

Hon. Mike Johnson
Speaker
U.S. House of Representatives
568 Cannon House Office Building
Washington, DC 20515

Re: Strengthening Congress through Appropriations

Dear Speaker Johnson and members of the House Republican Conference,

Congratulations on your election as Speaker of the House of Representatives. We, the undersigned right-of-center organizations and individuals, appreciate your commitment to strengthening Congress and write in support of the House's FY 2024 legislative branch appropriations bill. This bill strikes the right balance between fiscal responsibility and ensuring that the legislative branch has the appropriate resources to execute its constitutional responsibilities.

Our nation faces many challenges: an unsustainable fiscal path, with large deficits and ballooning obligations; global insecurity; and rapid technological innovation, forcing policymakers to respond quickly. These challenges all call for a strong and informed legislative branch.

The framers of our Constitution established Congress's authorities and responsibilities in the first article for a reason. Members of Congress are elected by the people to create our nation's laws and oversee the executive branch. For decades, however, Congress has deprived itself of the resources necessary to carry out its constitutional responsibilities.

Since the 1990s, congressional Republicans have promised to reduce federal spending and have led by example, cutting funding for the legislative branch first.¹ Since 1995, the growth of total federal outlays has outpaced legislative branch outlays by more than 2.5 times.² And during this period, legislative branch staffing—nearly half of which is staff

¹ Zach Graves & Kevin R. Kosar, "Want to Shrink Government? Invest in Making Congress Smarter," *RealClearPolicy*, June 13, 2019, <https://bit.ly/45SSRGx>.

² According to the Office of Management and Budget Historical Tables, between 1995 and 2022, federal outlays increased approximately 313 percent while outlays appropriated for the legislative branch only increased approximately 120 percent. <https://bit.ly/45ST5xn>.

based in district offices—has declined by around 20 percent.³ How can the legislative branch expect to reassert its constitutional authorities when it cuts its own resources before those of the agencies it oversees?

One of the main commitments the Republican Conference made to the American people last election was that the House majority would hold the Biden administration accountable. Committee staff play a critical role in the legislative and oversight process. For this reason, we are pleased to see that the FY24 legislative branch appropriations bill maintains the FY23 funding levels for committees at \$211.9 million. We hope that this continued support results in more effective oversight and policies that reflect conservative values.

Similarly, legislative branch support agencies are often unsung heroes. The Government Accountability Office (GAO), Library of Congress (LOC), Congressional Budget Office (CBO), Government Publishing Office (GPO), Office of the Chief Administrative Officer (CAO), and their various subsidiaries are an essential component of an efficient and effective legislative branch. Without their support, members and their staff would spend countless hours on duplicative efforts. We appreciate that the House Appropriations Committee has committed to maintaining or increasing funding for each of the aforementioned support agencies.

GAO in particular has one of the best returns on investment in the entire federal government. A review of public and non-public data found that GAO's work between 1999 and 2019 resulted in "more than \$1.1 trillion financial benefits to the U.S. government and more than 25,000 other government improvements."⁴ Put another way, GAO returns more than \$100 to federal coffers for each dollar spent on its work. We strongly support the decision to increase GAO's funding by \$15.7 million and hope that the Republican Conference will continue to strengthen Congress's watchdog.

The Republican majority in Congress is right to focus on the federal government's unsustainable fiscal path and should take additional steps to reduce the deficit and rising obligations. But appropriately funding the legislative branch to allow Congress to execute its constitutional responsibilities and oversee the Biden administration is a necessary first step to solving the nation's fiscal challenges.

³ Brookings Institution, "Vital Statistics on Congress," November 21, 2022, <https://bit.ly/3MhBo3Y>. The most authoritative data available ends in FY2015. However, based on legislative branch spending levels, we have no reason to believe this statistic has significantly changed.

⁴ Dan Lips, "Reviewing the Data: How GAO Saves Taxpayer Dollars," Foundation for American Innovation, September 2, 2021, <https://bit.ly/3Mmtt5d>.

For all these reasons, we encourage you to pass the FY2024 legislative branch appropriations bill.

Thank you for your consideration.

Sincerely,

Zach Graves

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Foundation for American Innovation

Adam Brandon

President

FreedomWorks

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Senior Fellow

American Enterprise Institute

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