

Opening Statement
Ranking Member Elijah E. Cummings

Full Committee Organizational Meeting

January 22, 2013

Thank you, Mr. Chairman. Let me welcome all of our returning Members and the new Members who are joining the Oversight Committee in the 113th Congress. It is an honor to have you here, and I look forward to working with you all.

This Committee has great potential to do enormous good on behalf of the American people. Our jurisdiction is perhaps the most wide-ranging in Congress. We can examine broad issues across multiple agencies. We can drill down and scrutinize the smallest individual action. We have significant flexibility in determining the course of our investigations, and we have tremendous power to demand information to inform those inquiries.

To me, this Committee is most effective when its Members work together, when we combine forces to focus on issues we agree on, and when we find common ground to pursue joint solutions.

Personally, I hold very strong convictions about the policies I believe should guide our nation. I know the Chairman has equally strong beliefs, some of which are the polar opposite of mine. But, as the President said yesterday, when we come together, that is when we are strongest. That is where we can make the biggest difference. And that is what the American people want us to do.

During the last Congress, much of our Committee's work seemed colored by politics, and perhaps that was inevitable. During this Congress, however, we have a new opportunity to reset our agenda and focus on actually improving the lives of those we serve.

Accomplishing these goals will require serious effort on both sides—Democratic and Republican alike. So today, I have both a commitment and a request.

First, on our side, we will commit that in everything we do—whether it involves hearings, witnesses, subpoenas, or other actions pursued by the Committee—our first course of action will be to try to work together to seek common ground. We will support the Committee's authority and prerogatives, particularly with the agencies that our Committee oversees. When we disagree, we pledge always to express our disagreement respectfully.

In response, we ask for something very straightforward. We want your first instinct in all matters relating to the Committee to be to consult with us and to consider seriously what we have to say. We would like the number one item on your checklist to be, "How can we work with the minority on this?"

I have served as both a chairman and a ranking member, and I understand that it is easy to simply ignore the minority. Easy, but not always wise. Sometimes, we may be able to find common ground if we just have the chance to talk first. Often, compromise enables us to reach a better solution. And when we are united, the Committee is much more effective.

So this is our pledge. We will endeavor to support your efforts and aggressively seek out areas on which we can collaborate. And we ask that you consult with us and respect the views we offer.

I know our staffs have already been meeting to discuss ways the Committee can begin this process, and I am encouraged by the progress made so far. I want the staff to know that we encourage them to lead the way on this. If you have ideas, bring them forward to me and the Chairman. We want you to be proud to work on this Committee.

With that, Mr. Chairman, I thank you for your courtesies in working with us over the past several weeks, I appreciate your accommodations on scheduling today's meeting, and I hope this is the first of many bipartisan Committee meetings still to come.