

“Thank you, Mr. Chairman, for holding this hearing on the budget process. And I join my friend, the Chairman, in welcoming our distinguished witnesses here today, two veterans of the budget process.

“I do think there are some measures, budget process measures, that can help improve the process. The Chairman mentioned the establishment of the Congressional Budget Office. I’ve introduced, along with many colleagues on this committee, a piece of legislation that would expedite Congressional consideration of spending cut proposals and other measures proposed by the President and by the executive branch, to give those an expedited review in certain areas of the budget.

“I also believe that the PAYGO rule that has been in effect during different periods has played a useful, even though limited, role in trying to prevent the deficit from getting even worse. However I want now to turn to the Chairman’s concluding point. Our rules, our Congressional rules on Congressional process, are like flashing yellow lights, and like stop signs. When Congress chooses to ignore them they don’t do any good, and unlike stop signs that are enforced by an external police power, Congress of course, is the ultimate enforcer of its own rules. Which means when it decides to blow through the flashing yellow lights or the stop signs it can decide to do that.

“That brings me to my main point that the Chairman concluded on, which is that the real challenge that we face is not a change in the rules, there may some things that we can do to modify and improve, I don’t disagree with that and I welcome the opportunity to explore this, but our fundamental is not the budget process rules, it’s the lack of political consensus and it’s the lack of political will. We’re now in an era of divided government. We have a Democratic president, we have a very close Democratic majority in the Senate, and we have Republican control in the House. And in an era of divided government the only thing that stands between divided government that works for the country and dysfunctional government is the willingness to compromise. And I don’t mean just finding common ground because some of us have very different views on how to tackle some of these issues. So, it is going to require compromise in order to move some of these issues forward.

“And I’ll just conclude with that because this is the Budget Committee, we’ve spent a lot of time looking at the deficit. We have, in the last 18 months, had three groups, three bipartisan groups that looked at ways to try and address our deficit problem over the long run. We had Rivlin-Domenici, we had Simpson-Bowles, and we have the Gang of Six – who doesn’t have legislation but has a concept. All three of those situations represent the kind of framework that’s been put together when you have bipartisan compromise. Nobody liked every provision in those recommendations; I certainly didn’t, but the overall framework addressed the way forward in a bipartisan way. Again, not finding common ground because not everybody agreed with every provision in every one of those reports, but tough compromises were made to try and advance the good of the country.

“So, again I welcome the opportunity to explore ways to improve the budget process but as you said, Mr. Chairman, I think we all recognize at the end of the day, especially in the era of divided government, only principled compromise can help move us forward for the good of the country. Thank you.”