



## Fulfilling America's Promise

### Restoring Congressional Function Through Bipartisan Commissions

#### I. Summary

For decades, the United States Congress has struggled to act decisively on the nation's most pressing and enduring challenges. Legislative gridlock—driven by polarization, procedural veto points, and misaligned incentives—has prevented meaningful progress on issues including immigration reform, Social Security and Medicare sustainability, fiscal stability, healthcare affordability, housing access, and election systems.

Despite broad public demand for action, the current system allows a determined minority to block legislation at multiple stages, most prominently through the Senate filibuster.

The Bipartisan Priority Reform Commission Act (BPRCA) establishes a structured, enforceable, and transparent pathway to address these challenges. It does so by:

- Creating bipartisan, bicameral commissions combining legislators and subject-matter experts;
- Requiring structured public engagement and transparent deliberation;
- Providing expedited congressional consideration for qualifying legislation;
- Conditioning fast-track procedures on demonstrated bipartisan support;
- Establishing enforcement mechanisms to ensure deadlines and procedural compliance.

Critically, the BPRCA does not eliminate the need for bipartisan agreement. Instead, it repositions where bipartisan cooperation is required—shifting it from a 60-vote supermajority at the end of the process to targeted bipartisan participation at earlier stages. This design preserves institutional norms while significantly increasing the likelihood that broadly supported, consensus-driven reforms receive a final vote and can be enacted.

## **II. The Problem: Structural Gridlock**

### **A. Evolution of Legislative Paralysis**

Congressional gridlock has evolved from episodic disagreement into a structural condition. Early and mid-20th century: Major reforms were achieved through cross-party negotiation. But from late 20th century to present: Ideological sorting and procedural escalation have increased reliance on obstruction tools. The reality of the modern Senate dynamics is that the 60-vote threshold has transformed routine legislation into supermajority-dependent outcomes.

### **B. Structural Drivers**

Through misuse of the Filibuster Rule as originally intended to foster bipartisan cooperation, it has now become a supermajority threshold where a minority can block legislation indefinitely. This is done through (i) agenda control where party leadership can prevent bills from reaching the floor, (ii) committee gatekeeping where legislation can be stalled without a vote, (iii) amendment strategy where unrestricted amendments can derail consensus, (iv) fragmented jurisdiction where complex issues stall across committees.

### **C. Consequences**

There are evident costs, including (i) economic costs in the form of fiscal instability, entitlement uncertainty, and market inefficiency, (ii) civic costs because of declining voter trust and disengagement, and (iii) social as a result of persistent failures in healthcare, housing, immigration, and public safety. Absent structural reform, these conditions are likely to persist or worsen.

## **III. The Imperative for Reform**

Effective reform must (i) enable action without enabling unilateral partisan control, (ii) preserve core institutional norms, including minority participation, (iii) create predictable pathways for legislative consideration, (iv) incentivize early bipartisan engagement rather than late-stage obstruction. The BPRCA is designed to meet these criteria by restructuring the legislative process rather than replacing it.

## **IV. The BPRCA Framework**

The Act operates through four integrated pillars: (i) structured bipartisan commissions, (ii) conditioned expedited legislative procedures, (iii) enforcement and oversight mechanisms, and (iv) targeted bipartisan participation requirements.

## **A. Selection of Priority Issues**

Each two-year Congress must designate one or two issues from a defined list of national priorities. The key features are (i) selection required within 60 days, (ii) limited debate and no amendments, and (iii) automatic designation if Congress fails to act. These features ensure continuous engagement with major unresolved policy areas and prevents agenda avoidance.

## **B. Commission Structure**

Each selected issue is assigned a 16-member commission, consisting of (i) 8 Members of Congress (evenly divided by chamber and party) and (ii) 8 non-legislative experts appointed on a bipartisan basis. The proposed includes the following safeguards: (i) balanced partisan representation, (ii) appointment backstops if leadership fails to act, and (iii) minority reporting requirements. This structure combines democratic legitimacy with technical expertise.

## **C. Commission Operations**

The Commission operating rules impose early bipartisan decision points, replacing the Senate's traditional late-stage supermajority requirement. The legislation process is public, requiring a minimum of three public hearings and a 60-day public comment period. It gives the commission 10 months to produce a report and recommend legislation. Proposed legislation requires a majority vote (9 of 16 commissioners) and, importantly, bipartisan support among the legislators on the commission. If approved by the commission, an amendment window opens where any member of Congress can propose amendments. Finally, if consensus fails, alternative proposals may still advance with limited bipartisan backing.

## **D. Expedited Legislative Procedures (Conditioned)**

Expedited consideration in Congress applies only if bipartisan sponsorship thresholds are met. To qualify for fast-track procedures, a bill must have (i) at least 5 majority-party sponsors and (ii) at least 2 minority-party sponsors in each chamber within 15 legislative days. If this threshold is not met, expedited procedures do not apply. If the sponsorship requirement is met in each chamber (i) committee review capped at 30 days, (ii) followed by 20 hours of debate, and (iii) then a simple majority vote. The Senate's Filibuster Rule is inapplicable. This procedure eliminates the 60-vote cloture requirement and guarantees a final vote for qualifying legislation.

## **E. Oversight Board**

A five-member bipartisan Oversight Board ensures procedural compliance. The Board has the power to (i) enforce deadlines, (ii) complete appointments if necessary, (iii) administer processes when institutions fail to act, (iv) certify fallback mechanisms, and (v) issue binding procedural directives. To be sure, while the Board does not set policy outcomes, its procedural authority can influence which proposals advance.

## **F. Sunset Provision**

The Act is time limited to two years with one automatic renewal unless affirmatively rejected by the subsequent two-year Congress.

## **V. What the BPRCA Changes—and What It Does Not**

### **A. What It Changes**

The Act (i) reduces the effective Senate voting threshold from 60 to 51 for qualifying legislation, (ii) guarantees floor consideration once conditions are met, (iii) eliminates committee and leadership bottlenecks, and (iv) forces structured negotiation on major issues.

### **B. What It Does Not Change**

The Act does not (i) allow purely partisan legislation to advance, (ii) eliminate the need for bipartisan agreement, and (iii) does not guarantee enactment of controversial reforms. The Act replaces a single, late-stage supermajority requirement with multiple earlier bipartisan participation thresholds.

## **VI. Why the BPRCA Improves Legislative Outcomes**

Many proposals that receive majority support (51–59 votes) currently fail. Under BPRCA, these measures can pass if minimal bipartisan support exists. Members must secure cross-party participation at the outset rather than after full bill development. The filibuster is bypassed only for qualifying legislation; minority participation is required but not dominant. Deadlines and automatic procedures reduce uncertainty and delay. Public hearings, reporting, and structured processes increase visibility into decision-making.

## **VII. Limitations and Realistic Expectations**

The BPRCA is not a cure-all for polarization. Highly contentious issues may still fail at the Commission or sponsorship stage. The Act improves the likelihood of enacting consensus-driven reforms, not ideologically one-sided proposals. For policymakers it provides a credible mechanism to demonstrate governance capacity. For moderates it creates

institutional leverage for bipartisan solutions. And for voters it increases the probability that widely supported reforms are enacted

## **IX. Conclusion**

The Bipartisan Priority Reform Commission Act offers a pragmatic restructuring of the legislative process. By shifting the location of bipartisan requirements, enforcing timelines, and guaranteeing votes for qualifying legislation, it addresses the procedural causes of gridlock while preserving democratic safeguards. It does not eliminate political disagreement. It does ensure that disagreement leads to structured decision-making rather than indefinite inaction. The result is a system more capable of producing durable, broadly supported reforms—precisely what current conditions demand.