

STATEMENT

BEFORE THE HOUSE ADMINISTRATION COMMITTEE

Representative HOWARD L. BERMAN

November 30, 2011

First, my thanks to Chairman Lungren and Ranking Member Brady, and also to your staff for the assistance provided to the minority staff on the Foreign Affairs Committee. I also want to thank my Chairman, Ileana Ros-Lehtinen, for her efforts and that of her Staff Director, Dr. Yleem Poblete, in helping to shape a budget request that is fair.

I will not sugar-coat my testimony. This has been a difficult year for the minority on the Committee. Just as all Americans have had to do, we have also tightened our belts and made significant sacrifices while trying to ensure that we do not jeopardize the Committee's essential operations to oversee the foreign relations of the United States.

Mr. Chairman, you asked me to comment on how the reduction this year affected our operations in the first session. First, we were forced to keep one of our positions vacant (after dismissing 28 employees as we transitioned into the minority). When another senior staffer departed, we also kept that position vacant. So we now have two vacant positions that we can't afford to fill.

Secondly, all of our staff, including the seven minority subcommittee staff, experienced an average 10.17% cut to their salaries. This was despite a generous allocation of additional funds to the minority's salary budget by the Chairman.

I am very grateful to the Chairman for once again offering the minority \$180,000 from operating funds to supplement the minority salary. But even after taking those funds into account, a 6.4% cut to the Committee's budget would require us to cut salaries of existing staff by an additional \$53,000, and we would not be able to fill the two vacancies which impacts our ability to exercise full oversight over all the programs in our jurisdiction.

As the Chairman states, our dedicated staff are our most valuable resource. She has demonstrated her commitment to them in her relations with us.

I also want to express my concern that the budget of this Committee covers the administrative expenses for both the House Democracy Partnership and the Tom Lantos Human Rights Commission. When I chaired the Committee, I supported the request of these two entities for funding independent of the Committee. I continue to believe that should be the case. But as it is, they represent an additional cost to this Committee which, as the Chairman notes, includes office space, equipment, and other support.

I want to express my appreciation for the Chairman's efforts to ensure a smooth coordination of Committee functions. We receive our share of all non-personnel expenses in each expense category, such as travel, communications, and equipment upgrades. I look forward to working with her in a bipartisan manner on a wide range of issues in second year of the 112th Congress.