



Will New House Rules Mean New Hope for the Constitution?

To that end, when the House of Representatives convenes on January 5, 2011, lawmakers will have the opportunity to manifest their intent to live up to that sacred oath. On that date, members of the House will vote on a slate of new rules designed to bring transparency to the workings of committees and to remind congressmen of the content of the document they solemnly swore to “support and defend.”



Since the first House of Representatives enacted [“rules and orders”](#) for itself on Tuesday, April 7, 1789, every new Congress has done likewise. The leadership of the majority party of the 112th Congress has followed this precedent and has published the rules by which it intends to control the conduct its business.

Pending their passage by the whole House, the new roster of rules empowers Speaker of the House-elect John Boehner (R-Ohio) to read aloud (or have read on his behalf) the text of the entire Constitution on his first full day as Speaker.

Another rule designed to remind the representatives of the source of their power is the requirement that every measure offered for consideration contain a statement “citing as specifically as practicable the power or powers granted to Congress in the Constitution to enact it.” Wary Constitutionalists will watch to see if the new Congress will imitate past legislatures and adhere to the letter and not the spirit of this new regulation by simply stretching the borders of the Commerce Clause and the Necessary and Proper Clause to cover the multitude of legislative sins.

With regard to the promise of greater transparency, one of the most talked-about proposed changes to House rules is the mandate that bills be published online for at least three days before brought to a vote, thus ostensibly allowing the American people to read the bill and communicate their opinion of such to their elected representatives.

Some of the more notable highlights from the proposed rule changes include:

- All bills must include likely budget effects through four ten-year periods. If mandatory spending increases the deficit by more than \$5 billion in any one of those decade-long windows, then the bill becomes vulnerable to a “point of order” debate. This measure is aimed at exposing the budgeting sleight of hand practiced so masterfully by these Potomac prestidigitators that makes budget bills appear to balance in the short-term while re-appearing somewhere further down the line.



Written by [Joe Wolverton, II, J.D.](#) on December 28, 2010

- There is a balancing requirement called the “cut-go” rule. This rule requires that any new mandatory spending bill be offset by an equal or greater reduction in spending in some other category. Additionally, this rule would forbid any tax increase aimed at funding additional mandatory spending.
- Those in the House that do not represent states (that is, the so-called “delegates” and “resident commissioners”) will not be allowed to vote when the House sits as a committee of the whole.
- A term limit of six years will be reinstated on committee chairmen.
- The names of certain committees will be changed, as well. The Committee on Education and Labor will revert to its previous name, the Committee on Education and the Workforce. The Committee on Standards and Official Conduct will be renamed the Committee on Ethics. The Committee on Science and Technology will become known as the Committee on Science, Space, and Technology.
- In another attempt at transparency, the attendance records of every congressman will be posted online. Videos of the hearings will be broadcast online, as well.
- Former members who now work as lobbyists will be forbidden from using the House gym.

As the package of proposed changes was delivered to GOP lawmakers on Wednesday, the principal author explained to reporters for [Human Events](#) the motive behind the modifications.

“The rules are focused on our goal to try and reduce the size, scope, and reach of government. It creates a climate which encourages the spending cuts, rather than spending increases. It has greater transparency, disclosure, and accountability. It makes things easier to understand,” said Representative David Dreier (R-Calif.), the Chairman of the House Rules Committee.

We can all hope that Dreier, Boehner, and the rest of the new generation of members of the House of Representatives are sincere in their quest to regain control of spending and re-ignite the guiding light of the Constitution. It is the sacred obligation of every American to hold these men and women accountable for their words and deeds and to remind them often of the oath they made “freely, without any mental reservation or purpose of evasion.”

All Americans who long for a re-enshrinement of our founding document and its enumerated and limited powers pray together that these, our elected representatives, will disregard any partisan pressure or zeal for personal aggrandizement and that they will indeed “bear true faith and allegiance to the [Constitution].”

Photo: Congressman David Dreier visits with 1997 West Point nominee David Dilly



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