

Testimony of Congressman Kurt Schrader (OR-05)
House Rules Committee, Subcommittee on Legislative and Budget Process
Wednesday, January 6, 2016

Mr. Chairman, Members of the Committee,

Thank you for the opportunity to testify before you today on Mr. Ribble's bill, HR 1610, the Biennial Budgeting and Enhanced Oversight Act of 2015.

This is the second time I have joined Mr. Ribble in sponsoring this bill because it gives Congress the opportunity to return to doing the people's business.

In the past several years we have moving towards these process reforms in an unorganized way. We passed Budget Control Act of 2011 nearly four and a half years ago to establish spending caps for ten years. Almost immediately we modified the fiscal year 2013 caps with the American Taxpayer Relief Act of 2012. The caps for fiscal years 2014 and 2015 were then modified by the Bipartisan Budget Act of 2013. Just a few months ago we passed the Bipartisan Budget Act of 2015 making further adjustments for fiscal years 2016 and 2017.

Essentially, we have passed a biennial budget agreement every two years since 2011, but failed to complete the related appropriations process in a timely manner.

Talking about a "return to regular order" is looking to the past for answers that are no longer capable of resolving the problems we are facing today. The current process was established forty-two years ago by the Congressional Budget and Impoundment Act of 1974. Despite that legislation giving Congress an extra three months to complete its work each year all regular appropriations bills have only been passed four times, in fiscal years 1977, 1989, 1995, and 1997. Four times in forty-two years is better than at least one continuing resolution being required in each of the previous fiscal years since 1952, but it is still far from regular.

This past year, the House only passed six of the twelve regular appropriations bills. The Senate passed none. Instead we passed two continuing resolutions and a single omnibus appropriations measure into law near the end of the first quarter of fiscal year 2016.

Instead of shifting the deadlines of the budgeting and appropriations process to give Congress more time to procrastinate as the 1974 legislation did, this biennial budgeting bill gets more work done each time Congress sits down to do that work and provide federal agencies with budget certainty for a longer period.

The fact of the matter is biennial budgeting works. The biennial process does not reduce oversight – it enhances our opportunities to conduct oversight. We set a budget in the first year and watch how it is spent, then make corrections in the second year. We are not tying our hands, but giving ourselves the time to conduct real oversight and make adjustments.

Biennial budgeting also pays dividends outside of the budgeting process itself. I have many friends on both sides of the aisle who bemoan the amount of time we spend bickering and revisiting the same petty partisan disputes every year.

We can give ourselves some breathing room to get the rest of the people's business done by structuring the budgeting and appropriations process to operate more efficiently.

In addition to the time we gain to operate more efficiently as an institution, we will be making our budgeting and appropriations process more effective as well. Budgeting and spending responsibly is about planning ahead. Biennial budget gives us a better window, not a perfect window, but a better window to look ahead and make smarter decisions.

I look forward to taking your questions.