

FRANK PALLONE, JR., NEW JERSEY
CHAIRMAN

CATHY McMORRIS RODGERS, WASHINGTON
RANKING MEMBER

ONE HUNDRED SEVENTEETH CONGRESS

Congress of the United States

House of Representatives

COMMITTEE ON ENERGY AND COMMERCE

2125 RAYBURN HOUSE OFFICE BUILDING

WASHINGTON, DC 20515-6115

Majority (202) 225-2927

Minority (202) 225-3641

February 8, 2021

The Honorable Frank Pallone
Chairman
Committee on Energy and Commerce
2125 Rayburn House Office Building
Washington, DC 20515

Dear Chairman Pallone:

I request that you pause the partisan sprint towards a reconciliation package for one week and begin earnest, bipartisan negotiations on further COVID relief with Energy and Commerce Republicans. Using reconciliation for COVID relief abandons your promise to continue Energy and Commerce's (E&C) rich tradition of bipartisan work and your commitment to regular order.

Just two weeks ago, during our Organizational Meeting for the 117th Congress, you pledged to continue E&C's tradition of bipartisan work and committed to regular order, saying "I look forward to collectively working together to address the unprecedented challenges our country faces... this Committee has a strong bipartisan tradition and I have every expectation that this tradition will continue over the next two years. During these unprecedented times we were able to come together last Congress to enact bipartisan policies that are making a difference in people's lives." You later said that "regular order is important... that has been the practice of the Energy and Commerce Committee in the past, and it will continue to be our practice... when I became Chairman, I made a commitment to running the Committee by regular order."

Yet, the first major action of the 117th Congress at E&C is to eschew any attempt at bipartisan agreement for a sixth COVID relief package and ignore regular order by going right to a full committee markup without holding any hearings or allowing our subcommittees to weigh in on this legislation. This is a real contrast to the bipartisan COVID oversight hearings the Committee held last week. Instead of objecting because Democrats failed to notice those hearings properly, we worked with you to invite witnesses that brought important perspectives to our COVID work. This is a bad start to regular order, and it is a bad start to bipartisanship.

When Congress considered prior COVID relief packages during the 116th Congress, Democrats and Republicans worked together with the Trump administration to deliver unprecedented, bipartisan relief through five separate COVID bills. We came together to deliver trillions of dollars in resources and relief for our frontline workers, and for vaccine development and administration, testing, personal protection equipment (PPE), broadband deployment, and more. These actions helped stymie the devastating health and economic consequences of the pandemic.

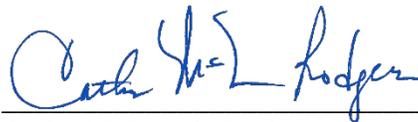
I share your deep concern about another delay in delivering more resources to vaccinate as many Americans as quickly as possible and agree that we cannot afford to wait another nine months, as we did last Congress when Speaker Pelosi rejected multiple offers of compromise with Republicans. Although we must do more, Congress just acted about a month ago to deliver almost a trillion dollars in additional relief to the American people. Many of these resources still have not been spent, and for those that have been spent, we do not have a clear understanding of how such funds have been used. We must move quickly, but effectively. We need time to assess fully what gaps remain and to work together, on a bipartisan basis, to address such gaps so that we can save lives and reopen our economy and schools.

Sprinting to a partisan markup without doing our due diligence to assess where our limited resources can do the most good suggests that Congressional Democrats are more focused on scoring political points than delivering real results to the American people. Regardless of the reason for doing so, proceeding to a markup without an understanding of where resources are needed most will hurt our ability to respond effectively to this unprecedented crisis.

The American public deserves comprehensive, transparent, and bipartisan consideration of any additional relief that will impact their families' health, financial security, and ability to return their lives back to normal. Congressional Democrats owe the American people the opportunity to examine this legislation fully and understand its effects given the enormous ramifications the measure will have on their health and financial security.

We cannot afford to be hasty or capricious on this matter. The issues under consideration are far too important and the effects are far too reaching for you to ignore the importance of a bipartisan process under regular order. I urge you to postpone this partisan effort for one week and engage immediately in good faith negotiations with E&C Republicans so we can deliver a sixth, bipartisan relief package for the American people.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "Cathy McMorris Rodgers". The signature is written in a cursive style and is positioned above a horizontal line.

Cathy McMorris Rodgers
Republican Leader
Committee on Energy and Commerce