

Committees on the Organization of Congress



As members of the House begin the process of considering and debating a new Rules package for the 116th Congress, BPC Action and the Congress of Tomorrow urge the creation of a new Committee on the Organization of Congress. The Committee on the Organization of Congress is not a new concept: in fact, there have been three since 1945 with the last one in 1993.

With approximately 20 years between each committee, the time for Congress to reform itself again is now. The 116th Congress can learn from previous Joint Committees on the Organization of Congress.

1945-1946 Joint Committee on the Organization of Congress

Composed of 12 lawmakers—three Republicans and three Democrats from each chamber, the first committee's final report contained 37 recommendations, including:

- Institutionalize permanent in-house staff
- Authorize each committee four nonpartisan professional staff experts and up to six clerical workers, in addition to the allowance of temporary employment of additional investigatory staff
- Reduce the number of Senate and House standing committees, as well as reorganize their jurisdictions
- Grant committees subpoena power for more effective oversight

These recommendations were included in the Legislative Reorganization Act of 1946, which was enacted into law.

1965-1966 Joint Committee on the Organization of Congress

Composed of 12 lawmakers—three Republicans and three Democrats from each chamber, the second committee's final report contained over 120 recommendations, including:

- Increase appropriations to the House Office of Legislative Counsel, which assists members with bill drafting
- Require that committees set regular meeting schedules
- Require committees to publish roll-call votes
- Authorize televising of open House committee hearings
- Allow recorded roll-call votes in the House in Committee of the Whole
- Improve the congressional budget process
- Allow committees to meet while the Senate is in session

These recommendations were included in the Legislative Reorganization Act of 1970, which was enacted into law.

1992-1993 Joint Committee on the Organization of Congress

Composed of 12 lawmakers from each Chamber—Senate Majority and Minority leaders selected six, as did the House Speaker and Minority Leader—the committee's final report contained the following recommendations:

- Reduce the number of subcommittees to five for the major committees (with the exception of Appropriations) and four to the lesser committees
- Publish committee roll call votes in committee reports, which should be released biannually with member attendance and votes, to increase transparency
- Recognize the minority party's right to offer a motion to recommit with instructions

These recommendations were included in the Contract with America.

2019: Proposed Select Committee on the Organization of Congress

The time is ripe for a new Committee on the Organization of Congress to rebuild public trust and restore individual members' roles in the legislative-making process. With a new Congress and the inclusion of this committee in incoming House Rules Committee Chairman Rep. Jim McGovern (D-MA)'s proposed rules package, there is a unique opportunity for congressional reform in the 116th Congress. We suggest the committee evaluate the following reforms to revitalize and modernize Congress:

- Modernize the congressional calendar and outdated procedures to make the legislative process more efficient, give members more access to the process and more time with their constituents, and create an environment in which members and staff have more opportunities to work together with greater bipartisanship
- Empower standing committees to complete their responsibilities to authorize government agencies and programs, and ensure that members have greater ability to impact legislation as it moves through the committees to the floor of both bodies
- Modernize the budget and appropriations process so both function more effectively
- Create better working relationships between the House and Senate, and restore the balance between the legislative and executive branches

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