Mr. Speaker, Woodrow Wilson once wrote that, "Congress in session is Congress on public exhibition, whilst Congress in its committee rooms is Congress at work."

The central problem of the House today is that its committee system is not working as intended. This in turn has led to a massive breakdown in the quality and accountability of our legislative process and the bills it produces.

Mr. Speaker, in a Republican Congress, one of our first priorities will be to restore a committee system that works since without it we will never be able to forge rational and effective national policies.

Why is our present committee system in such a shambles? The reasons are not all that difficult to discern. They have been amply testified to by political scientists and Members of Congress alike.

The simple fact is that in attempting to beef-up the House in the 1970's and put it on a more even footing with the Executive bureaucracy, we ourselves eventually became a bureaucracy.

And I use the term bureaucracy in the most pejorative sense of that term: Empire-building, over-staffing and overspecialization, overlap and duplication, lack of accountability, inertia and delay, and self-interest replacing the public interest.

In attempting to develop this body and flex our muscles, we became over-developed and muscle-bound.

We created our own congressional budget and budget process supported by new House and Senate budget committees and a Congressional Budget Office.

We strengthened the Congressional Research Service and General Accounting Office and created a new Office of Technology Assessment.

And finally, we greatly enlarged the congressional committee system. Since 1970, while the number of committees has remained relatively constant, the number of subcommittees has increased 16%, from 136 to 158, the number of committee staff has increased 186%, from 738 to 2,109; and appropriations for the House have increased 456%, from $203 million to $1.1 billion.
And yet, despite this large increase in subcommittees, staff, and spending on the system, House committees in the 101st Congress reported 502 fewer bills, 44% less than the 91st Congress, 20 years previous. And the House passed 162 fewer bills, or 14% less.

Of the bills passed by the House in the last Congress, 41.2% had not even been reported from a committee, as opposed to 4.8% in the 91st Congress. The difference is due mainly to the increase in the number of commemoratives — up from 9.8% of total enactments to 36%. But even when one subtracts commemoratives, the number of substantive bills enacted into law was 209 fewer, or 33% less, than the 91st Congress.

Mr. Speaker, what is responsible for these shocking statistics? While it may be difficult to pinpoint the degree of responsibility of various factors, I think it is generally safe to conclude that the central problem has been a combination of two factors: First, the proliferation of subcommittees; and second, the authority to refer bills to more than one committee without first rationalizing committee jurisdictions.

Consider if you will the fact that we have roughly the same number of committees now as 20 years ago and exactly the same number of Members. But those same committees and Members are now considering legislation from other committees, in more subcommittees, and driven by more staff.

While the surface data may show that our committees and subcommittees are doing less work than 20 years ago, despite increases in subcommittees, staff and resources, the fact is they are probably doing more work than ever before thanks to the multiple referral of bills to two or more committees, and the increase in the number of omnibus bills.

Members are spread more thinly among their various committee and subcommittee assignments than ever before and rightfully complain that they do not have the time or energy to perform any of the responsibilities in a conscientious or deliberative fashion.

As a result, the bills produced by committees are poorer in quality than ever before — less thought-out and less representative of the House as a whole.

The fact that two or more committees are usually involved in reporting major legislation often leads to compromises between differing versions. And those compromises may not be internally consistent from a policy standpoint. Last year's bank reform bill is a striking example of that. But that matters little since no single committee is really responsible or accountable for that final version.
In fact, our form of decentralized and fragmented subcommittee government is so hopeless that the majority leadership often relies on secret task forces and structured rules to patch together legislation out of various committees, or even in lieu of committee action. But secret task force government is hardly an acceptable alternative to subcommittee government if deliberative democracy is our ideal.

Does all this mean that representative government as envisioned by our Constitution is today an impossible dream, an outmoded form of government -- an anachronism? I refuse to accept that.

I think instead that with a few basic reforms we can restore a representative, accountable and effective committee system and thereby make this House again a living example of how a representative democracy can and should work.

As Republicans we have committed ourselves to a committee system and a House that works. To do this we need to do the following:

• First, we must realign and rationalize committee jurisdictions along more functional lines;
• Second, we must eliminate the joint referral of bills to two or more committees;
• Third, we must reduce subcommittees by limiting committees to no more than six each;
• Fourth, we must reduce Member subcommittee assignments to no more than four;
• Fifth, we must eliminate proxy voting and one-third quorums;
• Sixth, Members should be held accountable for their committee votes by publishing roll call votes in the reports on bills;
• Seventh, we must reduce committee staff by ten percent per Congress over three Congresses;
• Eighth, party ratios on committees must accurately reflect the party ratios in the House;
• Ninth, we must restore our authorization process by requiring the early reporting and enactment of authorizations prior to the consideration of appropriations -- probably through some form of biennial budget-authorization-appropriations process; and
• Tenth, committees must establish realistic oversight agendas at the beginning of each Congress and be held accountable for them through to the House Administration Committee.

    Mr. Speaker, these are the ten steps a Republican House would take towards making ours a working committee system and a more workable House.

    They sound easy enough, but the main hurdle continues to be those in power who are more interested in preserving the status quo for their own narrow political interests than they are in improving the institution. That is all the more reason why we need a change of parties in this House to accomplish these simple, yet essential reforms.

    At this point in the Record, Mr. Speaker, I ask unanimous consent to insert the full listing and summary of House Republican committee reforms, and various supporting materials.