

August 5, 2020

The Honorable Richard Shelby
Chair
Committee on Appropriations
United States Senate

The Honorable Patrick Leahy
Ranking Member
Committee on Appropriations
United States Senate

Re: Video Broadcast of Appropriations Committee Legislative Mark-ups

Dear Chairman Shelby and Ranking Member Leahy:

We write to respectfully request that video of Senate Appropriations Committee legislative mark-ups be broadcast online contemporaneously with committee proceedings. This would guarantee undiluted press and public access to the proceedings and conform Committee practices with those urged by the Senate Committee on Rules and Administration.

We understand it has been the practice of the Committee in prior years to broadcast business proceedings as audio-only in conjunction with allowing the press and public to attend in person. During the COVID-19 pandemic, the Capitol building and hearing rooms are closed to the public and press access is limited. An audio-only broadcast provides an inferior experience to attending in person, as it can be difficult to identify who is speaking, hard to follow the conversation, and nearly impossible to perceive how remarks are being received by Committee members. An online broadcast of audio and video of the Committee is the closest analog for the public and the press to follow the proceedings in real time in any way comparable to being there in person.

In addition, the Majority and Minority in the Senate Committee on Rules and Administration have articulated that, during the COVID-19 pandemic, committees are expected to provide a video livestream of all proceedings so the public and press can watch what happens as it happens. The decision to broadcast a committee business proceeding elsewhere in the Senate as audio-only met with widespread criticism from the press, civil society, and members of the Senate.¹

We believe all committees should provide video livestream of their proceedings unless they properly vote to close the proceedings, at least so long as the Senate is closed to the public and press access is limited. This is the standard practice among many Senate and all House

¹ "Committee Proceedings Should Be Open and Transparent," Coalition of Organizations to Sen. Risch (June 10, 2020) https://s3.amazonaws.com/demandprogress/letters/2020-06-10_Coalition_Urges_Open_and_Transparent_Senate_Proceedings.pdf.

committees in normal circumstances. Public and press access to official proceedings are essential to a democracy and the legitimacy of the proceedings. We urge you to adopt this practice.

We would gladly discuss this matter further. Please contact Demand Progress Policy Director Daniel Schuman at Daniel@DemandProgress.org.

Sincerely,

Demand Progress
Center for Data Innovation
Citizens for Responsibility and Ethics in Washington (CREW)
Fix the Court
Free Government Information
FreedomWorks
Government Accountability Project
Government Information Watch
Issue One
Judicial Watch
Lincoln Network
Lorelei Kelly, Beeck Center for Social Impact + Innovation at Georgetown*
National Security Counselors
National Taxpayers Union
Open The Government
Project On Government Oversight (POGO)
Quorum
Reporters Committee for Freedom of the Press
Taxpayers for Common Sense

** Affiliation listed for identification purposes only*

cc: Members, Senate Committee on Appropriations
Sen. Blunt, chairman, Senate Rules Committee
Sen. Klobuchar, ranking member, Senate Rules Committee