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One energy panel better for nation

Rep. Doc Hastings

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Change is never easy. This is especially true when it comes to the way Congress operates. I fully understood this reality when I proposed that House Republicans consider consolidating energy jurisdiction into a House Energy and Natural Resources Committee.

This is a clear, common-sense reform that deserves thoughtful consideration based on its merits. It is a bold change that would level the power of committees, aligning them to better focus on Americans' priorities, and creating opportunities for more representatives to serve.

Energy is currently divided between two committees in the House and this proposal would marry our nation's broad energy policy with the vast majority of America's energy resources that are on our federal lands and also offshore.

The Natural Resources Committee currently oversees all energy development on federal lands and offshore: oil, natural gas, hydropower, wind, solar, coal, geothermal, uranium, minerals — everything.

By combining this energy experience and jurisdiction with the Commerce Committee's current role overseeing the Department of Energy and energy policy generally (generation, transmission, marketing and conservation), the resulting committee has the comprehensive ability and perspective to tackle our nation's energy challenges.

A single Energy and Natural Resources Committee would allow the House to advance an all-of-the-above approach, which would help create new jobs and lessen our dependence on energy from hostile regions of the world. The new committee would also be a focal point for ensuring thorough, coordinated oversight of the Obama administration's energy policies and proposed regulations — especially their effect on jobs and the economy.

By establishing this one committee with complete jurisdiction that can give its concentrated attention to the sweeping range of energy issues, it would allow the Commerce Committee to better dedicate itself to its wide breadth of remaining legislative authority: health care, technology, telecommunications, interstate commerce, trade, travel and tourism and consumer protection.

Health care and Obamacare will dominate the attention of the 112th Congress. Aligning jurisdictions in this proposed manner will not only better serve the issues of health care

and energy for the next two years, but also recognize the long-term need to adjust the structure of the House to address these national priorities. Energy, health care and technology will only grow in importance to Americans' lives and our economy in the coming years and decades.

The visceral opposition that's erupted from Energy and Commerce Committee members, both Republican and Democrat, to this proposal surprises no one in Washington. In terms of legislative power, the current Energy and Commerce Committee is a Goliath. It spawned both Obamacare and the Democrats' cap-and-trade national energy tax.

I have great respect for my colleagues on the Energy and Commerce Committee, but this proposal is not about them. It's not about me or Natural Resources Committee members. It's about how best to structure the House to serve its members -- and the American people.

Overall, consolidating energy jurisdiction into one committee would have a positive effect on House members. Leveling the power of committees creates more opportunities for more members to be engaged in the important issues affecting American lives. A more equitable division of power would increase opportunities for newly elected representatives to serve on committees overseeing top priority issues.

A shift in jurisdiction clearly affects representatives now serving on the committee, whose authority is adjusted. By making this change during a shift from minority to majority status, there are options available to alleviate the effect. One can look to 1994, when multiple committees were eliminated, to see how possible accommodations can be made.

As House Republicans prepare for the 112th Congress, this is the chance to decide between making long-term changes to improve the House or perpetuating the vestiges of decades of Democratic control.

Republicans have a unique opportunity to reform the fundamental workings of the House to enable it to serve the American people more effectively and efficiently. It is in this spirit that I put forward this proposal and asked my colleagues to give it their serious consideration.

I believe it is right on the merits and hope the House Republican Conference agrees that, while change is never easy, this is the right decision to make and the right time to act.

Rep. Doc Hastings (R-Wash.) is the ranking member of the House Natural Resources Committee.

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