

Anthony Paolantonio

From: Jan Shapin <jshapin2@gmail.com>
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To: Anthony Paolantonio
Subject: testimony on H-5002,3,4,6,7,8,910,11,12

Testimony before RI House Rules Committee

Jan Shapin - 1/14/2021

To Representative Corvese and members of the Rules Committee:

I am submitting testimony regarding the proposed changes to the House Rules committee. I believe all the proposed changes are with merit and should be considered for inclusion in the final rules. Many of them were discussed extensively in 2019 and were not adopted at that time. The time to make these changes is NOW. Specifically,

H- 5002 – The changes in committees are a good move. It will better reflect the composition of legislative issues in 2021-2.

H-5003 – Having up to ten sponsors listed on the bills will do a number of things: 1) give new members more visibility on issues of concern to them, 2) give citizens a way to gauge the depth of support and broaden the number of legislators they can interact with on the substance.

H- 5004 - Given the way opponents of the past leadership were punished by stripping them of committee assignments, this is an important correction.

H- 5006 – Permitting remote committee voting and written in person and video testimony – there is some overlap with the changes proposed in H- 5002. I believe, when the Covid emergency is passed, we should adopt rules that open up participation to the broadest number of citizens. Letting committee members vote remotely may serve to have citizens talking to a near-empty room. If so, we should limit use of that provision to what is medically necessary, not the convenience of the legislators.

H- 5007 – Removing the “deal” between majority and majority leaders to suspend the rules is vital. 2/3 of membership is a reasonable number of legislators to suspend the rules.

H- 5008 – Eliminating the 50 day discharge rule would move bills to the floor more promptly and that is a good thing.

H- 5009 - Requiring bills to go to the floor in 7 days after committee approval also serves to prevent a pile up at the end of the session and horse trading with Senate bills. I also approve the second amendment in this bill to allow Committee chairs to appoint subcommittee chairs instead of the Speaker. This would enhance the authority of the Chairs which is appropriate and allow citizens to hold the Committee Chairs responsible.

H- 5010 – This amendment limits the current practice of killing bills by holding them for further study indefinitely. This is a noxious process that found its way into the rules less than a dozen years ago and has been abused by the leadership in egregious ways.

H – 5011 – Providing an exemption for budget bills from the 24 hour rule also needs to go. No excuse for this except to keep everyone (legislators and citizens) in the dark.

H- 5012 – While a 12 year rule on holding leadership positions is well intended, I fear it may encourage leadership to stay 12 years. 8 years would be better.

Respectfully,

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