Appropriations Committee in the 117th Congress

Highlighting Transparency, Accountability, and Inclusion

Discretionary spending legislated by the Appropriations Committee accounts for at least \$1.3 trillion each year and is projected by CBO to grow to more than \$1.6 trillion due to COVID-19. Despite its annual importance, many members find its details hard to understand and often harder to influence except through periodic floor amendments. The Appropriations Committee's work should evolve to be responsive to a 21st century economy, the growing needs of an increasingly diverse population with wide income disparity, and threats to our democracy and national security at home and abroad.

In addition, since the Committee's work touches virtually every aspect of American's lives and our nation's business, the Committee's leadership must have an inclusive process that obtains greater input before spending and policy decisions are made. As important, our oversight must expand to make sure that we are making investments that help meet the day to day needs of all Americans. As we move forward to organize for the 117th Congress and the remainder of this decade, here are some of the steps I believe ought to be considered:

I. New Tools and Approaches for the Caucus

• Operation Transparency

- Caucus input: In addition to the normal request letters to subcommittees, meetings will be held at each stage to identify members' key issues and desired outcomes. The Chair will meet with each major caucus quarterly.
- Pre-floor discussion: Caucus sessions will include the content of reported appropriations bills and a communications plan for each bill.
- New initiatives forum: The Committee will hold informal roundtables to solicit new ideas on key domestic, economic, and national security matters.

• Member Workshops and Orientation

- Provide an appropriations-dedicated session during freshman orientation.
- Offer appropriations workshops for members on how to impact budget, program, policy, and personnel decisions by executive branch departments and agencies and solve problems and create opportunities in their district.
- Match each new member with an appropriator mentor to better understand the process.

• Regional Economic and Social Impact

- Solicit input from regional delegations on the area's appropriations needs and make recommendations with specific regional impact.
- Establish a process for communicating regional impact.

• Ensure Priorities Reflect America's Diversity

- Subcommittee Chairs will establish a process to solicit input and recommendations on strategies and actions to address racial and gender inequities; and
- Solicit input on how to adjust federal investment and program structures to better aid underrepresented communities.

Build Relationships with the Authorizers:

• The Committee will foster a more cooperative relationship with authorizing committees through frequent check-ins and encourage joint briefings.

II. New Efforts to Empower the Appropriations Committee on behalf of the Caucus

Develop Greater Collaboration among Subcommittees

- Conduct bi-weekly or monthly meetings with the Subcommittee Chairs to guarantee better communication and stronger teamwork.
- With experts relevant to their subcommittee, Subcommittee Chairs will lead an initial retreat for the Caucus on their own topics of choice.

Reform the Development of Emergency Supplementals to Ensure Greater Transparency, Tougher Oversight

- Working with Leadership and Subcommittee Chairs, the Committee will establish a process for members to ensure communication of supplemental appropriations; and
- Assist members with an understanding of the appropriations process in response to disasters that are often regional such as floods, tornadoes, hurricanes, and wildfires.

• Strengthen the Committee's Historical Oversight Function

 Each Subcommittee will undertake a formal, programmatic review of a select set of key programs focused on fiscal accountability and eliminating waste, fraud, and abuse to ensure we are good stewards of taxpayer dollars.

Appropriations Retreats

 Establish a retreat for the Committee to hear from guest experts on challenges facing the nation and discuss the role the Appropriations Committee can and should play in tackling these problems and capitalizing on opportunities.

New Efforts at Bipartisanship

 Emphasize collaboration with Republican counterparts, including initiatives to deliver better domestic and national security results.