

July 22, 2021

Hon. Richard Shelby, Vice Chair
U.S. Senate Committee on Appropriations

Hon. Mike Braun, Ranking Member
Subcommittee on the Legislative Branch
U.S. Senate Committee on Appropriations

Re: Strengthening Article I with Policy and Oversight Capacity

Dear Vice Chair Shelby and Ranking Member Braun,

We the undersigned right-of-center organizations and individuals write to express our support for strengthening Congress, and rebuilding its capacity for policymaking and oversight.

As the Cato Institute recently wrote, Congress's institutional weakness "is a growing threat to liberty."¹ In recent decades, Congress has ceded far too many of its constitutional responsibilities to the Executive Branch. This means more policies are written by bureaucrats who never stand for election, and implemented by inefficient administrators and contractors with little meaningful oversight. A stronger and more assertive Congress can better fulfill its Article I duties as intended by the Framers, restoring balance between the three competing branches of the federal government.

Achieving this goal will require our elected representatives to stand up and reclaim their powers, including asserting congressional authority over regulations and regulators, leveraging the power of the purse, restoring effective congressional oversight, and placing limits on overly-broad executive powers and undue deference to executive agencies.² Reclaiming these responsibilities will require significant new staff time and resources, which have been depleted over the foregoing decades. As a first step, we must build up capacity in a Congress that is chronically understaffed and overworked. Enhanced staffing will allow Congress to stand up to the administrative state without being outgunned or outmaneuvered, and conduct its work with greater expertise and authority. Indeed, as a recent FreedomWorks report noted, "reducing Congressional resources has proven more likely to enable the growth of government rather than limit it."³

On the path to build a stronger Congress, the House legislative branch appropriations bill for FY 2022 contains measures necessary for this Congressional resurgence. This includes a 21 percent increase for personal, committee, and leadership offices; which would help restore staff funding levels to where they were a decade ago. It also provides for a 10.3 percent increase for the government's watchdog, the Government Accountability Office, which reports a savings of over \$100 for each dollar of its budget in curbing waste, fraud, and abuse. Even if not intended as such, these funding levels would pave the way for a legislative branch capable of keeping big government in check.

¹ William Yeatman, "[It's Time to Make Congress Great Again](#)," Cato Institute, January, 2020.

² See, e.g., Berin Szoka, "[Technical Expertise Is Just the Tip of the Iceberg](#)," Cato Institute, June, 2019.

³ Jason Pye and Josh Withrow, "[Restoring the Balance of Powers](#)," FreedomWorks, January, 2020.

Indeed, these resources, particularly for stronger committees and oversight capacity, are essential to help balance the unprecedented growth of federal spending during the COVID-19 pandemic and resist the Biden Administration’s agenda to expand the size and scope of government.⁴ Having this infrastructure in place *now* is particularly important as we head towards the 118th Congress, as it will take time to recruit and train new staff and have them in positions to be effective.

In recent decades, institutional demands have also shifted limited staffing and financial resources within Congress away from policy and oversight work. Over the past quarter century, the Capitol Police budget has increased by nearly 300 percent, and the Architect of the Capitol budget has increased by nearly 400 percent. Over the same period, budgets for GAO, CBO, and congressional committees have remained flat.⁵ While facilities and security should be provided for, these needs must not be prioritized over supporting Congress’s core responsibilities for legislating, conducting oversight, and assisting constituents. These core functions must be given appropriate consideration within the proposed increases to the legislative branch’s 302(b) suballocation.⁶

A stronger Congress is necessary to restore an accountable federal government and put it back to work for the American people. In the midst of our current period of uncertainty, we urge you to support the important work of restoring Congress as an institutional powerhouse capable of defending our Republic in the years to come.

Sincerely,

Zach Graves, Head of Policy, Lincoln Network; Visiting Fellow, National Security Institute at George Mason University’s Antonin Scalia Law School

Kevin R. Kosar, Resident Fellow, American Enterprise Institute;* Co-Editor, *Congress Overwhelmed: Congressional Capacity and the Prospects for Reform*

Jason Pye, Director of Rule of Law Initiatives, Due Process Institute*

Jon Schweppe, Director of Policy and Government Affairs, American Principles Project

Roslyn Layton, Co-Founder, China Tech Threat

Geoffrey Kabaservice, Vice President for Political Studies, Niskanen Center

Berin Szoka, President, TechFreedom

Jonathan Bydlak, Director of the Fiscal and Budget Policy Project, R Street Institute

Hon. Zach Wamp (Fmr. Representative, R-TN, 1995-2011); ReFormers Caucus Co-Chair

Hon. Ryan Costello (Fmr. Representative, R-PA, 2015-2019)

⁴ See, e.g., “[Federal Deficit Trends Over Time](#),” USASpending.gov.

⁵ Zach Graves, “[Rebuilding Congress’ Policy Capacity](#),” Federalist Society, July, 2020.

⁶ Daniel Schuman, “[A Primer on the Capitol Police](#),” First Branch Forecast, January, 2021.

Hon. Jim Kolbe (Fmr. Representative, R-AZ, 1985-2007)

Hon. Rick Lazio (Fmr. Representative, R-NY, 1993-2001)

Hon. Douglas Bereuter (Fmr. Representative, R-NE, 1979-2004)

** Affiliation listed for identification purposes only.*