

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

June 22, 2020

The Hon. Bruce Westerman
Member of Congress
209 Cannon House Office Building
Washington, DC 20515

Dear Representative Westerman:

While I disagree with the conclusions you reach in your letter of June 16, I appreciate the seriousness of your inquiry.

Ranking Member Bishop raised similar concerns in a letter dated April 30. My response ended with the following points, which still stand:

There is nothing inappropriate or even unusual about the events we have held and will continue holding. Roundtable discussions, virtual or not, provide a critical platform for highlighting important issues. As always, some of these will be bipartisan and some will not.

Members of our committee convened public roundtable discussions and forums prior to the COVID-19 outbreak and will continue to do so. As we have noted on several occasions, the Minority is free to do the same.

The concern that members of the public are confused by our website, YouTube channel, Twitter account, or Facebook page is unfounded. The specific events you mention are clearly and consistently labelled “NRDems Forums” on the website. Our YouTube channel (<https://www.youtube.com/user/NaturalResourcesDems>), Twitter account (@NRDems), and Facebook page (facebook.com/NRDems) all have “Dems” in the address, leaving no room for confusion. This is in contrast to the minority Twitter handle, which is @NatResources. We raised concerns at the start of this Congress that this handle was potentially confusing, but Ranking Member Bishop declined to address those concerns.

Your letter goes on to allege that, “Minority members and staff have not been given the opportunity to participate in the planning or execution of these meetings, much less offer a witness or prepare members.” That is false. The Minority was invited to participate in several of the forums we have arranged, including important discussions on the impacts of COVID-19 on commercial fishing, the federal response to wildfire, and the opportunities to create jobs by properly reclaiming orphaned wells. Those invitations were rejected in the strongest possible terms.

Committee Rule 2(c), referenced in your letter, quite plainly applies to official hearings or business meetings, not informal meetings like forums or roundtables, a distinction your letter recognizes by referring to these events as “forums” throughout. The Committee has complied with Rule 2(c) for all official meetings. The assertion that the rules somehow prevent the Chair from convening a panel discussion that is streamed to the public is without merit.

The concerns expressed in your letter would be more credible if committee Republicans had not attempted to derail official hearings as well. Every Republican participating in our June 11 hearing on the ongoing fiscal crisis in Puerto Rico voted to adjourn before allowing the witnesses to testify. It appears the minority is less concerned about the distinctions between forums and hearings, and more interested in obstructionism for its own sake.

You write that, “We have some specific recommendations that could be helpful as you assess options, if you’re inclined to work together.” I appreciate that offer and am open to reviewing any suggestions you or the other signatories to your letter wish to provide.

I am striving to adapt to a new world in which our Committee must find new ways to conduct all aspects of its work – both formal and informal – using modern technology. This is an effort to evolve and modernize, not trample anyone’s rights, and I welcome further discussion.

Sincerely,



Raúl M. Grijalva
Chair
Committee on Natural Resources



Jared Huffman
Chair
Subcommittee on Water, Oceans, and
Wildlife



Debra Haaland
Chair
Subcommittee on National Parks, Forests,
and Public Lands



Ruben Gallego
Chair
Subcommittee for Indigenous Peoples of the
United States



Alan Lowenthal
Chair
Subcommittee on Energy and Mineral
Resources



TJ Cox
Chair
Subcommittee on Oversight and
Investigations

Gregorio Kilili Camacho Sablan
Vice Chair, Office for Insular Affairs

Mike Levin
Member of Congress

Nydia M. Velázquez
Member of Congress

Diana DeGette
Member of Congress

Wm. Lacy Clay
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Ed Case
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Matt Cartwright
Member of Congress

Jesús G. "Chuy" García
Member of Congress

Darren Soto
Member of Congress

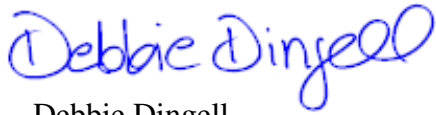
Steven Horsford
Member of Congress

Paul D. Tonko
Member of Congress

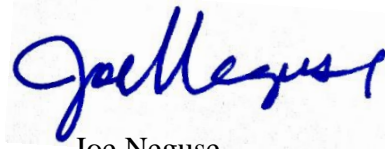
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