

Speaker Ryan: Urges bipartisan budget panel to advance bold reforms this year

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WASHINGTON—Testifying today before the [Joint Select Committee on Budget & Appropriations Process Reform](#), House Speaker Paul Ryan (R-WI) urged lawmakers to advance reforms that will enhance oversight and accountability over the way taxpayers dollars are spent. This bipartisan House-Senate panel, [established by the Bipartisan Budget Act](#), is required to hold public hearings, and vote on its findings and legislative recommendations no later than November 30, 2018. Following is Speaker Ryan's prepared testimony, which was submitted into the record:

Thank you, Co-Chair Womack and Co-Chair Lowey. I very much appreciate the opportunity to address this committee. In some way, it brings me back to my own days chairing budget reform hearings.

Of course, this panel has a much bigger, and more urgent, task. As things stand, we are simply falling well short. We continue to fail the taxpayer, but worse, we continue to set ourselves up to fail.

It is clearly time for a new approach.

I testify today as someone who has been on both ends of this process. As Budget Chairman, I recognized, and often lamented, that the budget process was broken. Not until I became Speaker did I realize just how broken the process truly was.

Whenever there is a new Speaker, there are hopes for a better process. Members clamor for more influence and more input. Given my committee background, I have certainly shared, and worked to implement, this imperative. On any number of legislative priorities, from tax reform to the farm bill to the highway bill, committees take the lead on major legislation, and see it through.

The budget and appropriations process begins with the same good intentions, if not the best foundation. The timeline is always tight, even under the best of circumstances, leaving little to no room for detours.

Invariably, the process seizes up, and not long after, falls apart. As the clock ticks down, the final decisions are kicked up to leadership, which kicks back a final measure that members find unsatisfactory.

Even "organized chaos" would be too generous a description of all of this.

To me, all these omnibuses and continuing resolutions are little more than local anesthetics. The pain goes away, but the problem does not. It just feeds on itself, fueling pessimism on all sides. Members become less engaged, and the public becomes more disenchanted.

With each stumble, we are handing over more spending decisions to the executive branch. We are squandering our oversight duties as an institution. We are abdicating one of our most fundamental constitutional responsibilities: the power of the purse.

As an unapologetic optimist, I believe we can solve any tough problem, even this one. The reforms we need are bold, but they are right in front of us. We have been debating them for years, decades even.

We may not be able to change the deadlines, but we can change the calendar. Look at what we are doing right now, trying to get an entire appropriations process done in a span of—what—four months?

Biennial budgeting offers a path to rewriting the process, not just reforming it. It makes budgeting an ongoing process instead of all these demoralizing fits and starts. It brings renewed transparency and accountability, setting us up to be better stewards of taxpayer dollars.

These proposals have taken a number of forms over the years. In multiple Congresses, I introduced the Biennial Budgeting and Enhanced Oversight Act.

One recent proposal, offered by Chairman Enzi, calls for a budget resolution that covers both years, with half of the appropriations measures considered in the first session, and half in the second session. I strongly support this idea.

If properly implemented, this will empower members to do a deeper dive on the most troublesome issues and enhance their ability to oversee the executive branch. It will reinvigorate member participation in the budget and appropriations process. It will enhance the importance of reconciliation, which is absolutely critical to addressing mandatory spending and the major drivers of our debt.

We know from recent history—from the budget accord Sen. Patty Murray and I reached in 2013 to the one Congress enacted earlier this year—that two years is about the time span for congressional agreements on discretionary spending. So let's make this our standard practice.

Now I know that, no matter how good the idea is, there are always real obstacles to implementing reforms. But there is no substitute for political will in solving our structural budget problems. This panel was given a mandate to produce recommendations, and it is comprised of leaders from the committees of jurisdiction.

I would also note that it is extraordinary—quite possibly unprecedented—to have both the Speaker and the Minority Leader testify before the same committee on the same day. This should serve as a signal of how seriously we take your work.

Consider the stakes here. Last fall, the House passed all 12 appropriations bills on time—the first time we had done that since 2009. But the last time both the House and the Senate passed all 12 bills on time was in 1994. Only 12 percent of the current members were here for that. I was a think-tank staffer at the time.

A generation of the people's representatives have become accustomed to, if not acclimated to, a failed budget process. This has to change, and soon. That is why I urge this committee to reach a bipartisan consensus, and submit recommendations to the full Congress.

Do not underestimate your ability to move this dialogue forward. Do not underestimate your capacity to lay the groundwork for long-term reforms. Do not squander this opportunity to advance one of the single biggest things we can do for the American taxpayer.

I stand ready to assist this panel in any way I can.

Thank you for taking on this task.