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HOUSE SELECT COMMITTEE ON MODERNIZATION
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When the Founders developed their vision of the American republic they called for Members of Congress to consult their constituents, to develop what James Madison called an "intimate sympathy with the people." Madison emphasized that representatives should not be pushed around by the passions of the people. But they should give serious attention to what he called "the reason of the people."

Representatives work to consult their constituents. But it isn't easy. Offices are swamped with millions of emails – many filled with passions, often based on limited or mistaken information. Few are targeted at the actual choices Members are making. Most citizens can't digest legislative language and don't know the complex tradeoffs Members face.

Furthermore, the people who communicate may not be representative of the district or state. So it's difficult to accurately discern the views of the people as a whole. The good news is that numerous groups, mostly at universities, have been working to address these challenges.

In our case at the University of Maryland's Program for Public Consultation, we have developed online tools called "policymaking simulations" – that put citizens in the shoes of policymakers. We distill an issue so it can be understood by someone with a high school education. Others here today have similar processes.

Citizens go online and get a briefing on a proposal under consideration in Congress. Then, they are presented and asked to evaluate pro and con arguments. Content is reviewed by proponents and opponents of the proposal to ensure that the briefing is accurate and balanced, and the strongest arguments are being made. Finally, the citizen is asked to make their recommendations.

Some of these tools enable individuals to forward their views to their Members, and Congressional offices can aggregate their responses. The tools are also being used to survey the nation as a whole. And finally, they are being used in surveys of representative samples of individual districts and states. This enables Members to get input from the people they represent as a whole.

When Americans are told about the possibility of being consulted like this, they overwhelmingly approve. We are hoping the Committee will adopt recommendations to enable much wider use of these tools. We hope the committee will:

- Encourage congressional staff to provide input on the content
- Encourage Members to use them with their constituents
- Link them to summaries of current legislation on congress.gov
- Address ethics rules that can pose a barrier to involving Members and staff
- And support appropriations for the development and use of these tools

The founders couldn't have imagined the potential of modern technology, but as you focus on modernizing Congress you have unique opportunities to help make their vision a reality.