



*"All, too, will bear in mind this sacred principle: that though the will of the majority is in all cases to prevail, that will to be rightful must be reasonable; that the minority possess their equal rights, which equal law must protect, and to violate would be oppression."
--Thomas Jefferson, First Inaugural Address, March 4, 1801*

The Constitution begins with the simple but revolutionary phrase "We the people," which announced to the world that here, the people rule. To speak for the people, the Constitution gives the greatest responsibility to the House of Representatives: Members are to be elected every two years, and no Member may be appointed to office.

Today in the House of Representatives, however, the voices of nearly half of the people have been silenced, and the marketplace of ideas has been effectively closed. Too often, incivility and the heavy hand of the majority have substituted for thoughtful debate.

Respectful of both the wishes of the Founders, and the expectations of the American people, we offer the following principles for restoring democracy in the "People's House," guaranteeing that the voices of the people are heard.

I. Bi-Partisan Administration of the House

There should be regular consultations among the elected leaders of both parties to discuss scheduling, administration and operations of the House.

- The House should have a predictable, professional, family-friendly schedule that allows the legislative process to proceed in a manner that ensures timely and deliberate dispensation of the work of the Congress.
- Similar, regular meetings between Chairs and Ranking Members of committees, and staffs should be held.
- The minority should control at least one-third of committee budgets and office space.

II. Regular Order for Legislation

The legislative process in the House should return to a more regular democratic order at every level.

- Bills should be developed following full hearings, open subcommittee and committee markups, with appropriate referrals to other committees. Members should have at least 24 hours to examine a bill prior to consideration at the subcommittee level.
- Bills should generally come to the floor under a procedure that allows open, full, and fair debate consisting of a full amendment process that grants the minority the right to offer its alternatives, including a substitute.
- Members should have at least 24 hours to examine bill and conference report text prior to floor consideration. Rules governing floor debate must be reported before 10 p.m. for a bill to be considered the following day.
- Floor votes should be completed within 15 minutes, with the customary 2-minute extension to accommodate Members' ability to get to the House Chamber to cast their vote. No vote shall be held open in order to manipulate the outcome.
- House-Senate conference committees should hold regular meetings (at least weekly) of all conference committee Members. All duly-appointed conferees shall be informed of the schedule of conference committee activities in a timely manner, and given ample opportunity for input and debate as decisions are made toward final bill language.
- The Suspension Calendar should be restricted to non-controversial legislation, with minority-authored legislation scheduled in relation to the party ratio in the House.