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While families across America continue to struggle to make ends meet, Congress continues to spend lavishly on itself. Leadership requires sacrifice, but right now, the rest of the country is sacrificing and Congress is not. Congress must demonstrate it understands the economic hardships facing the rest of America by reducing its own budget.

Since 2001, Congress has boosted its own budget by 55 percent. At the same time, the average American wage increased by only 23 percent.[1] In real dollars, the budget of the House and Senate has grown by more than $1 billion over the last decade.[2]

As Congress' budget has grown, oversight seems to have shrunk. There are fewer oversight hearings, fewer floor debates over spending priorities and fewer opportunities to vote on important issues. This past spring, GAO issued a 340-page report identifying more than $100 billion in savings that could be found in the federal budget simply by eliminating duplicative programs.[3] That review was a testament to failed congressional efforts of oversight.

Duplication in Federal Programs

Type of Program	Number of Programs
Surface transportation	100+
Teacher quality	82
Economic Development	88
Transportation assistance	80
Financial literacy	56
Job training	47
Homelessness prevention/assistance	20
Food for the hungry	18
Disaster Response/Preparedness – FEMA	17

[1] "National Average Wage Index," http://www.ssa.gov/oact/cola/AWI.html#Series
[2] Email from the Congressional Research Service, June 8, 2011.
[3] "Opportunities to Reduce Potential Duplication in Government Programs, Save Tax Dollars, and Enhance Revenue, U.S. Government Accountability Office, March 2011, http://www.gao.gov/new.items/d11318sp.pdf

While Americans are forced to do more with less, Congress is doing less with more. It is time for serious leadership, which should begin by Congress significantly trimming its own budget and eliminating wasteful or low priority spending.

Reduce the Senate and House of Representatives Accounts by 15 percent – $3.82 billion

Since 2000, the combined budget of the House and Senate has grown from $1.2 billion to nearly $2.3 billion.[4] In 2010, the budget for the House of Representatives was $1.4 billion and the budget for the Senate was $926 million, their highest levels in history.

Even with a 15 percent reduction, Congress' budget would still exceed $1.9 billion, approximately the level of funding in 2007. Congress could achieve this cut by reducing salary expenses for staff and cutting back on low-priority spending.

Between 2000 and 2009, the number of House of Representatives staff increased by 11 percent, to 9,808.[5] On the other side of the Capitol, the number of Senate staff has swelled by nearly 25 percent, to 6,099, between 2001 and 2010.[6]

Leadership offices have seen the biggest rise in staff over the last three decades, more than tripling in size since 1977.[7] Congress should consider reorganizing and consolidating its leadership and committee structure to ensure that it is designed to promote oversight, eliminate unneeded turf battles, and rationalize jurisdictions.

Experts and think tanks from all sides agree this is an area of government spending that should be reduced. In 2007, the Progressive Policy Institute proposed cutting congressional staff by 10 percent.[8] The Heritage Foundation has also recommended reducing the House and Senate accounts.[9] And the bipartisan Fiscal Commission recommended cutting Congress' budget by 15 percent.

In addition, Congress should consider eliminating low-priority programs and spending items that do not contribute to these core duties. These include following:

- A benefit House and Senate staffers receive comes in the form of student loan debt repayment. Thousands of congressional staff have taken advantage of the program in

[4] Email from the Congressional Research Service, June 8, 2011.
[5] "House of Representatives and Senate Staff Levels in Member, Committee, Leadership, and other Offices, 1977-2010," Congressional Research Service, August 10, 2010, report number: R41366, http://www.crs.gov/pages/Reports.aspx?PRODCODE=R41366&Source=search
[6] "House of Representatives and Senate Staff Levels in Member, Committee, Leadership, and other Offices, 1977-2010," Congressional Research Service, August 10, 2010, report number: R41366, http://www.crs.gov/pages/Reports.aspx?PRODCODE=R41366&Source=search
[7] "House of Representatives and Senate Staff Levels in Member, Committee, Leadership, and other Offices, 1977-2010," Congressional Research Service, August 10, 2010, report number: R41366, http://www.crs.gov/pages/Reports.aspx?PRODCODE=R41366&Source=search
[8] "Return to Fiscal Responsibility II," Progressive Policy Institute, April 2007, http://www.dlc.org/documents/Fiscal_Responsibility_04302007.pdf
[9] "Additional $47 billion in spending cuts for the Continuing Resolution," Heritage Foundation, February 11, 2011, http://www.heritage.org/research/reports/2011/02/additional-$47-billion-in-spending-cuts-for-the-continuing-resolution

recent years, with 3,000 House staff alone getting benefits in 2009.[10] Senate staffers can get $6,000 per year, and $40,000 in a lifetime, to repay any outstanding student loans.[11] House staffers are eligible for an even more, with the opportunity to get $10,000 each year, with a lifetime cap at $60,000.[12] In 2009, both houses of Congress combined to spend $18 million for this program.[13]

- Non-drivers can take advantage of benefits to cover the cost of public transportation. Senators can give staff who take the D.C. Metro a voucher worth up to $230 a month is available to pay their fares. House Members can give their staff as much as $230 a month.[14] Members are not required to pay for this out of their own budgets, but can provide it to their staffs from a separate account.

Achieve Savings by Reducing Printing Costs of Congressional Documents – $312.2 million

In 2010, Congress allotted nearly $100 million for its Congressional Printing and Binding account.[15] But in the digital age, printed copies of Congressional reports and other documents are as likely to grace a landfill as a bookshelf. Indeed, a representative of the Government Printing Office (GPO) recently testified, "70 percent of the GPO's funds are used to digitize legislation, schedules and other federal records, while 30 percent is used to print hard copies."[16]

Therefore, reducing the Congressional Printing account by 30 percent would finally discontinue the common wasteful practice of various congressional documents being printed, distributed, and immediately thrown away. Additionally, it would ensure that digital copies of federal records, such as the Congressional Records, will be available online.

End Funding for the Open World Leadership Center – $133.2 million

The Open World Leadership Center, created by Congress in 2000, sponsors exchange trips for thousands of political leaders and jurists from post-Soviet states to "experience U.S. democracy and free enterprise in action." A noble cause, its importance should nevertheless be evaluated in light of today's pressing budget concerns.

Some already have: Key members of Congress from both parties have recently endorsed shifting funding for the center to private donors. A June conference report discussing this program stated, "The conferees are fully supportive of expanded efforts of the Open World Center to raise

[10] Website of FactCheck.org, "Congress Not Exempt from Student Loans," January 6, 2011, http://www.factcheck.org/2011/01/congress-not-exempt-from-student-loans/.
[11] Website of FactCheck.org, "Congress Not Exempt from Student Loans," January 6, 2011, http://www.factcheck.org/2011/01/congress-not-exempt-from-student-loans/.
[12] Website of FactCheck.org, "Congress Not Exempt from Student Loans," January 6, 2011, http://www.factcheck.org/2011/01/congress-not-exempt-from-student-loans/.
[13] Website of FactCheck.org, "Congress Not Exempt from Student Loans," January 6, 2011, http://www.factcheck.org/2011/01/congress-not-exempt-from-student-loans/.
[14] "Legislative Branch Appropriations for 2010 Hearing," http://www.gpo.gov/fdsys/pkg/CHRG-111hhrg50439/html/CHRG-111hhrg50439.htm
[15] "Legislative Branch: FY 2012 Appropriations," Congressional Research Service, June 15, 2011, report number: R41870, http://www.crs.gov/pages/Reports.aspx?PRODCODE=R41870&Source=search
[16] "GPO Mulls Name Change in PR Offensive," Roll Call, Bade, Rachel, March 21, 2011, http://www.rollcall.com/issues/56_99/-204238-1.html

private funding and expect this effort to reduce the requirements for funding from the Legislative Branch appropriations bill in future years."[17]

End Funding for the Stennis Center for Public Service –$4.77 million

Based in Mississippi, the Stennis Center was created by Congress in 1988 and named to honor former Mississippi Sen. John C. Stennis. Its mission is "to promote and strengthen public service leadership in America."[18]

While the center's budget is funded by dividends from an endowment as well as contributions from private organizations, it has repeatedly received earmarks to enhance its budget.

Such continued public funding is questionable when compared to the many more urgent needs for taxpayer dollars. Congress should restrain itself from directing further funding to the center.

Eliminate the Account for Offices for Former Speakers

One expensive perk of office is available exclusively for former Speakers of the House when they retire. Former Speakers can claim nearly $1 million a year for up to five years after they leave Congress to maintain an office for archiving documents and tying up unfinished business.[19] What makes this particularly unique is that no equivalent benefit is available to former majority leaders of the Senate, or to any other individual congressional officeholder.

The money can be used for a wide variety of purposes, including travel, office rent, furniture, a staff, and other expenses such as computers, phones, blackberries, cable, and Internet.[20] Mail sent from the office can be sent free of charge, using the congressional franking privilege.

Freeze Pay for Members of Congress for Three Years – $6 million

Currently members of Congress do not vote themselves pay raises—they receive raises as calculated by a formula. In 2009, members of Congress received a 2.8 percent pay adjustment under the formula established by the Ethics Reform Act, increasing total congressional salary to $174,000.[21]

This plan, like the bipartisan Fiscal Commission, recommends freezing member pay for three years. The Commission's plan stated, "Unlike most Americans, members of Congress benefit from an automatic salary increase every single year – deserved or not. Before Congress can ask

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[17] "Legislative Branch: FY 2012 Appropriations," Congressional Research Service, June 15, 2011, report number: R41870, http://www.crs.gov/pages/Reports.aspx?PRODCODE=R41870&Source=search
[18] Stennis Center for Public Service website, http://www.stennis.gov, visited July 12, 2011.
[19] Skiba, Kathrerine, and Gerry Smith, "Former House Speaker Dennis Hastert's perk costs taxpayers $1 million," *Chicago Tribune*, February 17, 2010, http://www.chicagotribune.com/news/local/ct-met-use-this-hastert-0218-20100217,0,640306.story?page=2.
[20] A report of the Congressional Research Service, Glassman, Matthew Eric, "Former Speakers of the House: Office Allowances, Franking Privileges, and Staff Assistance," May 11, 2010, Report no. RS20099.
[21] "Salaries of Members of Congress: Recent Actions and Historical Tables," Congressional Research Service, Brudnick, Ida, February 9, 2011, http://www.crs.gov/pages/Reports.aspx?PRODCODE=97-1011&Source=search

the American people to sacrifice, it should lead by example."[22] Additionally, Congress should completely repeal the provision of law that provides automatic pay adjustments for members.

$4.28 billion in Savings Over the Next Decade

By enacting these reforms, Congress will demonstrate it is serious about fiscal responsibility and understands the economic hardships facing the rest of America. Additionally, ending low-priority spending items will ensure Congress' highest priority is oversight and writing effective legislation.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Reduce the Senate and House of Representatives Accounts by 15 percent
Achieve Savings by Reducing Printing Costs of Congressional Documents
End Funding for the Stennis Center for Public Service
Eliminate Offices for Former Speakers
Freeze Pay for Members of Congress for Three Years

UNITED STATES CONGRESS TEN YEAR SAVINGS
Discretionary: $4.28 billion
Total: $4.28 billion

[22] "The Moment of Truth," The National Commission on Fiscal Responsibility and Reform, December 2010, http://www.fiscalcommission.gov/sites/fiscalcommission.gov/files/documents/TheMomentofTruth12_1_2010.pdf