pull its members from the whole of the House, creating diversity and gaining members who express interest in modernization.

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<sup>1</sup> See *A History on the Committee of House Administration: 1947-2012*, 2012. p: 55-56. Available at <https://www.govinfo.gov/content/pkg/CPRT-112HPRT72170/pdf/CPRT-112HPRT72170.pdf>.

### *Disadvantages*

- CHA has jurisdiction over election-related issues. With the current focus on that important work, resource and time constraints may affect modernization work.
- The Committee on House Administration often has higher turnover than other committees. That could lead to having subcommittee members who are less invested in modernization.
- Subcommittee only: House Administration is understaffed and under-resourced. Creating a new subcommittee would require additional funds and staff that would need to be agreed upon by the leadership of both parties.
- Subcommittee only: Creating a Modernization Subcommittee under CHA's jurisdiction, if unevenly split between the majority and minority parties, could lead to politicization of the issues. We would advise having an even split of members.

### **Recommendation two: Renew the Select Committee on the Modernization of Congress.**

Continuation of the Select Committee on the Modernization of Congress as it stands today should be considered a worthy alternative to the first recommendation. There are several advantages that are gained in keeping the current structure.

### *Advantages*

- The makeup of the committee brings together members of key committees who have direct jurisdiction over House operations. With representatives of each party from House Administration, Appropriations, Rules, along with those who are freshman and senior members, it has the depth and breadth of experience that allows for meaningful discussion on issues with a mission towards communication and collaboration that lead to much needed reform.
- The model set forth by the Select Committee has provided a pathway for others to see how thorny issues can be explored fully and respectfully by members who do not necessarily agree but are seeking information to find solutions in common, for example by:
  - moving beyond the 5-minute rule at hearings, giving members a chance to build on one another's questions and witnesses the opportunity to share more expertise;
  - conducting roundtables and listening sessions that give members and staff an opportunity to dig deeply into issues and jointly explore solutions with internal stakeholders and outside experts;
  - scheduling and attending Member dinners which allow members to learn more about each other's districts and develop common bonds; and
  - conducting bipartisan retreats to set the committee's agenda for an upcoming Congress.

### *Disadvantages*

- The Select Committee lacks legislative authority.
- Implementation of recommendations is difficult and time-consuming for the committee because it lacks jurisdiction.

### **Recommendation three: Create a permanent Modernization Task Force, in addition to a member-based solution.**

While support for congressional modernization can and must come from members, in addition to a member-based solution, it would serve Congress well to advance modernization at the professional staff level. We recommend establishing a Modernization Task Force, established by using the Data Task Force<sup>2</sup> as a model. The task force would be made up of non-partisan, professional staff from across legislative agencies, including the General Accounting Office, the Office of the Chief Administrative Officer, the House Office of Diversity and Inclusion, the Clerk's Office and the Sergeant at Arms, each of which plays a key role in building a more modern and effective Congress. This staff-driven model would operate in tandem with member-level efforts and ensure that the work of the select committee continues and recommendations are followed up on in the hands of dedicated, professional staff. from prominent House offices.

### **Recommendation four: Pursue a Joint Committee on the Modernization of Congress.**

Ideally, modernization of Congress would include all of Congress. For that reason, the Cohort supports the creation of a Joint Committee on the Modernization of Congress. While it appears that the Senate is not prepared to take that step right now, we should be exploring that outcome during the next two years. In that way we can take on larger issues such as budget reform, which would help Congress regain its strength as the first branch of government.

Thank you for inviting me here to testify on behalf of the Fix Congress Cohort. You've allowed us—a community of civil society organizations who care deeply about strengthening Congress—to be instrumental in the modernization effort. We applaud the strong leadership, service and results of the work of this committee, the Modernization Committee. Making Congress more effective is a tall order in the current environment. We are grateful that this committee has been willing to stand by Congress as an institution and we wholeheartedly support that effort. It has been an honor and a pleasure for us to be a part of this vitally important work.

Thank you again and I look forward to your questions.

<sup>2</sup> For more information on the Congressional Data Task Force, which was previously known as the Bulk Data Task Force, see [https://usgpo.github.io/innovation/leadership\\_support/](https://usgpo.github.io/innovation/leadership_support/).