

**U.S. House of Representatives**  
**Committee on Natural Resources**  
**Washington, DC 20515**

April 30, 2020

The Honorable Raúl Grijalva  
Chairman  
House Committee on Natural Resources  
1324 Longworth House Office Building  
Washington, D.C. 20515

Dear Chairman:

These unprecedented times have brought Congress together in a truly bipartisan manner. Notably, in the past month we successfully rose above partisanship and passed multiple rounds of historic legislation to mitigate the health and economic impacts of the pandemic. As Americans have gone to great lengths to adapt to the current situation, so too must Congress. In that spirit, House Democrat Leadership recently pulled back on a partisan proposal related to remote committee proceedings that would have denied minority rights under House Rules.

As you know, House Leadership is instead moving forward with a taskforce to review proposals related to vote by proxy and remote proceedings on a bipartisan basis. In the meantime, committees are not authorized to hold official hearings and markups remotely. This poses challenges as there is important work and ongoing oversight to be conducted. On a positive note, many committees have developed creative avenues to continue serving our constituents through virtual public forums or meetings with bipartisan participation. Disappointedly, however, our Committee is one of few unsuccessful in rising above the partisan fray to carry on our work in a manner that offers all Members a voice in the process.

Under normal circumstances prior to the pandemic, you and your staff often used “roundtables” and “forums” as a supplement to official Committee proceedings. To my knowledge, these were exclusively partisan affairs that mostly catered to special interest groups. Even though these events were paid for with official Committee funds they often covered a range of topics not within our jurisdiction. At the time, Republican Members withheld complaints as most Committee stakeholders largely ignored the gatherings. Instead, we relied on official hearings and meetings to influence debate and policy. With an absence of regularly scheduled official Committee meetings, however, these partisan roundtables have become the exclusive public function of the Committee. This is deeply concerning.

While roundtables are generally an acceptable practice, the ones you recently scheduled, as displayed on the “hearings” page of your official website, indicate an attempt to substitute official Committee business. You are seemingly mimicking hearings to include inviting executive branch witnesses while not inviting Republican participation. Most glaringly, Committee Democrats are seeking government witness participation to address draft partisan legislation. In another instance, a witness or “speaker” for your roundtable includes a Democrat party official.

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Instead of adopting a more collaborative process during this time, you appear to use the circumstances of a crisis to circumvent transparency and avoid opposing viewpoints. This is an institutional disservice to the House and degrades the Committee. I urge you to take a step back and identify a better approach. With any hope, the House bipartisan working group tasked with reviewing these and other challenges (copied here) can soon provide productive input.

Sincerely,



Rob Bishop  
Ranking Republican

cc: Members of the Ad Hoc Working Group  
Majority Leader Steny Hoyer  
Minority Leader Kevin McCarthy  
The Honorable Zoe Lofgren  
The Honorable Tom Cole  
The Honorable Rodney Davis  
The Honorable Jim McGovern