

COMMISSION ON POLITICAL REFORM

Taking
The Pulse
of American
Democracy

Congressional Reform

The Commission on Political Reform (CPR), consisting of 29 thought leaders, puts forth recommendations that foster a modern, strong, and vibrant political system that accepts the strongly held differences of opinion among citizens and channels these differences in productive ways. Congress has shown that it can still come together on a bipartisan basis to move substantive legislation.

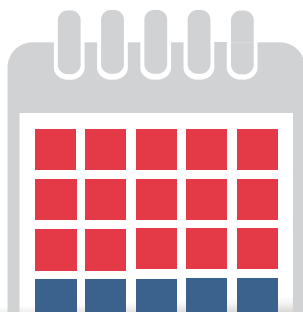
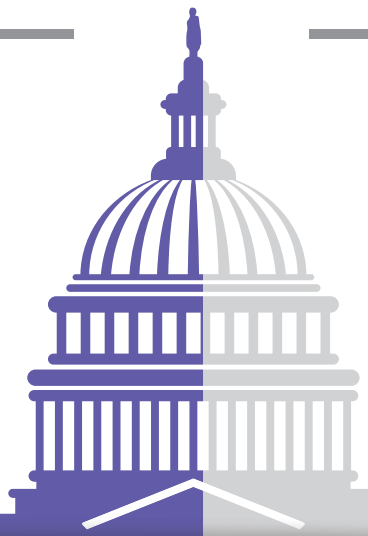
This is not an effort to return Congress to the “good old days.” CPR commissioners recognize that hyperpolarization pervades not just Congress but the electorate as well. However, the commission believes that Congress can function more efficiently despite that polarization. CPR’s recommendations are incremental, politically viable, and, most importantly, achievable if citizens and our leaders are ready to confront the structural and system-wide weaknesses in a fair and bipartisan way.

CONGRESS NEEDS TO SPEND MORE TIME IN WASHINGTON

OVER THE COURSE OF
THREE MONTHS IN 2014
CONGRESS ONLY SPENT

53%

OF BUSINESS DAYS
IN SESSION.



BPC'S PROPOSAL

5-DAY WORKWEEKS

3-WEEKS STRAIGHT

1-WEEK STATE AND DISTRICT WORK PERIODS



THE **ONE YEAR BUDGET CYCLE**
 CONTRIBUTES TO CONGRESS PASSING
SHORT-TERM
 GOVERNMENT-WIDE FUNDING
 MEASURES RATHER THAN
 STRATEGIC SPENDING DECISIONS.



PROBLEM

OUR SOLUTION

There is not enough time spent legislating. The House of Representatives and the Senate should schedule synchronized, five-day workweeks in Washington, with three weeks in session followed by one-week recesses.

Interparty and inter-branch communication has been nonexistent. The president should hold regular, monthly meetings with congressional leaders; similarly, congressional leadership should invite the president to attend joint caucuses twice a year.

Power in Congress is too centralized, which marginalizes individual members willing to formulate compromises. Committee chairs should solicit the views of all committee members—especially those in the minority—well in advance of a committee markup. To reconcile differences, full-fledged conference committees between the chambers on important legislation are essential to ensuring greater member participation in the policy process.

Threats in the Senate to change the filibuster rules to eviscerate minority rights further raise the temperature in an already polarized body. The Senate should only make changes to its rules at the start of a new Congress. These rules changes will only take effect when two-thirds of the Senate agrees to them.

The Senate minority is shut out of the legislating process to the detriment of good policymaking. The Senate should establish a process that gives priority consideration to a minimum of ten amendments offered by and alternating between senators of both parties.

The Senate is gridlocked by a normalization of the use of threatened or real filibusters. The Senate should eliminate filibusters on motions to proceed by limiting debate to two hours.

Congress has failed to complete the appropriations process on time for more than a decade. Congress should adopt a biennial budget process that includes two-year budget resolutions and appropriations bills, with expedited consideration given to enacting into law two-year discretionary spending ceilings for enforcement purposes.



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The Commission on Political Reform is deeply concerned about the distrust that permeates the entire electoral process and that reverberates through both federal and state legislatures. Americans must be able to trust that their electoral system is fair. States will need to take the lead in reformulating an electoral system that earns back the people's trust.

Electoral System Reform

A COMMON CONGRESSIONAL PRIMARY ELECTION DAY

AMERICANS KNOW WHEN ELECTION DAY IS
BUT NOT WHEN THE 2014
CONGRESSIONAL PRIMARIES ARE



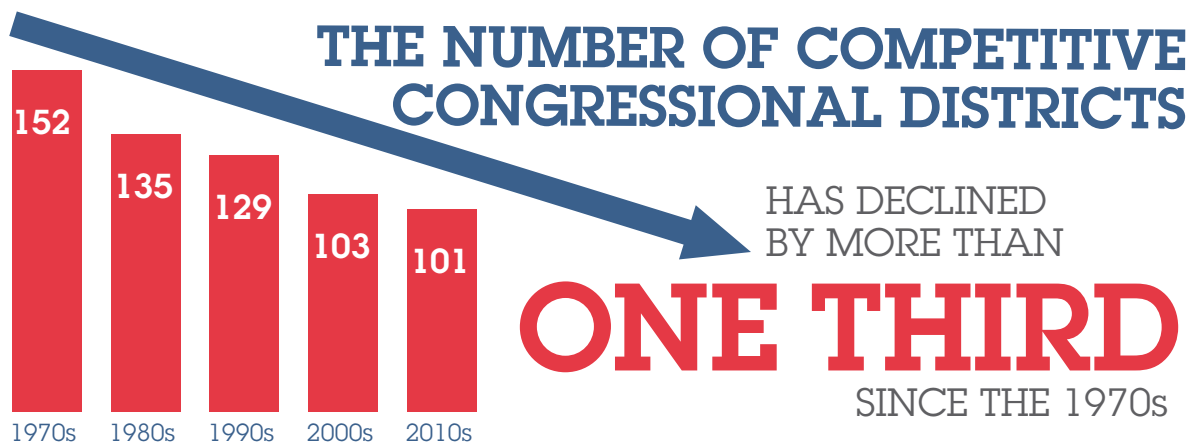
2014 CONGRESSIONAL PRIMARIES



BPC's Proposal

★ ★ ★
A COMMON CONGRESSIONAL PRIMARY ELECTION DAY
WILL INCREASE MEDIA ATTENTION AND AWARENESS
POTENTIALLY LEADING TO MORE PARTICIPATION
★ ★ ★





PROBLEM

Legislative districts are drawn in an overly partisan manner.

Voter turnout in congressional primaries is too low and the electorate is confused about when states' primary elections occur.

Inaccurate voter-registration lists.

Americans don't know who are financing elections.

Members of Congress focus too much time on fundraising at the expense of governing.

OUR SOLUTION

States should adopt redistricting commissions that have the bipartisan support of the legislature and the electorate.

States and political parties should strive to dramatically increase the number of voters who cast ballots in political primaries to 30 percent of eligible voters by 2020 and 35 percent by 2026.

States should create a single congressional primary date in June.

Improve access: identify eligible unregistered voters and contact them with an opportunity to register to vote.

Ensure integrity: states should encourage direct opportunities for voters to input their own registration information and to update their addresses and conduct crosschecks with other states' lists and with other databases to eliminate ineligible registrations or to correct mistakes on registration rolls.

Disclose all political contributions, including those made to outside and independent groups.

Congress should pass legislation requiring detailed disclosure of spending by congressional leadership PACs and mandate that leadership PAC funds be used solely for political activities (such as donations to other candidates) and not for personal use. Leadership PACs should be limited to the top three congressional leaders of each party in both the House of Representatives and the Senate.



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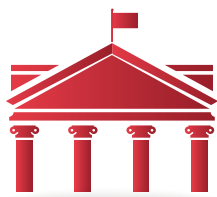
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Public Service

Successful democracies require an educated citizenry who actively participates in civic life. Americans must re-engage in ways that reinforce the notion that, as Americans, we are all part of a common enterprise that requires a lifetime of civic engagement.

**ALL AMERICANS AGES 18 TO 28 SHOULD COMMIT TO ONE FULL
YEAR OF SERVICE TO THE COMMUNITY AND THE NATION**

MILITARY



RUNNING FOR
OFFICE

MENTOR



PEACE CORPS

THIS COMMITMENT CAN BE FULFILLED BY PARTICIPATING IN ANY TYPE OF FULL-TIME SERVICE, INCLUDING MILITARY SERVICE, RUNNING FOR OFFICE; CIVILIAN SERVICE, IN PROGRAMS SUCH AS THE **PEACE CORPS** OR **AMERICORPS**; OR VOLUNTEER SERVICE THROUGH LOCAL AND NATIONAL NONPROFITS AND RELIGIOUS ENTITIES THAT SERVE OUR COMMUNITIES AND COUNTRY.



BIPARTISAN POLICY CENTER

WWW.BIPARTISANPOLICY.ORG

Permanent residents applying for citizenship are required to take an oral civics test administered by the U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services (USCIS).¹ The applicant is asked ten questions and must answer six out of the ten to pass. Questions from the exam cover basic civics, American history, and U.S. geography. Below are several questions from the USCIS civics exam. Can you answer them all correctly?

Q: What do we call the first ten amendments to the Constitution?

A: The Bill of Rights

Q: How many amendments does the Constitution have?

A: 27

Q: Why do some states have more representatives than other states?

A: The state's population

Q: The Federalist Papers supported the passage of the U.S. Constitution. Name one of the writers.

A: James Madison, Alexander Hamilton, John Jay, Publius

Q: Name one U.S. territory.

A: Puerto Rico, U.S. Virgin Islands, American Samoa, Northern Mariana Islands, Guam.



PROBLEM

Fewer and fewer Americans aspire to careers in public service.

Younger Americans are less likely than those in previous generations to pursue careers in community, national, and public service.

Federal service opportunities, like the Peace Corps and AmeriCorps, turn away thousands of volunteers each year for lack of available positions.

The appointments process discourages many of the most qualified individuals.

OUR SOLUTION

All Americans ages 18 to 28 should commit to one full year of service within their communities or at a national level through military service, civilian service, volunteer service, or by running for office.

Schools should refocus on their original civic missions to provide the core values, knowledge, and ideas from U.S. history in civic learning that will equip the next generation of active, engaged citizens. Colleges and universities should reaffirm their missions to develop engaged and active citizens and encourage service in formal and informal programs.

The federal government must leverage additional resources to increase the supply of available positions in AmeriCorps, VISTA, and the Peace Corps.

The public and private sectors should create a nationally recognized “qualified-service” opportunity program to match the supply of existing yearlong service opportunities to the demand of applicants.

Presidential administrations should open political appointments to the widest possible pool of applicants by streamlining the process and not imposing overly burdensome pre- and post-employment restrictions.

¹ “Civics (History and Government) Questions for the Naturalization Test.” *U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services*. March 2011. <http://www.uscis.gov/sites/default/files/USCIS/Office%20of%20Citizenship/Citizenship%20Resource%20Center%20Site/Publications/100q.pdf>.