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Congress of the United States
House of Representatives
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COMMITTEE ON APPROPRIATIONS

SUBCOMMITTEES:

VICE CHAIR, AGRICULTURE, RURAL DEVELOPMENT,
FOOD AND DRUG ADMINISTRATION, AND RELATED
AGENCIES

FINANCIAL SERVICES AND GENERAL GOVERNMENT
STATE, FOREIGN OPERATIONS AND
RELATED PROGRAMS

**Statement for the Record by Congressman Kevin Yoder for
The Subcommittee on Rules and Organization of the House of the Committee on Rules
Hearing on Proposed Rules Changes for the 114th Congress**

September 17, 2014

Mr. Chairman, Members of the Committee.

Thank you for offering us an opportunity to address the need to review the processes and procedures that determine how we make laws, and how we govern.

I would like to make several observations that I hope will be helpful to you as you consider what this committee can do to improve our rules and enhance the opportunities all of us have, on both sides of the aisle, to participate in and contribute to the legislative process.

First, I believe most members agree that the institution needs change. We hear all too often from our constituents, from former members, from academic experts and through an endless barrage from the media that the system is broken. Congress is dysfunctional. The evidence is pretty compelling.

Each year the Congressional Budget Office issues a report detailing Unauthorized Appropriations and Expiring Authorizations. I encourage all my colleagues to read this report, since it essentially highlights the work that needs to be done. For example, the latest report notes that, "for fiscal year 2014 the Congress appropriated approximately \$302 billion for programs and activities whose authorized appropriations have expired." This backlog consisted of 270 laws that were expired, including 32 which expired at the end of the last fiscal year. During the 113th Congress, the House and Senate have worked to address some of these issues by passing a Farm Bill, Defense Authorizations, WRDA, or extending Transportation authorizations. Still, the fact remains that we are woefully behind on reauthorizing programs, let alone providing oversight over government operations.

A further concern is our inability to meet basic budget deadlines. This is not a criticism directed at a specific party or body, since the Republicans and Democrats in the House, Senate and White House have had difficulty meeting the statutory deadline laid out in the 1974 Budget Act. According to the Congressional Research Service, "since FY1977 all of the regular appropriations bills were enacted before the beginning of the fiscal year in only three additional instances (FY1989, FY1995, and FY1997)." It's fair to say that there are times there where real differences in policy slow the legislative process. However; the inability to consistently meet budget deadlines is a systemic problem in need of reform.

This record of substandard achievement is among the reasons Congress is held in such low esteem. The most recent polling data I've seen indicated that only 13 percent of the American people believe the Congress is doing a good job, the lowest opinion on record.

Those of us who serve here know, however, that our colleagues are dedicated individuals who have sought public office to improve the lives and livelihood of their constituents. We've come to do good for our neighbors and our communities back home and our country. The statistics are not a reflection on those who serve. They are a reflection that the procedures and practices under which we operate have not kept pace with the political times in which we live and work.

The time for us to face up to these realities and restore an environment in which we can govern more effectively. We must be better stewards of this great institution. We have let this body degenerate too far for too long.

There should be no reluctance to act. Congressional reform is a natural, evolutionary occurrence in this body. Our Founding Fathers, in their great wisdom, understood that the system government they created would be living, breathing, ever-evolving organisms of self-governance. Congress has had to look inward and change throughout our history, from the creation of the first standing committee, to the separation of appropriations and authorizations, through the Cannon reforms in the 1920s to the dethroning of the Southern committee chairman and the creation of the budget process in the 1960s and 70s.

Republicans have an exceptionally strong record in recognizing the need for change when imbalances and disruptions cripple the ability of the institution to govern.

In the last several decades House Republicans have been at the forefront of procedural reform, proposing changes in the rules and procedures nearly a dozen times in the last 30 years. Among the more notable are the Blueprint for a House That Works in 1985, the Bicentennial House Restoration Project in 1987 and the Contract with America of 1994.

Reform is a natural and necessary function of a legislative body in a constantly changing and continually growing Republic. Change should be the norm, not the exception.

I hope the Committee will consider both changes in House Rules and changes in statute governing how we perform our duties. As a member of the House Appropriations Committee, I have seen the hard work of my colleagues put aside for the expediency of Continuing Resolutions. Conferences between the House and Senate are practically nonexistent. We have abandoned practices of germaneness and permitting members enough time to review legislation before voting on it. Our schedules of work here and work at home conflict with the Senate's and there are too few opportunities for us to work together in bicameral and bipartisan cooperation. These problems are not due to lack of effort on the part of my Chairman or colleagues, but instead a reflection that the underlying process in which we operate is flawed.

Whether your ideology is to eliminate government or make it bigger, you have to legislate to accomplish it. Making the House a more productive, more open and more legislative body is a goal that transcends party, ideology, geography, economics, sociology, age or gender. We all want and need a House that works.

I am working with other members on concepts for change and I hope that together we can bring about the kind of change that makes a difference.