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Welcome:

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P R O C E E D I N G S

MR. GALSTON: Well, good afternoon, one and all. I'm Bill Galston, a senior fellow in Governance Studies here at the Brookings Institution. On behalf of Brookings and R Street, another important research center here in town, and the American Political Science Association, I want to welcome all of you here in person and following this event via webcast to this discussion of recent steps to modernize and reform the Congress of the United States.

Few I think would contest the need for this effort. Fourteen years ago, my then-Brookings colleague Tom Mann and his AEI co-author Norm Ornstein labeled Congress the "broken branch." Rightly so, I'm afraid. Over the past decade public confidence in Congress has never exceeded 13 percent. It now stands at 11 percent. To give you some idea of the significance of this number, the Gallup organization's most recent survey of American attitudes toward Vladimir Putin gave him an approval rating of 22 percent, twice as high as the Congress of the United States. Houston, we have a problem.

The low esteem in which Americans hold their national legislature has not gone unnoticed. In recent years a substantial coalition of organizations has coalesced to work for congressional reform. Their work bore initial fruit in January of 2019 when the rules adopted by the new Congress authorized the formation of a select committee evenly balanced between Democrats and Republicans to consider steps to modernize the House of Representatives.

As soon as the Congress had taken this step the American Political Science Association decided to create its own task force of congressional scholars and policy to assist the congressional committee. Two research centers, Brookings and R Street, agreed to co-host this venture and to mobilize their own congressional experts on its behalf. We did so in the belief that even -- or perhaps especially in these polarized and populist times there's both a need and a place for nonpartisan expertise dedicated to the improvement of our governing institutions.

The purpose of today's event is to share with you an interim progress report on this venture. Here's how the next hour and a half will go. You'll hear next from Robert Lieberman, a professor political science at Johns Hopkins who outside of his day job also presides over a wide range of APSA activities that contribute to the wellbeing of our communities and our country.

Following Professor Lieberman's remarks you'll hear first panelists and then a panel discussion moderated by Michelle Chin, the academic director of the University of Texas Systems Archer Center. The panelists, whom she will introduce, will deliver introductory remarks and then will be seated for a panel discussion. The participants include the co-chair of the task force and three subcommittee chairs.

If everyone sticks to his or her allotted time, we'll conclude with about half an hour of your questions and panelist responses to them.

So, Rob Lieberman, your turn.

MR. LIEBERMAN: Thanks, Bill. I'd like to add my welcome on behalf of the American Political Science Association, with along with Brookings and R Street, convened the task force on congressional reform that produced the report that we're discussing today.

Let me offer just a little bit of background to where this effort came from. A little more than two years ago, then president-elect of the American Political Science Association, Roger Smith of the University of Pennsylvania, appointed an overarching association task force on new partnerships, which I've had the privilege of chairing. The impulse behind this larger task force was the need to expand the reach and relevance and impact of political science. Our discipline has made amazing strides in our ability to understand and interpret the world of politics and government, both in the United States and around the world. But Roger and I and our colleagues on the task force on new partnerships felt that political science as a discipline can and should do a better job of helping citizens make sense of politics, especially in a world, as Bill indicated, where polarization reigns, where civil discourse is increasingly elusive, and where fact-based nonpartisan analysis of public issues is under assault. And we believed that as a discipline we were not realizing our full potential to have a positive impact on the lives of our fellow citizen that truly matched the discipline's amazing record of scientific achievement.

Our task force focused its efforts on three critical areas, teaching, civic engagement, and research, and our principal research program that we've initiated in the Association was something we called a research partnership on critical issues. The idea here was that the American Political Association in partnership with research institutions from across the

ideological spectrum, as Bill has indicated, would convene study groups to tackle critical public issues and help show the way forward in areas where ideological debates have grown stale or needlessly polarized.

Fortuitously just about a year ago as we were developing this program on research partnerships and critical initiatives, the House of Representatives voted to establish its own select committee on the modernization of Congress, which gave us a golden opportunity to pilot this approach. The Association quickly teamed up with Brookings and R Street to convene the task force on congressional reform. We were fortunate enough to recruit two of our profession's leading experts on Congress to lead the effort, Frances Lee of Princeton, who you'll hear from in a moment, and Eric Schickler of the University of California, Berkeley. And what you'll hear today are some of the results of their extraordinary work.

Before I turn the floor over to my colleagues on the Congress project though, I need to offer a quick disclaimer on a couple of things. The disclaimer is that the views that you'll read about in the report and that you'll hear expressed on the panel today are those of the individual participants and not of the American Political Science Association. And the thanks are many. To Frances and Eric for their outstanding leadership of this effort, to Brookings and R Street, and particularly to Bill Galston and Kevin Kosar who convened a very, very fruitful partnership, to the Ivywood Foundation and the Hewlett Foundation for their generous financial support, and to the American Political Science Association staff, led by Steve Smith, our executive director, who is here, and especially to Amanda Grigg, the director of the Association's Centennial Center for Political Science and Public Affairs, who's provided really matchless support and leadership for all of the task force endeavors, including this one.

And with that, I will turn the proceedings over to our moderator, Michelle Chin of the Archer of the University of Texas, who will introduce the panel.

Thanks very much.

MS. CHIN: Thank you, Rob. And welcome. You know, as Rob said, APSA has a long history of providing expert advice on congressional reforms, but it has been a long time since a task force was convened by APSA to focus on institutional reform. So any of you alive in 1946

when the last task force was convened? (Laughter) It's been a long time. Hopefully it won't be that long until the next. So I'm excited to hear from our panelists. And the report, if you have a chance to read it, is very interesting.

So I'm going to introduce the speakers in the order in which they will present and then I'll introduce Frances Lee, who really doesn't need introduction, but we want to be fair.

Our first panelist is Lee Drutman who chaired the task force congressional capacity subcommittee. He is Senior Fellow in the Political Reform Program New American where his research focuses on party politics, Congress, lobbying, electoral reform, and money in politics. In 2016 Dr. Drutman received APSA's Robert A. Dahl Award for scholarship of the highest quality on the subject of democracy. He's back here in home territory where he was a fellow many years ago and is the author of a number of books, the most recent which is just out, "Breaking the Two-Party Doom Loop". I don't know if you have copies with you today, but I did see a copy hot off the presses.

Our next panelist is Kathryn Pearson. Kathryn chaired the task force subcommittee on staff diversity and retention. She is associate professor of political science at the University of Minnesota, also a former Brookings research fellow. So this place draws a lot of people home. From 1993 to 1998 she also worked as a legislative assistant for a couple of members of Congress. Her research is focused on the United States Congress, congressional elections, political parties, and women in politics. She's the author of "Party Discipline in the U.S. House of Representatives", which was I understand an extension of your prize-winning dissertation. So that's great.

Our last panelist is Kevin Esterling. Kevin chaired the task force technology and innovation subcommittee. He is professor of public policy and political science and also the director for the Laboratory for Technology, Communication, and Democracy at the University of California at Riverside. So we thank you for bringing the sunshine. His research focuses on deliberative democracy and he has been developing and evaluating technologies for new forms of citizen engagement with Congress. And, in fact, his innovative experiments are reported in "Politics with the People: Building a Directly Representative Democracy" that was recently published, a co-

authored book. He is also the author of "The Political Economy of Expertise: Information and Efficiency in American National Politics" and a co-principle investigator on NSF 7, NSF projects, totaling over $2.3 million, if I read your CV correctly. So kudos to you.

Before we explore their reports and hear from these panelists, I want to invite Frances Lee to explain the work of the task force. Frances co-chaired this congressional reform task force with Eric Shickler, as Rob mentioned. To many people she does not need an introduction. She's a noted Congress scholar and currently a professor of politics at Princeton University where her interests -- and also, I should add, holds the inaugural chair in congressional policy making at the John Kluge Center at the Library of Congress. She has the added distinction of being the only scholar to have twice received the Lynden B. Johnson Foundation's D.B. Hardeman Prize for best book on the United States Congress for her 1999 book with Bruce Oppenheimer, "Sizing Up the Senate", and for her 2009 book, "Beyond Ideology". She last year published her book, "Insecure Majorities: Congress and the Perpetual Campaign", and this year her co-authored book, "The Limits of Party: Congress & Lawmaking in a Polarized Era", will be published.

So I think I'm going to have to reorganize by library's Congress shelf to have a Frances Lee shelf. So please join me in welcoming Frances Lee. (Applause)

MS. LEE: Thanks, Michelle, for those kind introductions.

So it's normal for journalists, citizens, academics, and even lawmakers themselves to criticize Congress. But there have been particular times when concerns about Congress' ability to fulfill its role as a coequal branch of government had been particularly acute. We are undoubtedly in such a moment today. We obviously cannot and should not take for granted that Congress will measure up to the challenges America faces. It's also obvious that Congress itself does not take its own capacity for granted. Over the past year the House of Representatives has engaged in a process of self-examination and search for reform.

In January 2019 the House voted 418 to 12 to establish the select committee on the modernization of Congress. This committee has been very active. Under the leadership of vice chairs Derek Kilmer and Tom Graves, the committee has held scores of hearings and generated

dozens of recommendations. In convening this task force, APSA's goal was to assist in these efforts. The task force builds upon an important precedent. The American Political Science Association played an important role in Congress' landmark 1946 reforms. A report from an APSA committee helped shape those reforms. The leader of the APSA effort was George Galloway, who then went on to become the lead staffer for the reorganization effort on the Hill.

The 1946 reforms established the committee system in Congress largely as we know it today. They also began to professionalize the institution by providing it with staff expertise. Scholars usually date this reform as the birth of the modern Congress.

As in 1946, this task force was designed to work in conjunction with Congress' own efforts. Our task force placed special emphasis on the same topics that Congress referred to the select committee's attention in its rules package adopted in January last year. We also adhered to the same accelerated timeframe. The existence of the select committee has not been authorized to extend beyond the 116th Congress.

APSA president Roger Smith convened this task force in February 2019, right after the select committee was appointed. And then in getting to a consensus document, by the end of 2019 we certainly moved at an accelerated pace by the standards of academia. Now, in its design of the reform initiative, Congress made clear that its goals were explicitly nonpartisan in character. The select committee is made up of 12 members evenly divided between Republicans and Democrats and any recommendations it makes need to obtain support from at least two-thirds of the committee's members.

In that same spirit of bipartisanship APSA asked us to seek out the full range of views on congressional reform issues without any reference to partisanship or ideology. In accord with that mandate, my co-chair Eric Shickler and I assembled a broad and diverse group of experts from across the country and the Washington, DC think tank and advocacy community. The co-sponsorship of the R Street Institute and the Brookings Institution underscored the non or bipartisan character of our effort.

Working together these institutions helped us to reach out to a diverse array of experts on Congress inside and outside the academy. Nearly everyone Eric and I asked to

participate in the effort said yes. There was a lot of excitement among both academics and practitioners about the project. The result was a task force made up of 30 experts from across the country and here in Washington, DC. We are grateful for the time and the expertise that they dedicated to this effort.

For our first task force meeting in March of 2019 we asked participants to prepare short memos to help frame the discussion. We asked participants to identify our reform that had real prospects for consideration that might possibly make a positive different for congressional performance. Or alternatively, we asked participants to discuss a reform proposal that's in the mix but that is problematic or misguided in some way. So, in other words, we didn't want to be relentlessly prescriptive. We valued participants' expertise, not just for guidance about what reforms should be done, but also what reforms were just not a good idea.

At that first plenary meeting we heard briefings on a range of issues facing the legislative branch, from trends in congressional staffing to changing in internal procedures to the institution's technological challenges. Out of these discussions and initial memos we assembled a set of six subcommittees to study the issues in the more depth and to issue recommendations. Each of these subcommittees deliberated, compiled research, and exchanged drafts over the summer of 2019. Out of this work each subcommittee prepared a report that included an analysis of the problems that it was tasked with researching and an evaluation of proposed solutions. These reports saw wide circulation via legbranch.org, a website clearing house and blog maintained by R Street's Kevin Kosar, that's been a helpful site for resource sharing for the whole reform effort.

Throughout the process we operated under the baseline assumption that congressional reform is a hard, complicated process in which one has to be attentive to potential unanticipated consequences. In light of the often challenging and complex tradeoffs that they faced, subcommittees were not always able to coalesce around particular recommendations. In those cases their reports provided an analysis of the tradeoffs involved for each proposal. Our belief is that a clear view of the tradeoffs can inform the process even when consensus solutions are not feasible.

Drawing on the work of the subcommittees Eric and I compiled a draft report, we

then held another plenary meeting of the task force in September to go over the draft in detail. Eric and I then revised in light of the feedback and the discussions that occurred at that meeting. The report then obtained the approval of the task force late last fall.

For the heaviest lifting on this project we are grateful to the six committee chairs who took the lead in investigating the issues and building consensus around proposals. Three of these subcommittee chairs are here today and will offer briefings on their work. The three subcommittees represented here today were those that were able to achieve the most consensus about the directions reforms should take in their areas. The other three subcommittee chairs not presenting today were Molly Reynolds of the Brookings Institution, Nolan McCarty of Princeton University, and Jason Roberts of the University of North Carolina, Chapel Hill.

Even when the subcommittees were not able to coalesce around particular reform recommendations, they offered lucid and balanced analyses of the issues. We hope that these analyses, as well as the affirmative recommendations we're advancing in this report, will assist present and future reformers who are grappling with these challenging issues. (Applause)

MR. DRUTMAN: Hi, I'm Lee Drutman. I chaired the subcommittee on congressional capacity. And in this subcommittee we had a large amount of agreement that Congress needs more capacity. There are a lot of reasons for Congress' failures. At least one of them is self-imposed, which is that Congress has given itself a lobotomy by not investing it its own institutional capacity. There are now fewer people working in Congress than there were in the 1980s as everything about the world has become more complex, as the number of lobbyists has multiplied, and as the Executive Branch has expanded. And on issue after issue Congress is available in-house expertise is just plainly inadequate to support the fully informed independent judgment of executive proposals, of lobbyist proposals, and certainly inadequate to lead on policy innovation. And we're at a moment in which Congress has just ceded an incredible amount of its power to both the Executive Branch and lobbyists and I think this is an incredibly dangerous situation that Congress is the branch of government that is most representative, most capable of forging broad compromises in a pluralistic society. And so I think we all agreed very strongly that Congress should invest more in itself. But how? And that's what we spent most of our time

discussing.

Now, in the report we kind of lay out five main areas for expansion of congressional capacity, where to invest and how to invest resources. And we recognize that all decisions about how to invest in Congress are fundamentally decisions about how to allocate power within Congress.

So I'll walk through those five areas and talk a little bit about some of the pros and cons of different approaches and then I'll try to sum things up.

So first area is just that you could just expand the budget across all member offices. So every member office in the House has a member's representative allowance, an MRA, that is standard. They can allocate that money how they like. So the simplest way to increase congressional capacity would just be to give every member an increase in their own budget. Now, benefit of that is that it benefits all members equally, so everybody in theory could get behind it, but I mean one con of that is that actually a lot of members might not want to get behind it because they might view that as a political liability because members like the performative politics of sending money back.

Also, that money may just go to more PR for members, because in a top down centralized Congress it's very hard for individual members to actually engage in serious policy work.

You know, I think on the whole it would be a benefit for members of Congress to have more institutional capacity to engage with a wide range of difficult issues that they face. I understand the politics of it and I'll conclude a little bit more with that.

I think one, a more modest proposal at the very least might be to allow MRAs to adjust for the cost of living within the district, given that districts are much more costly to live in. And that would I think be more equitable to all members.

So the area of investment that I think we saw the most promise in as a committee was boosting the committee staff. As those of you who follow Congress closely, most of the serious work of policy making is done in congressional committees and the committee staffing levels have fallen most drastically since the '80s. And I think that would be the logical place to

invest in capacity.

Now, again, okay, can agree on that, but then how do you allocate that within the committee? Do you invest in nonpartisan staff who serve both parties, do you invest in partisan staff? So how do you balance the majority and the minority party? These are significant issues. Our feeling was that you should -- although we acknowledge that the idea of nonpartisan expertise is an idea, we also recognize that in these polarized times it is challenging to find nonpartisan expertise that both sides can agree to. So we felt that probably the most practical way to do it would be to increase staff for both the majority and the minority, try to get it as close to parity as possible, and try to create a situation in which the salaries were such that people would stay there for the long-term and not just work there for a few years and then take a job on K Street and make twice the salary, which is a serious problem in this town.

Another idea that we put forward that I kind of like would be a bit of a hybrid, that you would create some nonpartisan expert staff working for the committee and you could think of it as like having a kind of committee-based think tank in which people have kind of careers there alongside partisan staff. I think that would be a valuable hybrid. But I think it might differ by committee and some committees might want to experiment with different approaches.

A third area that we thought about was the support agencies which are really essential to Congress. And by support agencies, I mean the Congressional Research Service, the GAO, CBO, Congressional Budget Office, which are all professional organizations full of genuine expertise and independent fact-based resources. And all of them have seen their budgets decline over the last 40 years and have been expected to do more with less, which hampers those organizations, it hampers their ability to serve Congress. I mean most members of Congress and their staff will tell you that CRS is an incredibly invaluable resource for them and that they rely on CRS reports.

Another thing a lot of folks will tell you is that we miss the Office of Technology Assessment, which was an independent organization that did research specifically on technology. And there are constant efforts to try to bring something like that back to have more of an issue-based research organization. And I think maybe we wouldn't call it the Office of Technology

Assessment today, but something a little jazzier. But you could imagine a series of publicly funded think tanks that are research organizations that work on specific areas and their clients are members of Congress. I think there's incredible value in that and in terms of your bang for the buck it's really inexpensive. And one advantage of that approach is that you already have a trusted institution that you could beef up and it benefits all members of Congress because they could all take advantage of that expertise.

I mean the challenge with these institutions is that in order to maintain their support and legitimacy they have to engage in very neutral policy analysis and they don't want to be seen as partisan. And, you know, in these polarized times that becomes a bit of a challenge and sometimes it causes them to be a little overly cautious and does undermine a little bit of their relevance in some issues.

Now, one novel approach that we came up with is the idea of an in-house policy consulting service. You know, it's sort of like the role that many think tanks in this town actually play, which is that there are experts who work with members of Congress or their staff to develop particular policy proposals, but the idea here is rather than those think tanks being privately funded they should actually be funded by Congress and work like a consulting service where people who work in that consulting service would have different clients, different member offices, there would be a stock of different experts on different issue areas and they could work for different members or different offices on an ongoing or a quarterly basis depending on the demands for that expertise. I think that allows for some flexibility and it allows for folks to actually do deep dives with particular member offices on developing policy proposals. But broadly, we're very supportive, the subcommittee, of expanding these support agencies, which are crucial to how Congress does its job.

The fourth area that we focused on is congressional member organizations, formerly known as caucuses, which populate around Washington and are often really great forums for knowledge generation. Sometimes they can be spaces where there's bipartisan compromise reached, people get to know each other in different ways. And they can be somewhat flexible as issues arise. And here I think a somewhat straightforward proposal is just to give all

representatives, in addition to their member's representative allowance, MRA, a small budget to contribute to caucuses that they want to belong to and they could allocate based on their interests. And I think if we wanted to incentivize bipartisanship, Congress could give bonuses to those caucuses that are truly bipartisan.

So we thought about some proposals there. I think we're generally favorable to experimenting with those types of approaches. I mean one concern there is whether these caucuses would become too big and lead to too much fragmentation. But I think it's worth experimenting as a way to support members getting to know each other, work together, that's kind of separate from the highly politicized politics of something that is more public facing, like a committee.

A final area is leadership staff and here -- I mean -- we said -- we thought -- somebody -- all right. Sorry. I thought there was a comment from the crowd here, but it was a comment from technology. (Laughter) The thought that well, so much of policy making is centralized in Congress these days and if most stuff is going to be done from leadership of the party, at least give them more staff.

Now, we generally thought that that probably wasn't a great idea, but we'd rather put the staff at committee level and even if the committees work at the direction of party leadership, you know, well, that's okay. Our general feeling was that Congress should be more committee based and committee drive because committees are a space where you can forge compromises and develop more fluid coalitions, but we live in these polarized times and that may be hard.

So I think that the broad takeaway is that Congress should have more resources, should have more institutional capacity. And it would be pretty cheap if you think about it. The Federal budget last year was over $4 trillion and only $2.1 billion of that went to fund the House and the Senate, which is, if you're doing the math on the back of your program there, that's 0.05 percent of the Federal budget. So you could double that and nobody would notice.

Now, the obvious problem that we run into is the politics of it, which is that members of Congress don't like to be seen spending on themselves. Now, I think this is incredibly shortsighted. If members of Congress are not going to stand up for the institution that they belong

to, then who will? I think we'd see a boost in Congress' approval rating if they could actually solve some problems and they could actually solve some problems if they had the institutional capacity to do it.

So, you know, I think they should, we think they should, and the committee report has a number of ideas that I've outlined here on how Congress might go about doing that.

So thank you. (Applause)

MS. PEARSON: I'm Kathryn Pearson and I am the chair of the subcommittee on staff diversity and retention.

And before I start talking about the problem and our recommendations, I first want to say a little bit about the subcommittee itself and what we did. Well, as the chair of the subcommittee, we all have Ph.Ds. in political science, most of us focus our research on the study of Congress and have some expertise that have published in Congress, but we also all brought some expertise that was a little bit distinct to the subcommittee.

So I graduated from college and before I went back to graduate to get my Ph.D. came to the Hill in the 1990s with stack of resumes and an internship seeking a job on Capitol Hill. After I don't know how many informational interviews, I found a job and worked on the Hill for five years, actually for two different members of Congress for two different parties. I tell my students, you know, don't necessarily do that, but it worked out for me as an academic. (Laughter)

Casey Burgat, another member of our committee, he worked at CRS and now he crunches data the R Street Institute and is keenly aware of the limits of what we know about staff based on the data that's currently available. Menna Demessie was an APSA fellow on Capitol Hill and she is now with the Congressional Black Caucus Foundation already working on diversifying congressional staff. Bernard Fraga's expertise on the increasing diversity in America, was very helpful in shaping our recommendations. A dean at the University of Illinois, Tracey Sulkin is herself at times on the front lines of human resource issues. Michelle Swers has done countless interviews of members and staff on Capitol Hill. And finally, thanks to her experience working in a congressional district office in California, Vanessa Tyson was constantly ensuring that we didn't forget about the unique needs of district staff.

So in addition to the two larger group meetings in DC that we all attended, we spent a lot of time on conference calls, in Google docs, and actually met for two days at the APSA headquarters in Washington, DC to really fine-tune our recommendations.

And the challenge for us was figuring out how to improve staff retention and staff diversity. Congressional aides are members' primary institutional resource and members rely heavily on them to execute the many and varied functions of their duties as elected officials. From constituent casework to drafting and advancing legislative proposals, congressional staffer vital to each individual members of Congress and to the institution itself. And efforts to improve congressional capacity ultimately depend on our ability to improve the quality of staff, the diversity of staff, and its retention.

However, yet despite their acknowledge importance and influence, congressional staffers operate in a work environment that needs modernization. As a whole, the congressional staff lack diversity, particularly in more senior level positions, and members of Congress today have difficulty recruiting, retaining, and training effective congressional staff. Due to a combination of strenuous work demands, low and stagnant pay, and a lack of professional development opportunities, congressional staff commonly use Congress as a stepping stone to outside employment.

While the committee recognizes that every member's office has some degree of autonomy and that member styles may differ dramatically, we discovered that by modernizing its human resource operations and improving compensation and professional development, Congress could reestablish itself as a desired place of employment where talented professionals build long-term careers instead of just coming for a short time. Moreover -- and this is really important -- many of the reforms that we propose would actually save members and their offices time because they streamline human resources functions rather than leaving these functions for each individual office to do on a haphazard basis.

So our first recommendation really comes out of the fact that often times we had trouble identifying exactly what the problems are. So despite the knowledge that we had on Capitol Hill, the many phone calls that we made, the investigation that we did, it's pretty clear that the data

about staff are inadequate to really have a sense of what's going on. So our first recommendation is to improve the collection and dissemination of data on compensation and the demographic breakdown of congressional staff.

So in order to understand the problems and track progress in both staff retention and staff diversity, we need a better understanding of who is working on Capitol Hill. So we recommend that Congress require systematic information collection and dissemination. To achieve this goal, Congress can build on existing hiring practices. So offices currently complete a payroll authorization form when each hire is made and submit a mandated monthly verification of payroll data for all current staffers. We propose that new information is added. So in addition to filling out the payroll authorization form, offices also fill out a form that includes basic demographic questions about race, ethnicity, and gender, following established EEOC mandates, as well as questions about education and experience. And these staff level demographic data should be made publicly available -- and this is also important -- in a machine-readable format so that others can collect and analyze these data on the chief administrative office website.

We further recommend that the chief administrative officer of the House produce and submit to the committee on appropriations an annual report that reviews the salaries and benefits of DC and district office and committee staff in the House to evaluate first, the racial, ethnic, and gender breakdown of each position in the House and in each member's office, disaggregated by the DC and district office. And then, two, whether staff across offices and demographic categories receive similar pay for similar work. And, three, if there is a disjuncture, that the extent and nature of that disjuncture is broken out by office and job responsibilities.

So after we understand what's actually happening with staff in Congress to a greater extent than we do today, there are many recommendations that we made to increase workplace diversity. Cultivating a workforce that reflects the diversity of the Nation along multiple dimensions, including gender, race, ethnicity, region, and economic background is fundamental to achieving the representation of constituent views across America. And a more diverse workplace would better reflect the needs of a heterogeneous society and achieve better legislative outcomes.

So achieving a more diverse workforce must start with recruitment. And the task

force made several recommendations to help expand the candidate pool to provide offices with a path to recruiting highly qualified and more broadly representative workforce.

In 2019 the House itself created the Office of Diversity and Inclusion. We recommend that Congress strengthen and expand the role of this Office, placing it outside of party leadership and within the chief administrative office of the House that serves all members of the House and the staff. Because the Office of Diversity must be a nonpartisan and permanent office isolated from partisan politics and inconsistent budget appropriations.

Moreover, to be successful, the House must provide the Office on Diversity and Inclusion with consistent institutional support and resources according to best practices and human resources in the private sector.

So the responsibilities of the Office should be many. And in terms of recruiting a more diverse staff, the Office should maintain a public website with information about their diversity plan and evaluations of diversity efforts and also publicize information about internship and fellowship programs for underrepresented communities and conduct regular outreach. Workplace diversity can also be enhanced by increasing access to congressional employment opportunities. And the report itself makes many recommendations about how to do that.

Our third set of recommendations really dovetails with Lee Drutman's subcommittee's reports, and that is staff retention through better compensation. So I won't say too much about that, except that we saw from survey data that the top reason that staff tend to leave Capitol Hill, although the reasons are many, is because of low pay. And so we strongly endorse the recommendation of the other subcommittee to increase congressional pay coupled with an increase in member's MRA.

Relatedly, because of the discretion afforded members on how to run their own offices, each congressional office is markedly different in types of non-salary benefits that they offer to staff. Some offices offer student loan repayment assistance, some don't, some offer regular sick leave, some don't. And these office by office differences can be confusing to staffers and many staff are left unaware and uncertain about their non-salary compensation programs. And so we recommend standardizing such benefits across congressional offices to allow staff to better

understand and anticipate what compensation they'll receive on Capitol Hill so that won't also be a factor in choosing offices.

Our fourth recommendation has to do with advancement and professional development. A highly trained staff benefits the institution and increases the satisfaction of individual staffers. So we are recommending a well-developed training program that would offer education in both the legislative process and constituent work and that would also help staffers learn about long careers on Capitol Hill and help them envision a long tenure on the Hill.

So the first challenge is ensuring that all members offer their staff, or all staff are offered training through the Congressional Research Service. The CRS provides excellent nonpartisan legislative training, but not enough staff members take advantage of it. So we propose two types of mandatory training for all new staffers. At least two sessions of in person CRS legislative training and then online training in constituent service with different modules for DC and district offices. Current staff who have not completed this level of training should be highly encouraged to do so. This may require an increase in CRS's budget, but I think the tradeoff is well worth it. We also recommend that interns receive this training.

A second challenge relates to professional development in terms of career advancement. So we propose creating a more robust ongoing professional development program for current staff that would include regular life on the Hill events where panelists would discuss strategies for a long career on Capitol Hill.

And then finally, our fifth recommendation is about staff management and workplace climate. Office management and culture vary dramatically between member's offices. And while best practices in HR and management are followed in some offices, there's great variation. And in some offices poor performance in these areas come at a significant cost to members and the institution. And looking at a CMF survey, the second reason that staff are most likely to indicate that they left is that they were frustrated with the management of their office. So we also have a series of recommendations about training for chiefs of staff, for district directors, and then also training so that all employees know what their rights are on Capitol Hill.

Maintaining Congress' policy making capacity and co-equal role depends on

excellent staff, excellent staff who are excited to be on Capitol Hill and have a long-term commitment to be there. We are encouraged by the attention to staff diversity and retention issues so far from the select committee, and we hope that it continues and that they will draw upon this report. (Applause)

MR. ESTERLING: So I'm Kevin Esterling. I'm reporting on the work from the subcommittee on technology and innovation.

And one of the specific charges to the select committee was to make recommendations on the topic of technology and innovation. So if you look at its jurisdiction, that's one of the bullet points listed. And so Frances and Eric put together our subcommittee and put us to work and we said okay. But it became quickly apparent to us as we started our work that that topic of technology and innovation is not just broad, but it's very nebulous. And if you go to the jurisdiction, they don't really say what they mean by that. And so it just became apparent to us right away that we didn't have a good definition of the problem that we were tasked to solve, much less how to come up with recommendations to solve an undefined problem.

And so we found a really useful concept in the tech literature that's called the pacing problem, which is this concept that technology changes kind of at an exponential rate, maybe following Moore's Law, but that policy and regulation of technology tends to change at a linear rate, if at all. And so the difference between those two rates, the tech literature calls that the pacing problem.

And so we tried to apply this concept to Congress and what we found was that Congress actually had three different manifestations of the pacing problem. So Congress had kind of a triple threat pacing problem, if you will. And we labeled those three manifestations the external pacing problem, the inter branch pacing problem, and the internal pacing problem.

So the external pacing problem is the one that the tech literature is envisioning, which is that Congress is just having a hard time keeping up with changes in technology in the tech industry to make good legislation. And I think maybe humorously people would recall the Facebook hearings from a year or so ago that didn't go so well. But that really kind of reflects a Congress' sort of incapacity to develop expertise on technology. The inter branch pacing problem is that

Executive Branch also has a hard time keeping up with changes in technology, but it far outpaces the capacity to do so, and so that makes it hard for Congress to engage it its constitutional oversight role. And then the internal pacing problem is what we found to be Congress' near total complete incapacity to make use of technology in its internal operations.

And so those three aspects of the pacing problem we feel are kind of manifestations of this kind of underlying problem that Congress just has a hard time developing expertise on technology.

So one would hope that Congress would want to solve those first two pacing problems, right, making good public policy and doing good oversight. And our report has some recommendations that could help them to do that. But really what our report focuses on is helping Congress to solve the internal pacing problem. And part of that is because if we could help Congress put better technology in place to help it with its day to day workflow and to kind of improve staff capacity, then that might free up some capacity for the staff and the institution to work on those bigger picture things.

But the other reason that we focus on the internal pacing problems is that it should just be a no brainer, that it should be some really easy recommendations to make to the institution because no member of Congress benefits from bad technology. So there aren't stakeholders in Congress who are guardedly protecting the bad technology that they use and there's not kind of bad technology caucus out there that's kind of protecting that. And so our report has -- we give lots of kind of horror stories about kind of the bad use of technology. And I'm not going to delve into all of those, but I'm just going to mention the one that most people already know about, which is the constituent relations management software, CRMS, which is the software that offices use to communicate with their -- to sort of coordinate communication with their constituents. And I can tell you, you could go to any hallway of any of the House office buildings and talk to any staff member and ask them what they think about their CRM and you're going to get an earful about how it just doesn't -- they don't work. And it's really strange. It's crazy, right? Somebody once told me that member of Congress like to get reelected (laughter) and the CRMS is the software that helps them communicate with the people that reelect them. And there's lots of -- we have lots of stories like

that, that are just kind of head scratchers that just don't make any sense. And so the fact that Congress can't embrace new technology that literally makes every member of Congress better off suggests that there is something deeper, there's like a deeper organizational problem at work.

And so my colleagues on the task force document lots of dysfunctions in the institution and I endorse their work. But there's one dysfunction that's really relevant to the adoption of technology that we kind of focused on, which is the radical decentralization of decision making in the House for technology. So if you think about it, there's 20 standing committees, 441 member's offices, and then about a dozen kind of support agencies and other offices that support the internal workings of the House. And so the House -- just the House of Representatives has almost 500 different units in it and it turns out that pretty much every one of those units, for the most part, is entirely on its own to make purchasing decisions and to develop expertise and to decide what are best practices. And for these staff who are -- for offices that are understaffed already to begin with.

But if you think about the kind of the House as a whole -- and we actually piece together an org chart for the House, and if you look at the org chart, it turns out there's no office that -- like an IT office that is kind of the central player that kind of deploys and manages and recommends and trains on technology. It doesn't exist. So House Information Resources is not what I'm talking about. What I'm talking about is an office like I have in my campus, everybody at every university has, almost every firm has, every hospital has an IT office. And I know we always complain about our IT offices, but what they do is they deploy technology across our organizations. So what my IT office -- is called information technology resources -- and they do site licenses and they recommend software and they build infrastructure and they do training and they mandate security protocols, right. And they do all that stuff that kind of infuses my institution with technology. And there's just no such thing. There's no office in Congress that does that.

So that's the organization problem that we really focused on -- okay, cool -- and that we want to figure out to help Congress solve that deeper organizational problem. But we don't want to recommend to Congress that it put in place an IT office that's regulatory, like the one that we have. So at my university the IT office can tell us what to do because we're employees -- they

can push us around, but you can't put in place an IT office that's heavy handed and regulatory in Congress because you can't tell committee chairs how to run their committees and members how to run their offices. But we still want to have something that's central, that's kind of a repository of expertise and best practices.

And so what we came up with was our main recommendation -- and we've actually circulated this recommendation to the select committee staff, just informally as a two-page report. They seemed to like it. We'll see. But our recommendation is that they create something called the House Technology Working Group, which would be a series of teams that can come together from across the chambers. So people coming out of their silos and working together collaboratively on tech topics that are relevant to the institution. So in our proposal we call these teams task forces. And you could imagine -- the task force could be on anything, but you could imagine things like a cybersecurity task force, a legislative office technology taskforce, a district office technology task force, a committee technology task force, and an internal operations task force. Could be anything, but it could be those kinds of groups or along those topics.

And what these task forces would do would be to collaborate across, right, to share their knowledge across the silos, but also to consult with outside experts, develop their own expertise, facilitate experimentation within the institution with new technology and see what works and what doesn't work, come up with metrics for what counts as a successful innovation, and then curate and disseminate best practices for technology for the institution, and maybe even host training if they felt ambitious.

For governance, we recommend that there be an organization called the House technology leadership council that would be a member driven oversight board, not too different form the way the old OTA was organized with the member kind of oversight board. And then what the House technology leadership council would do would be to kind of set priorities and policies, make sure that the task forces have a little bit of funding and a little bit of staff support. And then you could imagine that this whole thing be organized under the committee on House administration and maybe specifically under the auspices of the chief administrative officer.

So our report is a little bit different, where we don't have kind of a listing of sort of a

series of recommendations. The way our report is organized is we have this one big recommendation and the we also list dozens and dozens of other recommendations for software and apps and solutions that also we think are really good ideas. But the way we wrote the report is to be really careful not to encourage Congress to simply layer new technology and new apps and new solutions on an inefficient functioning organization. Instead, the way we wrote the report is there's this one recommendation which is put in place, this House technology working group, and get it going. And then once that group is in place, then they can look at all of the dozens of recommendations that we make and other people make and work on them and see if those things work for the institution. But to really fix that underlying problem. And we think that this is a really easy recommendation that it is something that would cost almost nothing, right, because we're just talking about people informally getting together in these teams with a little bit of funding. But I guarantee you, there would be an immense amount of enthusiasm among staff and some members within the institution to do this. And I think that if they could put together this House technology working group, it would solve that organizational problem that I mentioned. And it would help to meet the current demands for technology, but it also could help sort of propagate new ideas for new types of technology that could enable the institution. And I think that this recommendation in a way would really -- maybe in a literal sense really help to modernize Congress more than almost anything.

So that's what we have to say. (Applause)

MS. CHIN: Great. Well, we are going to engage in a very short brief panel discussion and then we'll open it up to questions from the audience. We have a couple of interns who are roving with the mics. If you could raise your hands. So if you just raise your hand and we'll get the mics in place.

So you mentioned that the task force was on an accelerated time schedule and the question that came to my mind was these are great recommendations. Is there anything that you would have done differently or changed if you had more time?

MR. DRUTMAN: Should we each answer that? On behalf of the capacity subcommittee, I think we were pretty much in agreement and I'm not sure we would have come to

any different conclusions had we had more time. So I don't feel like we compromised our work in any way.

MS. PEARSON: Yes, we spent two really solid days in DC working together. Most of us on the subcommittee were able to attend. And we had already individually sort of thought about different aspects.

I think the one thing we might have done more of that we did do some of, but we would have increased, is talking to people who are currently on the Hill, both formally and informally. We did some of that, but I think more time would have given us more opportunities for those types of valuable discussions.

MR. ESTERLING: I don't think I would change anything. My team was very collaborative and as I mentioned, we really had to kind of work on the fly to even sort of think how to think about our topic. And it was really an amazingly fruitful and intellectually interesting exercise. We spent the summer on it and ended up writing an 80-page long document that was the underlying memo for our -- and then Frances and Eric were upset with us because it was 80 pages (laughter). They made us make it shorter.

But this has been just a truly amazing experience.

MS. CHIN: That's great.

From your perspective as the co-chair, were you satisfied with the timeline?

MS. LEE: I'm amazed that it came together. I mean everybody was operating on a volunteer basis and so to get people to write and to do the deliberation and to do this research and to assist in this way, we just had to rely on their public spiritedness and their good will. And that's not always a safe bet. (Laughter) But it happened to work out in this case.

MR. DRUTMAN: Well, it was such an important topic.

SPEAKER: Yeah.

SPEAKER: Yeah.

MS. PEARSON: Well, we all care about Congress.

MS. CHIN: Certainly modeling civility and collaborative.

So in the kind of academic atmosphere where you're thinking about problems and

obviously these are issues you've been thinking about for a long time, you've been writing about, you've been working on, in the cannon of political science research, these are issues that have existed for a long time. So if you look at this kind of disconnect between the practice of politics and the kind of theoretical understanding of politics, why are we still having this conversation or -- why is there still this trouble in accepting these recommendations or making the changes that the academics think are necessary?

MR. DRUTMAN: You mean like why doesn't Congress just take our report and enact it? (Laughter)

MS. CHIN: Yes.

MR. DRUTMAN: I don't even know if they've read our -- I hope they've read it. I mean the part of the challenge is they don't have time to read and think about these things. I mean I think that the modernization committee is a rare bright light in Congress actually having the time to think about itself and its importance and in our (inaudible) an incredibly unreflective institution at most time. So I think that's part of the challenge, and part of the challenge is that there are politics underlying all of this. And just because we agree doesn't mean that, you know, enough members of Congress are going to agree that these are good ideas, because it might change how they operate.

MS. PEARSON; I think my subcommittee was both very attune to partisan politics and political realities, but also tried very much to take into consideration best practices and, you know, EEOC guidelines and sort of human resource experts from outside the institution. So sort of a combination of what really makes sense, what are best practices, and then, okay, what would have bipartisan support, you know, what wouldn't alienate one of the two parties. And sort of, you know, separating the House Diversity and Inclusion Office from partisan politics, making it permanent. Sort of things like that with political realities in mind.

MR. ESTERLING: So I'll say the select committee staff has been great to work with. I don't know how much you all have interacted, but my group interacted with them quite a bit and it's just been an absolute pleasure working with them. And I think that they're very intellectually engaged in the political science of this, but then they need to bring things to the members. And the

way the select committee is moving forward is the way Kilmer and Graves are sort of moving forward is cautiously. In the current environment, that's sort of the best that they can do and they're doing it well. But I don't think the staff can just push everything in front of them. I think that they need to sort of curate what kinds of things that they're showing to the members that make it so that they committee can move forward in the way that they aspire to move forward.

So it's kind of a tough time to be doing congressional reform right now. But I'll tell you, the staff have just been fantastic to work with and they're super smart.

MS. CHIN: Do you feel from the technology perspective that that seems to be the most obvious place where, you know, as you called a pacing problem is observed, that members who are constantly on social media and connected in many different ways, that that's probably a more pressing reform than say staffing, diversity, or capacity?

MR. ESTERLING: So if you look at the recommendations the select committee has made so far, quite a few of them have been about technology and they have even said that they need to revamp the House Information Resources Office. But I think what we are pushing for is kind of a bigger -- it's bigger than -- it's sort of a change in how the organization functions. And I don't think that -- that's kind of the pitch that we're making to them, that we're not really going to solve the technology problem until that underlying organizational problem is solved. And that's a big ask. So I think they're very attentive. And they've had hearings on technology, they've made a number of recommendations on technology. But I think we would like to see them go a little bit farther.

MS. CHIN: Frances, I wonder, we only heard from three subcommittees, subcommittees that can find consensus. So there are three subcommittees that had a much more difficult time. I wonder if you might say a few words about those challenges.

MS. LEE: Well, the other three subcommittees dealt more with internal organization and procedure. So we had a budget and appropriations subcommittee, a subcommittee on committee processes and legislative process, focusing on departures from regular order that have become very prevalent in how Congress operates, and then a subcommittee on the calendar dealing with issues of how little Congress is in town, members are

here, and how that gets in the way of Congress' ability to do legislative work, and whether there are imbalances relative to Congress' representational role. So those were the questions that were dealt with, but all of those committees confronted very serious tradeoffs that made it very difficult for them to make recommendations along the lines of what we're presenting today.

Instead it was an analysis more of well if we do this, these are the following implications. So in the case of the congressional calendar, the (inaudible) tradeoff there of course is representation versus lawmaking. And members confront realities where they're expected to be in their constituencies. Their constituents expect them to be there. In a world of jet travel, you don't have an excuse not to go home anymore. So we are not in a position to tell elected officials the right way to do their job. So we lay out the tradeoffs and the difficulties associated with calendar as it currently exists. And that's what each of those other three committees needed to do.

With regard to departures from regular order in the legislative process, those frequently happen because the regular order results in impasses that have to be dealt with at a leadership level. And so if the legislative process, the regular order process is not working, the Congress needs to do something differently. Now, that has tradeoffs. So those aspects of the report are informative of the dilemmas, institutional dilemmas that Congress faces. But we didn't reach a set of recommendations generally speaking. There are some smaller scale recommendations in that section to the report, but those are tough issues for good reason.

MS. CHIN: Right. Sort of harkens back to something that, Lee, you mentioned in your remarks about the challenge being that you're asking political parties in essence to give up power. And this is a human organization. It's a constitutional institution, but it's made up of human beings, so to the extent that human beings are responsible for these decisions either to go along with the party leadership or to defect from the party leadership, these are challenges, particularly in the House, that we observe.

So to the extent that the recommendations you're offering or are suggesting really challenge the parties to give up some measure of power, how realistic --

MR. DRUTMAN: How realistic are they?

MS. CHIN: How realistic --

MR. DRUTMAN: I mean the parties have power because the members give the party leaders power. And if members collectively say we want more power for ourselves or we want committees to have more power, they can do that. I mean the challenge is that there's a reason that a lot of members want to delegate a lot of power to party leadership. Either they don't want to take the responsibility of legislating themselves, or they think party leaders are best empowered to deliver the policies that they would like to see. So there's a lot of bellyaching on Capitol Hill about how individual members have no power or Mitch McConnell has too much power, Nancy Pelosi has too much power, but they have power because the individual members delegate that power to them.

And so ultimately Congress does what its members collectively want to do, so its members have to collectively say we want to have power elsewhere than leadership. And until they do that -- I mean it's not going to magically happen on its own.

MS. PEARSON: And at the individual member level, increasing staff capacity and staff diversity -- I mean, sure, that may give an individual member a little more legislative oomph to challenge a party leader, but it could also help them with constituent services and a whole host of other things that wouldn't necessarily be a challenge to party leaders that hopefully members on both sides of the aisle could agree would be good for both congressional capacity and their individual careers.

MS. CHIN: In terms of the cycle, you've kind of alluded to this a little bit, the push for greater party leadership control over the committee process was itself a kind of reaction to exercise of power on the party of the committee leaders.

So do we think that if these reforms are adopted that at some point in the future we're going to be having a different conversation? Is this a cycle? And if it's a cycle, then what's the timeframe for the next reform conversation?

MR. ESTERLING: Probably it is a cycle. I mean the last time we had incredibly centralized leadership control was in the late 19th century, early 20th century, and then there was a revolt against strong leadership and then Congress became more and more decentralized over time until it was too decentralized. In other words, there's not order to this, we need to delegate

more power to leadership. Now everybody is complaining there's too much power to the leadership, but at some point, that probably collapses and then I think you're right. Then there's some period which we have a kind of golden middle period in which we're transitioning to something. And then -- I mean Congress is constantly changing and it's always reacting because you can't -- I think underlying all of these reports is that there are tradeoffs and you can never get those tradeoffs entirely right. You can just hope to overcorrect when you steer too far in one direction.

MS. PEARSON: But these recommendations don't get us to the place where committees were sort of in the age of committee power before the reforms of the 1970s. One of the reforms from Molly Reynolds' subcommittee that was not mentioned was actually to repeal term limits on committee chairs because of the problems that that has led to in terms of diminishment of expertise in the chair and retirements. But that was not discussed. But even that would not return us to sort of the age of the committee chair that we saw prior to the '70s.

MS. ESTERLING: So one thing that's interesting from the perspective of our subcommittee is that people tend to take the way Congress is as the way that it's always going to be. And it's interesting for technology that people have such low expectations that Congress can use technology. They can't even envision a Congress that uses technology to perform in a different way.

And so, in fact, not to disclose too much, but during our September meeting we had a long discussion about calendaring, as Frances mentioned, where people were agonizing about this tradeoff between the time you spend in your district with your constituents, but then you're not lawmaking in DC. And one of my subcommittee members -- and I was thinking about it too, that's a terrible tradeoff, and then one of my subcommittee members, Claire Abernathy, mentioned well, they could use technology to at least solve some of that. So if they're in their district, they can use Zoom to meet with their colleagues in DC to work on legislation or there's a number of us on the subcommittee that are working isn't new technology for constituent engagement where they can better engage their constituents using technology from DC. And so you could actually use technology to solve some of these long-standing problems. But the problem

is that it's hard to envision Congress using technology because it so persistently doesn't currently use it. So we tend to think of this as well that's just the way it's always going to be. But that's kind of something that we're hoping that we can kind of get people to think different.

MS. CHIN: The final thing I wanted -- and then we'll get to the audience questions -- but the final question I had for the panel is how do you measure success? How do we know that these reforms are working if they're adopted? (Laughter)

MS. PEARSON: I mean our recommendations are pretty specific, so I think to the extent that they're fulfilled, to the extent that the House Diversity and Inclusion Office does maintain a website and do outreach and that there are data that are collected from each office which includes this information that are machine readable. I mean it's sort of so that each metric is achieved. That would be progress.

MR. DRUTMAN: I think the bar right now is pretty low (laughter) for Congress playing a more active role in our political system. So I mean I think seeing Congress engage more in its constitutional role of actually being a source of policy innovation and genuine oversight of the Executive Branch would be a success. So I think basically, you know, anything that is better than what we have now would be a success, but I'd like something greater than that too.

MR. ESTERLING: I teach policy evaluation at my university and so evaluations serve -- that's kind of built into the plan of kind of using developing metrics and what counts as a success as part of what our recommendation is, yeah.

MS. CHIN: That's great. We can go to audience questions. Yes, sir, in the back.

MR. SCHOETTLE: Thank you. I'm Peter Schoettle and I ran the Brookings Legis Fellows program for a dozen years.

We're in the middle of a presidential election and there's fierce opinions on both sides. It's also a congressional election. And I think many of us would agree that Congress is broken. Why is there no large public outcry to fix Congress? I hear almost nothing. It's almost silent. And we're at an 11 or 12 percent approval rating. How come?

MS. LEE: I mean one answer to that paradox is that we elect individual members of Congress who are not responsible for Congress as an institution. In fact, in many cases, these

individual members run against the institution that they then serve in. So no one is accountable for Congress as a whole. That may be one of the reasons for Congress' failure to invest in itself on many fronts, because members don't see their interest as fully aligned with the institution, they're not accountable for the institution's outcomes, they're accountable to their constituents for impressing them with the good job that they do, for the positions that they take, for the votes that the cast, but not for the performance of Congress as a whole.

MR. SHOETTLE: What about the leadership?

MS. LEE: I mean the leadership are not accountable for Congress, they are accountable to the constituencies that put them in their position, the members who put them in their position. It's still not an institutional accountability on the scale of what would be needed for the public outcry. You know, who do you blame for Congress as a whole? You know, there isn't a single site of responsibility for that.

MS. CHIN: In the back.

SPEAKER: Hi. Thank you for your work.

So do you think in that respect that gerrymandering or how the Congress uses their time would be the bigger issue in terms of them being able to look at this and want this work that you've done?

And one other question, are you going to follow up?

MS. LEE: We didn't pursue electoral reform as part of our effort because it was not within the scope of the issues outlined for the select committee on the modernization of Congress. That helped to guide our effort. I mean there are many topics in congressional reform that we -- even though this is a length report -- that we did not tackle. And electoral reform, campaign finance reform, those were both beyond the scope of what we dealt with.

SPEAKER: Are you going to follow up?

MS. LEE: Well, we have fulfilled our mandate to the American Political Science Association (laughter) as of this juncture. So that's an ongoing question.

MS. CHIN: There's a question here, fourth row in, fifth row in. Yes.

SPEAKER: Hi, good afternoon and congratulations on this work.

A part of your recommendations for the Diversity and Inclusion Office have already been adopted. The House has approved the hiring of a diversity and inclusion officer. She is in place.

SPEAKER: Oh good.

SPEAKER: And so congratulations to the work that you've done; take credit for it. (Laughter)

Now the question is, you know, rallying 500+ members and getting them to abide by and even have an interest in diversity and inclusion and equity, do you have any recommendations or suggestions for the person who is stepping into this role? And it's not me by the way. (Laughter)

MS. PEARSON: Thank you. Yes, when we met in June the Office had been created, but it was not yet staffed. And one concern that we had was that -- you know, Democrats came into Congress and created this and we wanted to make sure that it was permanent, would remain the next Congress no matter who has majority party control, and that it would get enough resources so that as its role would expand it wouldn't just be one person.

But it is a tough job. But I think one of the reasons why we started with the necessity of collecting good demographic data from every office and putting it on line in a machine-readable format and then having the chief administrative office presenting it to the appropriations committee every year so that there was much greater awareness and much greater transparency. And then hopefully members would be incentivized to go to the diversity and inclusion office and come up with a plan if their office wasn't very diverse. And, in addition -- I sort of went quickly through some of the recruitment and hiring -- we also recommend a searchable database where job candidates could voluntarily include demographic information. They would not be required to, but they could so that if members were trying to improve the diversity of their office, you know, they could no longer say well, you know, we don't know where to find diverse candidates because in fact candidates could disclose this information in a central way as well.

And so at the end of the day, members still have to be incentivized to make changes politically and sort of personally, but we're hoping that all of these recommendations would

really help in that process, along with a permanent and sufficient appropriations to the office.

MS. CHIN: We'll come here to the front -- I'm sorry, to the third row in. This gentleman here. Thank you.

SPEAKER: An observation and a question. I'm an APSA member and I was a Brookings Fellow during Watergate.

The observation is that in many countries that we may all be familiar with have sort of luddite predilection in terms of technology and government which protects to a certain the members who are in place, stability. And it seems to me that it might be worth considering that. If Congress members could have anything, such as software that could communicate with their constituents easily, then their constituents could have it almost instantaneously and it would be like them having a machine or a gun that could shut everybody else up. They can have it all alone, that would be fine, but if you make it Congress-wide, then the other 537 members have it. And it is destabilizing because right now they don't have equal resources in their (inaudible). So it's a consideration.

The question, however, is about something that is more behavioral than theoretical. You pointed out the departure point for the task force was the evident decline of congressional assertiveness and the submissive to -- from the imperial presidency -- you didn't say that, but I'm assuming that to the war power, et cetera. And so I'm simply -- not about the environment politically, but about the behavior of Congress at points in your study in committees and elsewhere when people decide to, you know, toe the line of the White House or anything else. Are there any references or conditions that indicate concession?

I mean for the moment we see a lot of things going on, but are there some common denominators that you have observed in your collections of background reading or in your actual interviews that might give an indication of what processes at committee level or elsewhere indicate Congress is about to bend over?

MS. CHIN: We'll go to you next.

No, go ahead.

MS. LEE: Well, with respect to your question about Congress' assertiveness

relative to the Executive Branch, we did not take as our position as the goal of our task force to increase Congress' force relative to the Executive Branch. We wanted to help Congress work better by its own mights, whatever those are. So you don't prescribe to Congress how it should use its powers, but Congress can work more effectively according to the goals that it sets for itself. We looked to the select committee's jurisdiction, what are the issues they see a pressing need to work on.

So we want Congress to be able to play its co-equal role in the constitutional system, but we didn't prescribe that Congress needs to check the Executive Branch to a greater extent than it currently does. We saw that as a political matter beyond the scope of our work.

MR. ESTERLING: A quick point on the technology point. So my colleague Brad Fitch is here from the Congressional Management Foundation, and they produce these reports that show how already offices are fully inundated with electronic communication from constituents. So what a number of us are working on and what we worked on we mentioned in our report, is a number of us are looking for technology solutions that enable members' offices to extract better insights and to really understand sort of the nature of communication that they're getting, to sort of -- because they're already inundated. So maybe to find ways to help them with that.

MS. CHIN: If we can have two questions, if you can ask the questions and then answer them. This lady and then in the middle. Sorry.

SPEAKER: Thank you very much. And thank you for your efforts.

I'm beginning to understand that your task force was more on internal procedural attempts to better Congress. I do have a question. Which subcommittee, if any, addressed perceived legislative corruption on the Hill originating from lobbying influences? Was there any subcommittee that addressed that?

MS. LEE: I would say two -- oh, sorry.

MS. PEARSON: Oh, no, go ahead. I --

MS. LEE: Two subcommittees spoke to that. The congressional capacity subcommittee was very concerned with lobbying influence. And one of the reasons why Congress should seek to beef up its internal capacity to evaluate policy proposals is so that it would be less

reliant on outside sources of information, like lobbyists.

So it's in the background, but it was not -- we did not advance proposals around lobbying regulation. You know, that also not being within the scope of the issues referred to the select committee.

The work on the subcommittee on staff retention and diversity also dealt with issues of internal management, where there have been a number of scandals on the Hill relating to management of staff that their recommendations would speak to and help to address going forward.

MS. CHIN: Last question.

MR. WOLFENSBERGER: Don Wolfensberger, former Hill rat and current think tank cellar dweller. (Laughter)

A political scientist recently wrote -- I can't remember who it was -- that Congress really isn't interested in beefing up its capacity for problem solving and policy making, that it's really driven by the reelection imperative. And I think you can see this reflected in the hires, that members have and leadership have more communications experts for messaging and fewer and fewer policy experts.

So I'm very much sympathetic with what you all are trying to get at, Congress should do a better job of identifying our problems and solving them, but are they really interested in doing what we think they should be doing.

MR. DRUTMAN: I think some members are and some members aren't. But I think that the problem is that there are a lot of folks in this country who might want to run for Congress, and then they look at what the role of a member of Congress is now and they say, you know, I've got better things to do. I'm not going to tear my family apart and spend half the time in Washington and, you know, at a --

So I think part of the challenge is there's a sort of chicken or egg dynamic here, which is you want to build a Congress that attracts people who are seriously interested in policy, but you can't do that until members are willing to invest in the resources that it would take to attract those kinds of people. And we're on the opposite downward spiral in which people who are

interested in serious policy making are retiring and leaving and the people who come are just people who want to be on TV more and more.

MS. PEARSON: Right. And the same dynamic is true at the staff level. So with better training, better pay, people who really want careers as policy experts in Congress, hopefully that would help improve the staff as well.

MS. CHIN: Well, we are out of time. And I know that there are other questions. This is a relevant issue.

Any last words?

I want to thank you all for coming, thank you for your interest and your support. (Applause) Thank you to Brookings and R Street and APSA. Have a great day.

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