



October 18, 2018

The Honorable Steve Womack
Co-Chair
Joint Select Committee on Budget
and Appropriations Process Reform
2412 Rayburn House Building
Washington, DC 20515

The Honorable Nita Lowey
Co-Chair
Joint Select Committee on Budget
and Appropriations Process Reform
2365 Rayburn House Building
Washington, DC 20515

Dear Co-chairs Womack and Lowey:

Thank you for your leadership of this critical effort to restore functionality to Congress' budget and appropriations processes.

We commend the leadership of the House and Senate Appropriations Committees for working across the aisle, committing to regular order, and—as a result—passing nine of twelve appropriations bills in the Senate before the end of the fiscal year for the first time since 1997.

This demonstrates the ability to make real progress; yet, three appropriations bills didn't pass both chambers on time. In addition, we acknowledge the challenge facing you next year as the current two-year budget agreement ends. The Joint Select Committee on Budget and Appropriations Process Reform (JSC) can build off the good work demonstrated this year and significantly restore Congress's ability to responsibly fund the government through a series of discrete reforms – many of which would simply enshrine recent advances.

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The last three budgets have applied for two years each. The Committee could regularize the length of these agreements by codifying a biennial budget, as recommended by the Bipartisan Policy Center's Commission on Political Reform that we co-chaired. Our commission also urged biennial appropriations to improve the overall functioning of Congress.

Additionally, the Committee should build on the success in using 'minibuses' to package annual appropriations bills for floor consideration. With partisanship and ideological battles at a fever pitch, it may be a bridge too far for Congress to separately enact 12 funding bills annually. Grouping them into three or four minibuses each year for floor consideration, however, would enable member input into these critical spending measures without jeopardizing Congress's capacity to act.

In our view, these steps are the minimum the Committee should take. It should also champion commonsense changes that would not only restore congressional effectiveness but also comity in the Senate.

As the budget resolution is not subject to filibuster, in recent history, it has passed both chambers on party-line votes. While the majority should have the ability to put its imprimatur on the budget, ideally, it should reflect bipartisan input. We encourage the Committee to enhance bipartisan input into the budget to help avoid the end-of-year showdowns that result in spending packages designed by a few and dropped on lawmakers at the last minute.

The ability to pass continuing resolutions to fund government beyond its fiscal deadlines has enabled members to postpone the inevitable and defer tough decisions. It has also precipitated countless, self-inflicted fiscal crises for the nation -- including real and potential government shutdowns. We encourage the Committee to require that

Congress meet certain budget and appropriations milestones before they can recess for congressional work periods.

Finally, the Committee should call for the creation of a second joint committee to reform Congress overall. Improving the budget and appropriations processes should be the beginning, not the end, of Congress's self-examination. A Joint Committee on the Organization of Congress could examine issues including the authorization process, floor procedures, jurisdictional alignment, and more.

We are ready to help in any way we can. We commend you for undertaking this important task.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Daschle".

Tom Daschle
Former Senate Majority Leader

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read "Trent Lott".

Trent Lott
Former Senate Majority Leader

cc: The Honorable Jodey Arrington
The Honorable Michael Bennet
The Honorable Roy Blunt
The Honorable Jodi Ernst
The Honorable Mazie Hirono
The Honorable Derek Kilmer



The Honorable James Lankford
The Honorable David Perdue
The Honorable Lucille Roybal-Allard
The Honorable Brian Schatz
The Honorable Peter Sessions
The Honorable Sheldon Whitehouse
The Honorable Rob Woodall
The Honorable John Yarmuth