The Bipartisan Vote Compact

A Pledge to Let Congress Vote

Preamble

In 1994, candidates for Congress signed a public contract committing to bring specific bills to a vote within 100 days of taking the majority. Whatever one thinks of its contents, the mechanism worked: it turned a vague campaign promise into a concrete, trackable, public commitment.

This Compact borrows that mechanism for a different purpose. It does not ask any candidate or member to commit to a policy position. It asks them to commit to a **process**: that legislation with genuine, demonstrated bipartisan support should not die in a drawer because leadership in either party refuses to schedule a vote.

No signer is asked to vote *for* any bill. Only to let the House and Senate *vote*.

The Pledge

I pledge that, if elected or re-elected, I will:

1. Sign discharge petitions on genuinely bipartisan bills.

I will sign any discharge petition for a bill that has been formally co-sponsored by at least 5 voting Members of each party in the House, regardless of whether my party's leadership supports the bill. (This is the same evidence-based threshold used in Item 2 below — see the note there for how it was set.)

A note on why the discharge petition itself stays in this Compact, unchanged, at its current 218-signature threshold: automatic privilege (Item 2) is a rule that does not yet exist. Until Congress adopts it, the discharge petition remains the only real tool available, so this Compact continues to ask signers to use it. An earlier draft of this Compact proposed lowering or reformulating the 218 threshold; that idea was dropped on further review. The majority party rarely needs a discharge petition at all when it is unified, since it already controls the floor — so 218 already functions, in practice, as a guarantee that either the majority is internally divided or real minority-party crossover is required. Lowering it risked handing a numeric minority more power to force floor votes than intended, not less. Real cosponsor data across several successful discharge petitions also shows the discharge petition and automatic privilege catch genuinely different bills — some succeed with dozens or hundreds of cosponsors from the minority party, some with only one, and some (bills filed as procedural “shell” vehicles) with none at all, since the substance is added only after discharge. A cosponsor threshold, however set, cannot catch that last category. This Compact treats the unmodified discharge petition and automatic privilege as two complementary paths to the same goal, not one replacing the other.

2. Support automatic privilege for genuinely bipartisan bills.

I will co-sponsor and vote for a rules change, modeled on the Congressional Review Act's existing discharge mechanism, that:

- Grants any bill **automatic privileged floor status** — no petition, no signatures, nothing for any member to publicly sign — the moment it is cosponsored by at least **5 voting Members of each party** (non-voting Delegates and the Resident Commissioner are not counted), **or** is reported out of committee by a two-thirds vote that includes support from both parties.

- Makes this a **standing right with no expiration**, callable by any member whenever the House is in session, rather than a time-boxed window leadership can run out the clock on.
- Verified automatically by the Clerk's office, which already tracks cosponsorships and committee votes publicly in real time — no new bureaucracy required.

How the 5-per-party number was set. An earlier draft of this Compact proposed 80, then 15, cosponsors from each party. Both were tested against real signature and cosponsor data from recent successful discharge petitions and rejected: 80 would have excluded every single one; 15 would have excluded all eight of the real successes reviewed, since actual cross-party support in these cases ranged from 2 to 12 signatures. Five is the number that reflects, rather than exceeds, what genuine bipartisan support has actually looked like in practice — high enough that it cannot be met by one or two token names, low enough that it does not quietly rule out the exact bills this mechanism exists to help. There is no separate minimum on total cosponsors: a narrow bill that clears the 5-per-party bar has already demonstrated real, voluntary cross-party support, and automatic privilege only guarantees a vote, not passage, so the cost of extending it to a narrow bill is small. Only voting Members count toward each party's total: non-voting Delegates and the Resident Commissioner are excluded, so a bill cannot qualify on the strength of cosponsors who have no floor vote. In a review of 39 current House bills, delegates appeared on 14 of them; excluding them did not change which bills qualified, but it did change the exact counts on several.

3. Publish my discharge petition record.

I will make public, on a quarterly basis, every discharge petition I signed, declined to sign, or withdrew from, and my reasons.

4. Oppose leadership retaliation for signing.

I will publicly oppose any effort — committee removals, bill blockades, endorsement threats — used to pressure a member to withdraw a signature from a bipartisan discharge petition.

5. Support an up-or-down vote guarantee for commission-style packages.

For any bipartisan commission or working group product (e.g., a BRAC-style package) that meets defined bipartisan support thresholds, I will support bringing it to a floor vote without amendment, so that no single provision can be used to pick off individual votes.

The Reform Ask

One page, for legislators and staff

Problem: Bipartisan bills with real, demonstrated cross-party support routinely die because a single chamber's leadership — of either party — controls the scheduling calendar and has no obligation to bring popular, co-sponsored legislation to a vote.

Existing tool, underused: The discharge petition already allows a majority of the House to force a floor vote over leadership's objection. It stays unchanged in this proposal — 218 signatures, standard rules — because it already functions as intended: a unified majority rarely needs it, so reaching 218 in practice requires either genuine intra-majority division or real cross-party support. What it lacks is not a lower bar, but protection from exposure: public, real-time disclosure of every signature (a 1993 rule change, adopted for reasons that were more about pressuring political opponents than protecting voters' right to know) lets leadership identify and pressure holdout signers before a petition can succeed, and the 30-day waiting period gives leadership time to do it.

Proposed fix: create automatic privilege as a separate, parallel path, as a House rule. Any bill cosponsored by at least 5 voting Members of each party, or reported from committee by a two-thirds bipartisan vote, automatically earns privileged floor status — no petition, no public signature, nothing for any individual member to sign. This removes the exposure problem entirely for the bills it covers, while the unmodified discharge petition remains

available for bills that succeed through active organizing rather than pre-existing cosponsorship (real examples include bills that passed with fewer than five co-sponsors of either party, and procedural “shell” bills that structurally have none at all).

Why a House rule, not a statute. A statute would require House passage, Senate passage, and a presidential signature, and would then be durable across changes in House control. A rule requires only a House majority, but must be re-adopted at the start of every new Congress, since House rules do not carry over the way Senate rules do. Given the current political alignment, the statutory path is not realistically available in the near term; this proposal is deliberately scoped as a House rule, adopted at the start of a Congress and defended at the start of every Congress after that, with the statutory version treated as a longer-term goal to revisit if political alignment changes.

Why members should support this even if they dislike a particular bill: It does not force anyone to vote for anything. It only forces a *vote*. Members retain full freedom to vote no.

A Note on the Rules Committee

Most House bills don't die from a lack of votes — they die because the Rules Committee, known as “the Speaker's committee,” never grants them a floor vote in the first place. Rules controls the terms of debate and amendments for nearly every bill, and unlike most committees, its seats are stacked heavily toward the majority party (9 to 4) regardless of how narrow the chamber's overall majority is. It typically votes along party lines.

This is why most modern discharge petitions on genuinely bipartisan bills target discharging *Rules* from the resolution that would let a bill reach the floor — not the substantive committee that may have already reported it. Item 1 of this Compact should be read with that in mind: a discharge petition “on a bipartisan bill” often means, procedurally, a petition aimed at freeing that bill from Rules. The tracker flags this distinction so it's visible which fights are about a substantive committee's inaction and which are about leadership's floor-scheduling power specifically.

Reforming Rules' own party ratio is a much heavier lift than anything else in this Compact — it's set fresh by majority leadership at the start of each two-year Congress, not something an outside pledge can move mid-cycle — so this Compact does not ask signers to change it. It only asks them to sign discharge petitions and support the procedural reforms above, which work around the chokepoint rather than trying to dismantle it directly.

One honest limit of automatic privilege, worth stating plainly: it removes the exposure problem, but it does not remove leadership's ultimate lever — control over whether the House is in session at all. A privileged matter, however it is triggered, can still be delayed indefinitely if leadership simply adjourns the chamber. This happened in real time in September 2026, when a privileged impeachment resolution's mandatory two-day consideration window was defeated not by a vote, but by the Speaker sending the House home until after that year's midterm elections. Automatic privilege is a major improvement over the discharge petition on the specific problem of individual exposure, but it is not a complete fix, and this Compact does not claim otherwise.

Actionable Follow-Ups

The governing constraint: this has to land before the next Congress organizes. House rules are negotiated fresh at the start of each Congress, typically in early January, and a narrow majority — the likely outcome of the 2026 midterms regardless of which party wins — is the best available leverage point, since it forces leadership to court internal factions to organize the chamber at all. Everything below is sequenced around landing before that window, not after.

Near-term (now through the November 2026 election)

1. Validate the reform ask with people who've already done the work. Track down existing proposals in this space, and identify which current members or staffers are already sympathetic — Fitzpatrick, Golden, and members of the Problem Solvers Caucus have a track record of discharge petition activity and are natural first contacts.

2. Keep the tracker current through Election Day, so outreach in December and January can point to a live, credible track record rather than a static document.

3. Draft a short version of this Compact as a one-page ask, for use in outreach emails to sitting members, candidates, and existing bipartisan-adjacent organizations (Problem Solvers Caucus, Common Ground Committee, Convergence Center for Policy Resolution, Issue One, Unite America, Protect Democracy).

4. Send outreach to Fitzpatrick's office and Common Ground Committee now, rather than waiting — the goal is for automatic privilege to already be on their radar before rules-package negotiations begin.

Medium-term (November 2026 through early January 2027)

5. Identify the incoming majority's likely narrow-margin dynamics as soon as the election result is known, and find the specific bipartisan bloc most likely to have real leverage over the incoming Speaker vote and organizing resolution.

6. Recruit a small founding cohort of signers before any public launch — 15–20 credible signers asks people to join, rather than go first.

7. Partner rather than found. Bring the Compact and the tracker to an existing group as a ready-made project they could run, rather than building new infrastructure.

Longer-term

8. Because House rules must be re-adopted every Congress, treat this as a standing function, not a one-time campaign.

9. Once the tracker and Compact have real signers and a track record, that becomes the credibility base for the fuller “conclave” idea, and eventually for revisiting the statutory version of automatic privilege if presidential alignment changes.