



## PROMOTING BIPARTISANSHIP IN AN ERA OF POLARIZATION: THE HOUSE SELECT COMMITTEE ON THE MODERNIZATION OF CONGRESS

*Martha Coven and Elliot Mamet drafted this case study based on interviews conducted in July, August, and September 2024. Case published November 2024*

### SYNOPSIS

In 2019, amid record high levels of political polarization, the US House of Representatives established a Select Committee on the Modernization of Congress. The committee's goal was to "make Congress work better for the American people," and from the beginning, the chair, Rep. Derek Kilmer, a Democrat from Washington state, was determined to do so in a bipartisan manner. Kilmer and his fellow committee members faced a number of challenges. Some of the challenges were expected, such as figuring out how to do the committee's work and build consensus. Some were unexpected, such as a global pandemic that kept committee members physically apart and the January 6, 2021, attack on the Capitol, which strained relationships among committee members. The committee wrapped up its work after four years. It accomplished some modest structural and operational reforms, but perhaps more important, it built strong bipartisan relationships among its members and modeled a way of working together in Congress across differences.

## INTRODUCTION

Derek Kilmer was considering running for a seat in the US Congress in 2012. As a Democratic state senator from the Olympic Peninsula of Washington state, he lived about as far as you can get from Washington, D.C., in the Lower 48. A former management consultant, Kilmer approached the decision analytically and sat down to make a pros and cons list with his wife. One major con, in addition to time away from family, was the political dysfunction in the nation’s capital. Then Kilmer realized that that con might be a pro. “Hey, maybe that’s the reason to do this,” he recalled thinking. “It’s *because* it’s a mess.”<sup>1</sup> So he ran for Congress and set about trying to clean up that mess.

Polarization in Congress had risen steadily since the 1970s—as it had across the United States more generally. An analysis of congressional voting records found that Republicans and Democrats were further apart ideologically than at any point in the previous 50 years.<sup>2</sup> This trend affected state legislatures too.<sup>3</sup>

In the United States, partisan acrimony often led to gridlock because legislators tended to be reluctant to work across party lines to get things done. Bipartisanship had nearly always been necessary to enact federal legislation in the United States, where divided government had become the norm. Even when one party secured a trifecta and controlled both chambers of Congress as well as the White House, as happened at the start of the Trump and Biden presidencies, Senate rules required a 60-vote supermajority to overcome a filibuster. Neither party had held such a supermajority since 2010. Limited workarounds for budget and tax legislation existed, but generally speaking, bills couldn’t move unless they had bipartisan support.<sup>4</sup> Moreover, persistently narrow margins in Congress had created what Princeton University political scientist Frances Lee called “insecure majorities,” wherein the two parties perpetually campaigned against each other rather than looking for ways to work together on legislation.<sup>5</sup>

Even very popular legislation was proving difficult to pass. After the Sandy Hook Elementary School shooting in 2012, polls indicated that 90% of Americans favored requiring universal background checks for gun purchases, yet legislation to require universal background checks was voted down in the Senate after failing to reach the 60-vote supermajority threshold.<sup>6</sup>

To be sure, though, legislating hadn’t ground to a halt—despite appearances.<sup>7</sup> As Dartmouth University professor Sean Westwood, director of the Polarization Research Lab, argued, media coverage of the most-polarizing politicians distorted public perception. “Firebrands are absorbing all of the media attention,” Westwood has contended, adding, “Congress is not nearly as dysfunctional or polarized as people may think.”<sup>8</sup>

Still, Kilmer and others, on both sides of the aisle, were frustrated with how difficult it was to get things done. They responded by launching an effort to modernize Congress and improve its capacity not just to facilitate bipartisan agreement—though that was a motivating goal from the start—but to “make Congress work better for the American people.”<sup>9</sup>

The question for Kilmer and other lawmakers who wanted to bring about more bipartisanship in Congress was: How?

## THE CHALLENGE

On January 4, 2019, the House of Representatives voted 418–12 to establish the Select Committee on the Modernization of Congress.<sup>10</sup> Seven members spoke on the House floor in favor of the establishment of such a committee. Rep. Tom Cole, a Republican from Oklahoma, called the plan “a serious, well-intentioned proposal to create a bipartisan committee to produce a bipartisan product aimed at improving the way Congress functions now and into the future.”<sup>11</sup> Representative Kilmer also mentioned his high hopes for the committee. “I truly believe that this select committee will help us chart a better course,” he said, “one where consensus is not only sought but actually achieved. . . . I believe that modernizing this institution is the key to settling our diverse country’s most pressing challenges and restoring the public’s faith in Congress.”<sup>12</sup>

Congress had periodically undergone reform efforts in the past, including in the 1970s and 1990s, though the record of those reforms was generally mixed.<sup>13</sup> Precisely how this particular Modernization Committee came to be is not entirely clear. The idea may have first percolated at a monthly breakfast of former congressional staff in the early 2010s, after which a coalition of outside organizations began advocating for a Modernization Committee. In 2015, Illinois Reps. Darin LaHood, a Republican, and Dan Lipinski, a Democrat, introduced a bipartisan bill proposing to create such a committee—after a particularly acrimonious period during which a Republican-led Congress struggled to reach agreement with Democratic President Barack Obama on fiscal legislation.<sup>14</sup> Notably, both LaHood and Lipinski had fathers who had served in Congress. All four legislators were known to work across party lines. In addition, as former committee staff member J. D. Rackey said, new members of Congress were experiencing a “growing frustration about how the institution was running, not just from a legislative lens, but also the outdated technology and antiquated operations.”<sup>15</sup>

In her memoir, Speaker Nancy Pelosi, a Democrat from California, specifically credited Kilmer, along with then Rep. Joe Kennedy, a Democrat from Massachusetts, with suggesting creation of the committee after the 2018 congressional elections.<sup>16</sup> At the time, the Democrats had just gained a majority in the House. *The Washington Post* reported that Pelosi “agreed to demands from a bipartisan group of moderates for internal reforms, including the creation of this committee to study and recommend institutional changes” as part of her effort to secure enough votes to be elected speaker.<sup>17</sup>

The committee had no formal legislative authority. The House of Representatives had two types of committees: standing committees and select committees. Standing committees had the power to report out legislation that could go on to be considered by the full chamber. In contrast, the House

generally did not give select committees, like the Modernization Committee, any legislative authority.<sup>18</sup> The Modernization Committee could issue recommendations, but other committees would be required to formally approve relevant legislation—especially the Rules, Appropriations, and House Administration Committees. In the case of recommendations related to committee practices, they would need the chairs of other committees to decide to change their procedures. Plus, as with all House committees, their ideas would generally need support from the congressional leadership to advance.

Moreover, because Senate leaders were not outwardly interested in getting involved with this modernization effort, the committee had to focus primarily on House-only actions and not bicameral congressional reform.

## FRAMING A RESPONSE

Before it could develop recommendations and get buy-in on those recommendations from the broader Congress, the Committee had to determine how to operate and conduct its work, including how to build consensus among its members.

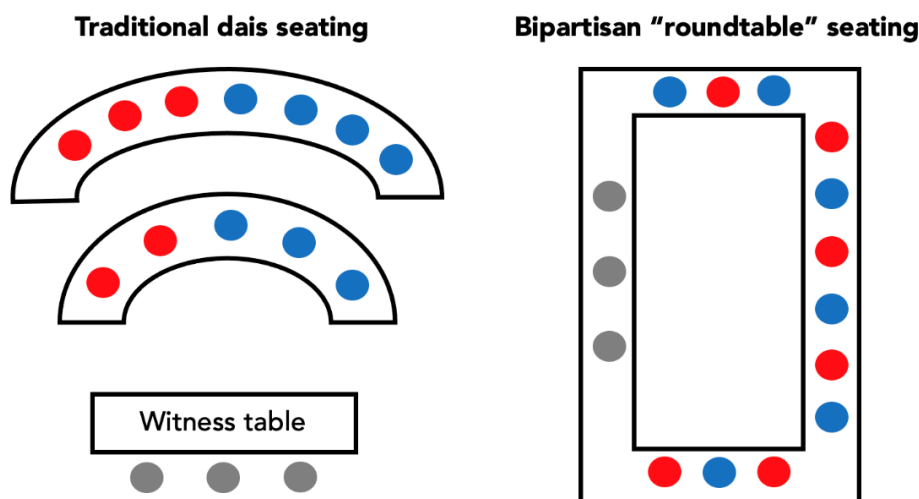
The Committee had an equal number of Democratic and Republican members, which was unusual in Congress, where the majority party typically held more seats on a committee. Kilmer insisted on this arrangement from the start, when Pelosi asked him to chair the committee. “If reform is going to be durable,” he advised her, “it has to be bipartisan.”<sup>19</sup> The committee also required a two-thirds vote to approve any recommendations—so as to ensure broad bipartisan support.

Due in part to their professional backgrounds, the committee members had a strong commitment to improving the capacity of Congress to do its work. Of the 12 original members, 5 were former state legislators and 4 were former congressional staffers.<sup>20</sup>

The appetite for working across party lines was palpable from the start. The first Republican vice chair, Tom Graves of Georgia, said shortly after the committee’s creation that “people really want to work together,” adding, “there is a strong yearning and desire for bipartisan outcomes and results.”<sup>21</sup> And Graves was no moderate; as Kilmer noted, Graves “came to Congress as a self-described bomb-throwing Tea Partier”—a reference to a conservative populist movement of the time.<sup>22</sup> In fact, Graves was rated as more conservative than 96% of his Republican colleagues.<sup>23</sup>

The committee began its work with a bipartisan agenda-setting retreat. The members opened the retreat with an exercise grounded in organizational psychology research focused on breaking down barriers between people who view themselves as part of warring factions. Members were asked to discuss why they had come to Congress and how the experience had met or failed to meet their expectations. Kilmer recalled, “What was stunning was to hear story after story of Democrats and Republicans who were inspired by a virtuous mission and came with good intentions. They were all frustrated with being part of an

**Figure 1. Traditional congressional committee seating arrangement versus roundtable format used by the Modernization Committee.**



*Source: authors*

organization that was punching far below its weight, which built a common bond.”<sup>24</sup> By focusing on shared interests rather than political differences, the committee was able to get off to a good start.

To facilitate bipartisan dialogue, the committee abandoned the congressional practice of seating members on a dais—in theater-style rows stacked above one another and segregated by party. “I’ve never had a good conversation speaking to the back of someone’s head,” Kilmer quipped.<sup>25</sup> Instead, members sat around a conference table and alternated the seating by party so that members could turn to their left or right and speak with someone of the opposite party. “You could look each other in the eye,” Kilmer explained, “so you had discussion rather than debate.”<sup>26</sup> (Figure 1)

And it worked. “Members would talk and brainstorm,” recalled former committee staffer SoRelle Gaynor. “They’d bring in experts and ask them whatever they wanted, and sitting around the table, they weren’t embarrassed that they didn’t know the answers. It was really uplifting.”<sup>27</sup>

Then Sen. Kamala Harris, a Democrat from California, made a similar observation about her experience on the Senate Intelligence Committee, whose seating arrangement for classified briefings was less formal than for public hearings. She wrote in her memoir that at those closed-door briefings, “The rigid partisanship that has paralyzed much of Washington somehow fades as we enter the room.”<sup>28</sup>

The committee staffed itself differently as well by hiring a joint staff rather than following the “Democratic staff” and “Republican staff” structure that was typical of other committees. A shared staff and budget was Kilmer’s idea; Graves admitted that his initial response was “to chuckle and say, ‘My leadership is going to hate that idea. But let’s give it a shot.’”<sup>29</sup> The general practice was for staff to brief committee members all together rather than divided up into party

caucuses, though each member also had a dedicated staffer from the member's personal office to advise and support them in addition to the bipartisan committee staff.<sup>30</sup>

They went about their research jointly too. They studied the practices of state legislatures and even traveled abroad together at various points, visiting the European Parliament and UK House of Commons to learn about their internal practices.<sup>31</sup> “Everything we did was in a bipartisan manner,” said former committee staffer Rackey.<sup>32</sup>

## GETTING DOWN TO WORK

The primary work product of the Modernization Committee consisted of recommendations the members were able to agree to, with the required two-thirds support. During its lifetime, the committee issued more than 200 recommendations, many of which were also fully or partially implemented during its existence even though the committee itself had no legislative power.<sup>33</sup> The recommendations addressed a range of issues, including many operational matters not directly related to bipartisanship and ranging from interns' stipends to improved technology, to the continuity of operations in the event of an emergency. Of the more than 200 recommendations, 31 specifically related to bipartisanship and collaboration. (See Text Box 1.)

Part of the reason committee members were able to reach agreement and get many of their ideas implemented was that they avoided controversial topics that could lead to internal disagreements or major conflicts with others in Congress, such as campaign finance reform, committee jurisdiction, or the way bills made it to the House floor.<sup>34</sup> They also worked diligently to anticipate and handle potential criticism and build support for their ideas among party leaders.<sup>35</sup>

When the COVID-19 pandemic struck one year after the committee's creation, members had to adapt. As former committee staffer Betsy Hawkings observed, due to the pandemic “opportunities for members to get together were negligible to none, and that reduced the ability to get to know your neighbor as a human being.”<sup>36</sup> The pandemic's restrictions added urgency to the committee's work on relationship building and bipartisanship.

Inspired in part by the shift to video meetings during the COVID-19 pandemic, the Modernization Committee secured from the House parliamentarian an exception to the rule limiting a member's speaking time to five minutes, so the members could have less structured discussions.<sup>37</sup> Republican Rep. William Timmons of South Carolina, who became vice chair of the Modernization Committee in 2021, observed that debate in the committee was more like his experience in the state senate, which he characterized as “so much fun” because legislators had to defend their ideas and engage in a back-and-forth with their colleagues.<sup>38</sup>

The Modernization Committee became “one of the most high-functioning bipartisan workplaces on Capitol Hill,”<sup>39</sup> wrote *Washington Post* columnist Amanda Ripley.

### **Text Box 1. Modernization Committee recommendations relating to bipartisanship and collaboration**

#### *Implemented*

1. Bipartisan group events at the Library of Congress
2. Bipartisan workspaces for staff
3. Nonpartisan new-Member orientation
4. Permitting committees to use official resources for events that foster bipartisan collaboration
5. Promoting civility during new-Member orientation

#### *Not implemented*

1. Accounting more clearly for member contributions to legislation
2. Bipartisan committee staff
3. Bipartisan committee staff briefings
4. Bipartisan committee websites
5. Bipartisan Members-only space in the Capitol
6. Bipartisan new-Member update seminars
7. Bipartisan oversight training
8. Bipartisan pre-hearing committee meetings
9. Bipartisan retreats for Members and their families at the start of each Congress
10. Bipartisan retreats for committee members to set their agenda
11. Committee-based domestic policy trips
12. Developing a flexible hearing space that permits roundtable seating
13. Incentivizing committees to experiment with alternative hearing formats
14. Institutional support to facilitate civility and collaboration by sharing best practices and facilitating workshops
15. Nonpartisan “rapid response” fact sheets from the Congressional Research Service
16. Nonpartisan summaries of bills considered on the House floor
17. Permitting two members to serve as first sponsors of a bill if from different political parties
18. Piloting weekly Oxford-style debates on the House floor to encourage thoughtful debate and deliberation
19. Providing information on outside organizations and resources to help manage conflict and foster common ground
20. Providing resources to help committees develop civility norms
21. Semi-regular, bipartisan international CODELs to learn about other legislatures and to facilitate better collaboration and understanding among committee members
22. Shared staff directory across Congress
23. Task force to discuss rules changes to require consideration of widely supported bipartisan legislation
24. Technology tools to enable collaboration
25. Training on civility, collaboration, and leadership skills
26. Training on debate and deliberation skills

## OVERCOMING OBSTACLES

In addition to the pandemic, a second large and unforeseen obstacle arose two years into the committee's four-year tenure. On January 6, 2021, rioters violently stormed the US Capitol, seeking to stop Congress from certifying that Joe Biden had won the presidential election. By that time, Representative Graves had retired from Congress, and Timmons, the new vice chair, voted along with two-thirds of House Republicans against certifying the election results later that night,<sup>40</sup> when the Capitol was finally secured by the National Guard and members were able to return.

"After January 6, there was a lot of animosity. Democrats were asking, 'Why would I work with people who incited an insurrection?'" observed former committee staffer Gaynor.<sup>41</sup> One committee member, Rep. Nikema Williams, had to hire private security to keep her children safe because she was a Democratic elector in her home state of Georgia, where President Trump was actively contesting the outcome.<sup>42</sup> "It was a much more challenging dynamic because of January 6," Timmons said frankly. "We had to be very intentional about working together, especially because I voted against certification. We had to have real conversations about that."<sup>43</sup>

So they did. They brought in experienced mediators to facilitate, still via Zoom due to the ongoing pandemic.<sup>44</sup> Committee members "had a bipartisan conversation about the sixth of January," said Kilmer, adding, "I don't know anyplace else where that type of conversation was happening between Democrats and Republicans in a structured way, with an eye toward conflict resolution."<sup>45</sup> Noted former staffer Hawkings, "There were some profound, open-hearted conversations. They worked through it. And I thought, if they could do that, Congress could work, too."<sup>46</sup>

## ASSESSING RESULTS

The Committee disbanded in January 2023, after four years of work, with about 20% of its recommendations fully implemented and over 80 others in progress.<sup>47</sup> During the ensuing two years, Congress continued to take up the committee's proposals. (Text box 1)

However, even the leaders of the Modernization Committee hesitated to claim they had made significant advances in fostering bipartisanship within the House. By 2024, the institution remained deeply polarized.

The committee's greatest impact on bipartisanship may have stemmed from how it modeled cooperation rather than from the specific recommendations it was able to advance.

Committee participants consistently pointed to four concrete outcomes that had arisen from their work.

- *Stronger relationships across party lines among members of the committee.* Working together on the committee and sharing dinners, travel, and other experiences, members formed strong bonds across party lines. And they visited one another's home districts, in some cases, which was unusual for



members of different parties. Timmons even visited the district of fellow committee member Williams, the Georgia elector.<sup>48</sup> “I’m friends with everybody that was on the committee,” reported Timmons, “and I have every single member’s cell number in my phone.” Since then, they’ve texted regularly, he added.<sup>49</sup> These relationships yielded spillover benefits outside the committee, in the broader House. Some of the members served together on other committees that did have legislative power, and together they introduced bills related to matters other than modernization.<sup>50</sup>

- *Modeling nonpartisan seating arrangements.* The Modernization Committee inspired at least three other committees in Congress to experiment with nonpartisan, roundtable seating arrangements. One was the successor to the Modernization Committee: the House Administration Subcommittee on Modernization.<sup>51</sup> The two others were select committees with no legislative power: the now disbanded Select Committee on Economic Disparity and Fairness in Growth, chaired by Democratic Rep. Jim Himes of Connecticut,<sup>52</sup> and the House Select Committee on Strategic Competition between the United States and the Chinese Communist Party, chaired by then Rep. Mike Gallagher, a Wisconsin Republican.<sup>53</sup> Himes’s committee also held a bipartisan planning retreat, and Democratic Rep. Mark Takano of California experimented with relaxing the five-minute time limit to allow for more open bipartisan dialogue in the Veterans Affairs Committee.<sup>54</sup>
- *Nonpartisan orientation for new members.* Nonpartisan orientation remained a priority for the chair of the Subcommittee on Modernization, Oklahoma Republican Rep. Stephanie Bice, who advocated with congressional leaders to continue the practice.<sup>55</sup> Orientation is “no longer an exercise in keeping the two parties apart,” said Kilmer.<sup>56</sup>
- *Bipartisan staff workspaces.* The committee recommended “flexible shared workspaces open to all staff [which] could help break down norms that staff can only work near and collaborate with people from the same party.”<sup>57</sup> The House Administration Committee followed that recommendation by creating a pilot staff workspace in one of the main House office buildings. The Senate likewise took steps to create more collaborative workspaces for staff.<sup>58</sup> However, it was not clear whether the spaces made a difference, and the committee was unsuccessful in securing a bipartisan space for House members to gather in the Capitol, which the committee felt would help facilitate private, trust-building discussions.<sup>59</sup> (Figure 2)

More broadly, it was possible that the Modernization Committee’s efforts helped create the enabling conditions for subsequent bipartisan action on legislation. Indeed, several bipartisan bills were enacted during the Modernization Committee era and afterward, including pandemic response measures; the Infrastructure Investment and Jobs Act—also known as the

**Figure 2. Bipartisan staff workspace in the Cannon House Office Building.**



*Source: authors*

Bipartisan Infrastructure Law; the CHIPS and Science Act; and reauthorization of the Violence Against Women Act, along with more-routine measures like annual appropriations and national defense authorization acts.

These achievements were consistent with the bipartisan spirit the Modernization Committee’s promoted, although far greater forces were likely at play in winning bipartisan agreement in these instances.

As one former staffer noted, “It was hard to tell how the rest of Congress viewed the committee, if they even knew it existed,” other than the Appropriations Committee, which was involved with the Modernization Committee’s successful effort to restore earmarked funding for local projects.<sup>60</sup> Perhaps some of the committee’s success came because it operated outside of the spotlight.<sup>61</sup>

In 2023, the Modernization Committee formally ended but the work continued through the Subcommittee on Modernization of the House Administration Committee, created pursuant to a recommendation in the committee’s final report.<sup>62</sup> Democrats had just lost control of the House, and Republicans were taking over, but Timmons advocated with the staff of the incoming speaker and majority leader for creation of the subcommittee<sup>63</sup> in a move supported by Illinois Rep. Rodney Davis, who had served as lead Republican on the House Administration Committee.<sup>64</sup> With that transition, modernization firmly became a bipartisan effort.

At the same time, process changes—like creating a committee—do not necessarily lead to progress. Often, when it is unclear how to move forward,

legislators gravitate toward creating a new select committee, commission, or another advisory body. In fact, Kilmer, who decided to retire in 2024 after 12 years in Congress, included among his parting recommendations the creation of yet another select committee, this one “charged with making recommendations on how to reduce political violence, toxic polarization, and the spread of misinformation.”<sup>65</sup>

## REFLECTIONS

Derek Kilmer’s leadership and “legislative entrepreneurship”<sup>66</sup> were major factors in the committee’s ability to achieve even those modest successes. “He genuinely wanted to be a good leader, and to include the vice chair as a co-equal, which endeared him to his colleagues and helped when we would get into stickier subjects,” J. D. Rackey said. “Members trusted him to work the process and find the path.”<sup>67</sup> Betsy Hawkings agreed. “He has a very gentle way about him,” Hawkings said, adding, “He was good at helping colleagues see that these changes were going to make things better.”<sup>68</sup> Sorelle Gaynor observed that “It was bipartisanship at all costs for Kilmer, and it trickled down from him.”<sup>69</sup>

Republican vice chair Tom Graves and his successor William Timmons took their charge seriously as well. “Anytime Graves is asked to promote the work of the committee, he will,” said Hawkings. “He laughs about being a conservative firebrand who is Mr. Bipartisan Modernization.”<sup>70</sup> Graves also worked directly with conservative external organizations—which might otherwise have been skeptical of the committee’s work—to help them understand that the work would make government work better and was therefore aligned with their interests.<sup>71</sup> As for Timmons, he reflected that “it was some of the most rewarding work I’ve ever done in my professional life.”<sup>72</sup>

Asked what lessons he would draw from the Modernization Committee experience for others trying to bridge partisan divides whether in the United States or abroad, Kilmer emphasized the importance of finding ways to spend time together. It could be through travel, he noted—perhaps by visiting another politician’s home constituency. “There’s real value in walking in someone else’s shoes and spending time in their community,” he argued.<sup>73</sup> Or it could be as simple as “breaking bread”—creating the opportunity for dialogue by gathering for a meal, he said. Kilmer spoke of his participation in a bipartisan working group, which “every legislative body should have,” and noted that the group would meet over breakfast.<sup>74</sup> Indeed, research by political scientists has shown that bipartisan ties could make members more effective lawmakers.<sup>75</sup>

Timmons echoed those sentiments. “If you’re not respected and trusted by your colleagues, you’re in it for the wrong reasons,” Timmons said. “You have to build relationships. Earn the respect of the people you work with, work with both sides of the aisle, and let the best ideas win. I mean, that’s how it’s supposed to work.”<sup>76</sup>

Another lesson, Kilmer cautioned, is that change won’t happen all at once. “It’s like turning a battleship,” Kilmer said.<sup>77</sup> But ripple effects can come from

even modest steps. In the words of Hawkings, “When members know each other better, they’re less likely to tweet nasty stuff. . . It creates a much more pleasant work environment, so people are more likely to stay. As a result of staying longer, they have greater knowledge, are able to do their jobs more effectively, and are better at solving problems.”<sup>78</sup>

Reflecting on his committee experience, Kilmer said, “One of my main takeaways is, if you want things to work differently, *do things differently*.”<sup>79</sup>

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<sup>23</sup> See <https://voteview.com/person/20962/tom-graves>.

<sup>24</sup> Interview with Derek Kilmer, Zoom, August 1, 2024.

<sup>25</sup> Interview with Derek Kilmer, Zoom, August 1, 2024.

<sup>26</sup> Interview with Derek Kilmer, Zoom, August 1, 2024.

<sup>27</sup> Interview with SoRelle Gaynor, Zoom, August 29, 2024.

<sup>28</sup> Kamala Harris, *The Truths We Hold: An American Journey* (Penguin Books, 2020), p. 233.

<sup>29</sup> Interview with Derek Kilmer, Zoom, August 1, 2024.

<sup>30</sup> Interview with J. D. Rackey, Washington, D.C., July 26, 2024.

<sup>31</sup> Select Committee on the Modernization of Congress, “Final Report,” Report 117-646, December 15, 2022, pp. 52-53, <https://www.govinfo.gov/content/pkg/GPO-CRPT-117hrpt646/pdf/GPO-CRPT-117hrpt646.pdf>.

<sup>32</sup> Interview with J. D. Rackey, Washington, D.C., July 26, 2024.

<sup>33</sup> The Bipartisan Policy Center has continued to monitor progress made by Congress in implementing the committee’s recommendations, even after the committee was disbanded. See <https://bipartisanpolicy.org/modernizing-congress/>.

<sup>34</sup> Interview with J. D. Rackey, Washington, D.C., July 26, 2024.

<sup>35</sup> Interview with Betsy Hawkings, Zoom, August 26, 2024.

<sup>36</sup> Interview with Betsy Hawkings, Zoom, August 26, 2024.

<sup>37</sup> Interview with J. D. Rackey, Washington, D.C., July 26, 2024.

<sup>38</sup> Interview with William Timmons, Washington, D.C., September 10, 2024.

<sup>39</sup> Amanda Ripley, “These Radically Simple Changes Helped Lawmakers Actually Get Things Done,” *Washington Post*, February 9, 2023,

<https://www.washingtonpost.com/opinions/2023/02/09/house-modernization-committee-bipartisan-collaboration-lessons/>.

<sup>40</sup> The vote record can be viewed here:

<https://clerk.house.gov/Votes/202111?Page=2&Date=01%2F07%2F2021>.

- <sup>41</sup> Interview with SoRelle Gaynor, Zoom, August 29, 2024.
- <sup>42</sup> Interview with Betsy Hawkins, Zoom, August 26, 2024.
- <sup>43</sup> Interview with William Timmons, Washington, D.C., September 10, 2024.
- <sup>44</sup> Amanda Ripley, “These Radically Simple Changes Helped Lawmakers Actually Get Things Done,” *Washington Post*, February 9, 2023, <https://www.washingtonpost.com/opinions/2023/02/09/house-modernization-committee-bipartisan-collaboration-lessons/>; Smith, Diana McClain, *Remaking the Space Between Us: How Citizens Can Work Together to Build a Better Future for Us All* (Ballast Books, 2024), p. 92.
- <sup>45</sup> Chris Cioffi, “They Tried to Modernize Congress. Now Time Is Running Out,” *Roll Call*, September 12, 2023, <https://rollcall.com/2022/09/13/tried-to-modernize-congress-now-time-running-out/>.
- <sup>46</sup> Interview with Betsy Hawkins, Zoom, August 26, 2024.
- <sup>47</sup> Brennan Center. “A Functional Congress Shouldn’t be Shocking,” <https://www.brennancenter.org/our-work/analysis-opinion/functional-congress-shouldnt-be-shocking>
- <sup>48</sup> The trip was part of the Bipartisan Policy Center’s American Congressional Exchange program. See Ruby Klawans, “Lessons of ACE: Regaining Trust in Each Other,” Bipartisan Policy Center, August 11, 2023, <https://bipartisanpolicy.org/blog/lessons-of-ace-regaining-trust-in-each-other/>.
- <sup>49</sup> Interview with William Timmons, Washington, D.C., September 10, 2024.
- <sup>50</sup> Interview with J. D. Rackey, Washington, D.C., July 26, 2024.
- <sup>51</sup> Interview with Betsy Hawkins, Zoom, August 26, 2024.
- <sup>52</sup> Interview with Betsy Hawkins, Zoom, August 26, 2024.
- <sup>53</sup> Interview with J. D. Rackey, Washington, D.C., July 26, 2024; J. D. Rackey, “Modernization Ideas Continued to Spread in the 118th Congress, Bipartisan Policy Center, August 26, 2024, <https://bipartisanpolicy.org/blog/modernization-ideas-continued-to-spread-in-the-118th-congress/>.
- <sup>54</sup> Interview with Derek Kilmer, Zoom, August 1, 2024.
- <sup>55</sup> Interview with Betsy Hawkins, Zoom, August 26, 2024; see also Stephanie Bice and Kevin Kosar, “How Can the House of Representatives Better Prepare New Members?” *Understanding Congress* podcast, American Enterprise Institute, September 3, 2024. <https://www.aei.org/podcast/how-can-the-house-of-representatives-better-prepare-new-members-with-rep-stephanie-bice/>.
- <sup>56</sup> Interview with Derek Kilmer, Zoom, August 1, 2024.
- <sup>57</sup> Select Committee on the Modernization of Congress, “Final Report,” Report 117-646, December 15, 2022, p. 108, <https://www.govinfo.gov/content/pkg/GPO-CRPT-117hrpt646/pdf/GPO-CRPT-117hrpt646.pdf>.
- <sup>58</sup> Interview with J. D. Rackey, Washington, D.C., July 26, 2024.
- <sup>59</sup> Select Committee on the Modernization of Congress, “Final Report,” Report 117-646, December 15, 2022, p. 174, <https://www.govinfo.gov/content/pkg/GPO-CRPT-117hrpt646/pdf/GPO-CRPT-117hrpt646.pdf>.
- <sup>60</sup> Interview with SoRelle Gaynor, Zoom, August 29, 2024.
- <sup>61</sup> We thank Molly Reynolds for this suggestion.
- <sup>62</sup> Select Committee on the Modernization of Congress, “Final Report,” Report 117-646, December 15, 2022, pp. 222-223, <https://www.govinfo.gov/content/pkg/GPO-CRPT-117hrpt646/pdf/GPO-CRPT-117hrpt646.pdf>.
- <sup>63</sup> Jim Saksa, “Fix Congress’ Committee Says Farewell, But Not for Long, Members Hope,” *Roll Call*, November 17, 2022, <https://rollcall.com/2022/11/17/fix-congress-committee-says-farewell-but-not-for-long-members-hope/>.
- <sup>64</sup> Interview with Betsy Hawkins, Zoom, August 26, 2024.
- <sup>65</sup> Jim Saksa, “Proxy Voting for New Parents Among Changes Pitched to House Rules Panel,” *Roll Call*, September 19, 2024, <https://rollcall.com/2024/09/19/proxy-voting-for-new-parents-among-changes-pitched-to-house-rules-panel/>.

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- <sup>66</sup> “Four Main Activities . . . Constitute Legislative Entrepreneurship: Acquiring Information, Bill Drafting, Coalition Building, and Pushing Legislation.” Gregory Wawro, *Legislative Entrepreneurship in the U.S. House of Representatives* (University of Michigan Press, 2000), p. 5.
- <sup>67</sup> Interview with J. D. Rackey, Washington, D.C., July 26, 2024.
- <sup>68</sup> Interview with Betsy Hawkins, Zoom, August 26, 2024.
- <sup>69</sup> Interview with SoRelle Gaynor, Zoom, August 29, 2024.
- <sup>70</sup> Interview with Betsy Hawkins, Zoom, August 26, 2024.
- <sup>71</sup> Interview with Betsy Hawkins, Zoom, August 26, 2024.
- <sup>72</sup> Interview with William Timmons, Washington, D.C., September 10, 2024.
- <sup>73</sup> Interview with Derek Kilmer, Zoom, August 1, 2024.
- <sup>74</sup> Interview with Derek Kilmer, Zoom, August 1, 2024.
- <sup>75</sup> James Curry and Jason Roberts, “Interpersonal Relationships and Legislative Collaboration in Congress,” *Legislative Studies Quarterly*, vol. 48, no. 3 (2022): 333-369.
- <sup>76</sup> Interview with William Timmons, Washington, D.C., September 10, 2024.
- <sup>77</sup> Interview with Derek Kilmer, Zoom, August 1, 2024.
- <sup>78</sup> Interview with Betsy Hawkins, Zoom, August 26, 2024.
- <sup>79</sup> Chris Cioffi, “They Tried to Modernize Congress. Now Time Is Running Out,” *Roll Call*, September 12, 2023 (emphasis added), <https://rollcall.com/2022/09/13/tried-to-modernize-congress-now-time-running-out/>.

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