

September 19, 2019

Select Committee on the Modernization of Congress  
United States House of Representatives  
226 Cannon House Office Building  
Washington, DC 20515

Re: ***Recommendations for Improving the Budget and Appropriations Process***

Dear Chairman Kilmer, Vice Chairman Graves, and Members of the House of Representatives Select Committee on the Modernization of Congress:

We applaud the Select Committee's convening of a hearing on improving Congress's budget and appropriations processes. In the spirit of that conversation, we submit the following recommendations on improving Member access to spending information and resources.

- **Line item spreadsheets.** Every appropriations bill should be accompanied by a digital spreadsheet that contains all line items for the current bill and for previous years, adjusted for inflation, and made available 24-hours in advance of consideration before the subcommittee, full committee, and on the floor. This would support Member understanding of how funding levels have changed over time.
- **Congressional Budget Justifications.** Every Congressional Budget Justification from all three branches should be published online upon receipt in a central location for the current fiscal year and, where possible, for prior years as well. These justifications provide a plain language explanation of how an agency intends to spend funds and how its plans were implemented.
- **Member Day testimony.** All appropriations subcommittees should be encouraged to hold Member day testimony and public witness testimony. This may help surface new ideas.
- **Secure electronic submissions.** The House of Representatives should implement technology to provide for the secure submission of appropriations requests to members of the Appropriations Committee. Some current submission mechanisms may be vulnerable to inadvertent disclosure and cyberattacks.
- **Publication of subcommittee prints.** Appropriations subcommittee prints provide in-depth explanations of the legislative text contained in appropriations bills and should be more widely available to members and stakeholders.

- **302(b) allocation data tables.** Publication of historical 302(b) allocation, adjusted for inflation, alongside current proposals would make it easier to understand how appropriations subcommittee funding levels have changed over time and would provide a framework for committee votes on those allocations. Historical non-mandatory defense versus non-mandatory non-defense levels, adjusted for inflation, should be published as well.
- **Modernize CBO publication and disclosure practices.** The Congressional Budget Office should modernize how it discloses information, taking guidance from a recent civil society letter.<sup>1</sup> This should include publishing CBO reports at predictable URLs, publishing bulk data for CBO scores, providing longitudinal spending data, improving website search functions, encouraging participation in the bulk data task force, and better disclosure of the political activity and financial interests of CBO's panel of advisers.
- **Personal office staff for appropriators.** All members of the appropriations committee should be afforded a staff designee to assist with matters before the committee, not just appropriators who joined the committee prior to the 112th Congress.<sup>2</sup>
- **Normalize legislative branch 302(b) allocations.** Funding levels for the legislative branch have not kept pace with funding levels for other appropriations.<sup>3</sup> Funding levels for the legislative branch appropriations subcommittee should be normalized to bring it more closely in line with other appropriations subcommittees, and non-defense non-mandatory spending in general. This would ensure that Congress has the resources necessary to oversee the rest of the federal government.

Thank you for your interest in our recommendations. We would welcome the opportunity to discuss this further. Please contact Daniel Schuman, policy director, Demand Progress, at [daniel@demandprogress.org](mailto:daniel@demandprogress.org) or 240-237-3930.

Sincerely yours,

Daniel Schuman

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<sup>1</sup> [https://s3.amazonaws.com/demandprogress/letters/2019-07-08\\_CBO\\_Transparency\\_Letter.pdf](https://s3.amazonaws.com/demandprogress/letters/2019-07-08_CBO_Transparency_Letter.pdf)

<sup>2</sup> <https://firstbranchforecast.com/category/reports-analysis/>

<sup>3</sup> [https://s3.amazonaws.com/demandprogress/letters/2019-09-09\\_302b\\_Allocation\\_Letter.pdf](https://s3.amazonaws.com/demandprogress/letters/2019-09-09_302b_Allocation_Letter.pdf)